

**A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE UTOPIA OF WILLIAM MORRIS
FROM HIS LATER PROSE ROMANCES**

A Thesis

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by

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PART I
CHAPTER I

In her book, William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary, Margaret R. Grennan says, "What the invention of the telescope did for space in the seventeenth century, the sense of the past accomplished for time in the nineteenth."¹ In other words, this "sense of the past," though not a mechanical instrument like the telescope, nor aimed at discoveries within the realm of physical science, nevertheless served such men as Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Newman in much the same fashion as the telescope had served Galileo and Kepler some two hundred years earlier. If not renowned natural scientists, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Newman were at least intelligent students of society; and they were, in a sense, the fathers of democratic

¹ Margaret R. Grennan, William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary (New York, 1945), p. 1.

socialism.

For Galileo and Kepler, their colleagues and disciples, the major stars and planets were the first and favorite objects of observation; for the nineteenth century socialists "the Middle Ages from the start were the favorite field of scrutiny."² It was not long before the astronomers focused their new instruments and their greatest powers of comprehension and interpretation upon the relationship of the sun and moon, of Mars, Venus, and Saturn to the earth; nor was it long before Carlyle and Ruskin and their fellow students became interested in the past not only for its own sake but for the sake of the present as well. This interest received probably its greatest expression in Carlyle's Past and Present, in which work "the historic fed the prophetic imagination, and in the older patterns, the times to come were prefigured."³

Among the fellow students--or perhaps I should term them disciples, for those of whom I speak were much younger and much influenced--of the four major prophets I have listed above was a young man named William Morris, a student at Exeter College, Oxford.

Margaret Grennan has said that though Morris was a lesser prophet, he "shared with Carlyle his conviction" of the value of the past "as a tutor of the present; and he had no rival in the ability to

² Ibid., p. 2.

³ Ibid.

create a new world out of the best traditions of the old."⁴ She adds that "the Utopia Morris fashioned from his knowledge of the past, his concern for the present, and his 'hope for the days to be'" must be placed "against the general background of the medieval revival, and in particular against that aspect of it which saw in the earlier social institutions a solution for modern problems."⁵

Towards the close of her little book she makes a suggestion which is, in effect, the inspiration of this paper. Her remarks concern the prose romances which Morris began quite late in life:

Morris reaches back through the years--back to the endless tales of knightly adventure he told at Marlborough and to the prose of the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. . . . Seven volumes of the 24 in the complete works are devoted to this literature of 'escape'--but it is escape to the poet's larger world. It is unthinkable that they should have little to tell of the man, written as they were during the years when he lived most intensely. Yet they have been strangely neglected. Too much discussion has centered on their expression . . . and too little has been said of the matter expressed. . . . no attempt has been made to relate this great mass of writing to that vision of the world that is distinctly William Morris' . . .

The German student who solemnly listed the "flora and fauna" of the prose romances blundered close to the truth. There is a world here real enough to have its flora and fauna catalogued and its cities described in some prophetic Baedeker. It encompasses what Morris thought good for man, realized in the best days of the past and coming again with the fulfillment of his 'hopes of the

⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵ Ibid.

days to be.'

It would be, however, a mind wilfully set in its determination to see socialism in everything that could find direct propaganda in these stories.⁶

I have been unable to find the work of the German student rather caustically referred to above. However, I do not believe that such a study would have much bearing on my proposed treatment of the prose romances. My purpose is to reconstruct as completely as possible the Utopia of William Morris as it is blueprinted in fragments scattered throughout the prose romances. I am more concerned with the architecture of the towns and cities and the isolated homesteads described by the author than with his heroes and heroines; and I consider Morris' selection of certain types of geographical and geological settings more germane to my thesis than any undertones of socialism a psychologist might discern in such predilections.

Of course, it will be necessary to dwell somewhat upon the characters and moral development of certain members or groups of the population of Morris' romances, as well as upon their external appearance; for physical environment to a great extent determines the personalities of individuals; however, it must be clear from this statement that the environment itself should be the matter of first concern. And surely this was what Morris believed. "Of the feelings of his social inferiors--or indeed of his social equals--he was

⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

sometimes strangely inconsiderate; but towards their weaknesses he was habitually indulgent."⁷ Thus says Mackail of William Morris.

And this statement implies that Morris was of an indulgent and generous nature, but not much of a psychologist. In other words, he was more inclined to act than to think, to believe than to question, in matters where the human element was of prime consideration.

Morris was an active socialist. But was his greatest concern the moral condition of the English worker, or bourgeois, or aristocrat? No, certainly not. His first and greatest concern was with the physical environment of the masses of his own society. Why else did he organize the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings ("Anti-Scrape"), take up the study of medieval crafts, study and lecture upon medieval art, and retain an ever avid interest in medieval architecture to the point of visiting and revisiting those remains on the continent and at home--cathedrals, chapels, farms, and barns--which had been permitted to retain in whole or in part their original characteristics? Were these pursuits carried out for his own pleasure and interest? In large degree they were; but from his earliest days Morris was a youth in search of a cause. He found the cause while a student at Oxford, where he read Ruskin's Stones of Venice, a work which "by arguments whose social emphasis made them the more attractive

⁷ John W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris, 2 vols, in 1 (London, 1950), II, 65.

. . . confirmed his natural preference for the medieval over the renaissance."⁸ And this cause was to seek to reinstitute the best aspects of the physical environment in which, according to his belief, man had attained to his happiest and most fruitful state of being.

As Mackail has said, Morris was "on the imaginative side . . . far behind, and far before, his own time: he belongs partly to the earlier Middle Ages, and partly to an age still far in the future."⁹ And, as Margaret Grennan says, Morris' "interest centered not so much on the intangibles explored by Henry Taylor in The Medieval Mind, as on things: brasses, windows, illuminations, early printed books, domestic furnishings, the costumes of men, the appearance of towns, and even the face of nature in those days."¹⁰ She concludes that "though Morris knew the seamy side of the Middle Ages he preferred it to the reverse of the modern tapestry. He preferred medieval to modern vice because the medieval, in his opinion, was free for the most part from hypocrisy and was not so pervasive of every phase of life as to stifle all creative expression."¹¹

The importance of the Scandinavian epic to Morris is well known. It is also well known that his "life-long passion" for the thirteenth century grew on the "study of medieval architecture" and "on a rapid

⁸ Grennan, p. 29.

⁹ Mackail, I, 100.

¹⁰ Grennan, p. 57.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 61.

and prodigious assimilation of medieval chronicles and romances."¹²
All these had their influences upon the formation of Morris' Utopia.

Morris began writing prose romances in the summer of 1855 and continued for about a year. "But during this year he and Burne-Jones read through Chaucer. . . . Thenceforth prose was abandoned . . . for thirty years."¹³ The influences of Chaucer and Browning were, according to Mackail, "like two great windows letting in the air and the day . . . in his third year at Oxford."¹⁴ The years which followed were years of painting and studying, writing poetry and learning crafts, reading in other literatures and translating some of what he read; they were the years during which he made his two trips to Iceland and a number of trips to the continent; and the last ten or so were the years of active socialism.

May Morris, the editor of The Collected Works of William Morris, quotes from some notes made by a Mr. Cockerell on November 28, 1892, at Kelmscott House during a biographical talk by William Morris, and these notes--as they are quoted--seemed to me a fitting conclusion to the brief discussion of Morris which has filled these few pages. Allowing for the fact that the following statements are secondhand, so to speak, they have a definite authenticity;

¹² Mackail, I, 41.

¹³ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁴ Ibid.

in other words, they do sound like Morris speaking of William Morris:

Our clique was much influenced by Keats, who was a poet who represented semblances, as opposed to Shelley who had no eyes, and whose admiration was not critical but conventional. . . . I went up to College in 1852. Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* (vols. 2 and 3) came out in the following year, and made a deep impression. I read Mrs. Browning a good deal at Oxford. She was a great poetess. . . . I pretended to like Wordsworth at that time, and was to some extent touched by the Kingsley movement. . . . I never read Byron; even now I have only read *Don Juan*, the *Vision of Judgement*, and *Cain*, which I consider a fine piece. I did not care for Milton; the essence of him was rhetoric, though he was of course a wonderful versifier. Shakespeare did not much attract me, as I have not much sympathy with the dramatic form. I had read all Scott's novels by the time I was seven. . . . I have read the whole of the *Faerie Queene*, without being interested in the characters; but it is beautiful verse. We fell under the influence of Rossetti, perhaps I even more than Burne-Jones, and he did us a great deal of good. He was not a happy man, being too self-centered, though very kind and fair in his judgement of other people. He had no sympathy with Northern things, being an Italian by race. He used to insist upon the importance of the dramatic element. Of course Swinburne is by name and race pure Danish, and he was deep sunk in Chaucer and Froissart when first I knew him. Rossetti was immersed in Dante and the like. After the Tennyson period Rossetti introduced me to Browning, who had a great influence on me. I have read *Sordello* from beginning to end, though I don't remember what it is about. Rossetti's poems, and mine also, are rather of the nature of a series of pictures. I left Street after being with him nine months in order to try painting. I should have painted well so far as the execution is concerned, and I had a good sense of colour; but though I have, so to speak, the literary artistic memory, I can only draw what I see before me, and my pictures, some of which still exist, lack movement.

I was greatly taken up with Malory, Froissart, and anything medieval that I could lay my hands on, my interest in history being essentially with medieval or artistic times and with the present or revolutionary times out of which one hopes to draw more art in the future.

. . . We opened business in Red Lion Square in 1860. I went twice to Iceland, in 1871 and 1873, and have always been deeply stirred by the Northern Sagas, as was Swinburne too. In religion I am a pagan.¹⁵

"The return to literature, which began early in 1886 with the translation of the Odyssey into English verse, was to some degree both the cause and the effect of a gradual change in Morris' attitude towards active socialism."¹⁶ The new prose period began with A Dream of John Ball; but the switch from John Ball to The House of the Wolfings was a going back "from the close of the Middle Ages to their earliest beginning and from a complex artificial society to the simplest of all known to history."¹⁷ In the nine years following his retirement from active socialism William Morris wrote the following:

Romances

A Dream of John Ball

The House of the Wolfings

The Roots of the Mountains

News from Nowhere

The Glittering Plain

The Wood Beyond the World

Child Christopher

The Well at the World's End

The Water of the Wondrous Isles

The Sundering Flood

First Printings

The Commonweal, Nov. 13 to
Jan. 22, 1886

Reeves and Turner, December 1888

Reeves and Turner, November 1889

The Commonweal, Jan. 11 to Oct. 4,
1890

English Illustrated Magazine, June-
Sept., 1890; Kelmscott Press,
1891

Kelmscott Press, May 30, 1894

Kelmscott Press, July 25, 1895

Kelmscott Press, March 2, 1896

Kelmscott Press, April 1, 1897

Kelmscott Press, November 1897

¹⁵ May Morris, The Collected Works (London, 1910-15), XXII, xxxj-ij.

¹⁶ Mackail, II, 173.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 216.

According to May Morris, "This is the order of publication; but one or two of the long romances, as *The Well at the World's End*, were on hand several years."¹⁸ She adds that in addition to "these unfinished tales there are five in different stages of development, and two entirely discarded unfinished drafts (of *the Wood Beyond the World* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*). There are, besides, several plots for other stories."¹⁹

A Dream of John Ball is said to be the "clearest expression" of Morris' socialism. If this is all it is, it does not belong in this study; but it is also said to be "the most effective statement of his reading of the past and his vision of the future."²⁰ In this case, John Ball does belong in this study.

In the introduction to Volume XVII of The Collected Works May Morris tells us that "John Ball, written for the Commonweal 'to supply the demand for a serial story,' was the first of the romances, but is not quite of them, standing apart, alike in the mood in which it was written, and in the fire and concentration felt behind the easy flow of the narrative." She adds that "it is, more even than *News from Nowhere*, a Confession of Faith . . . his faith in the power and purpose of human life and its majestic continuity throughout

¹⁸ May Morris does not italicize or set quotes about titles. See Appendix A for contents of The Collected Works.

¹⁹ May Morris, XVII, xx.

²⁰ Grennan, p. 48.

the ages."²¹

A Dream of John Ball is concerned with actual historical person-ages and events: John Ball preached and the Peasants' Revolt occurred in 1381. Thus this story does not belong in quite the same category as the main body of these romances; nor does News from Nowhere. In the latter Morris jumps into the future and to some extent realizes his and John Ball's dream. For reasons which will become more obvious in the final pages of this paper these two "Dreams" must be contrasted one with another--not as opposite extremes, but as the counterweights of realism and imagination which balance the scale upon the mean of ideal socialism: for one is a dream of what may be, while the other is an intuitive rendering of a dream that was, of an attempt that failed; one is prophecy, the other is history. And these two together must be contrasted with the other eight romances. They must be considered as the limit of fantasy in one direction and the descriptive basis of reality in the other. These two stories, then, will be discussed at the end of this thesis.

In order to facilitate the task of reconstructing Morris' Utopia, I intend first to select descriptions of topography from every one of the romances, with the exception of the two "Dreams," thus demonstrating the consistency with which Morris introduces certain features

²¹ May Morris, XVII, xiiij.

of terrain into his stories. Then, having made these selections, I intend to present a composite word-picture of Morris' Utopia as I conceive it--a composite which will include, in addition to the topography, descriptions of all the other physical elements of Morris' romantic scenery. In my conclusion I shall attempt to substantiate further the hypothesis upon which this reconstruction is to be based.

CHAPTER II

The House of the Wolfings marks the "beginning of Morris' practical dealings with the art of typography",²² for he was at this time interested in the idea of becoming a publisher and was experimenting with various type designs. But it is doubly a beginning in its own right: it is the first in a series of romances concerned with entirely fictional persons and events, and the action of the story takes place in an earlier period than does the action of any of the other completed prose romances.

Between *A Dream of John Ball* and the fairy romances, then, stand *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, each with its difference. In these the writer gave utterance to his particular interest in some of the world-history that was enacted

²² Mackail, II, 223.

in the Plains and among the Great Mountains of mid-Europe: the Invasion of Italy, the beauty of the legends that blossomed around it, the field of conjecture opened out, made this period of change and growth a fine subject . . . second only in charm to the Northern matter. . . .

Written within so short a time of each other, the difference in the handling of these two tales is of interest. The House of the Wolfings is entirely conceived in the spirit of the Sagas . . . in its remoteness, its breadth of handling and absence of elaborate detail.²³

Most of the action in The House of the Wolfings takes place in the Mark, or March, an area comprising part or all of a great woods that stretched below a high range of mountains, presumably somewhere in central Europe--perhaps north of the Austrian or Swiss Alps. A river--which indeed may have been the Rhine--split the Mark, north and south, and within it there were three clearings: the Nether-mark, the Mid-mark, and the Upper-mark. "The river ran from South to North and both on the East side and on the West were there Houses of the Folk, and their habitations were shouldered up nigh unto the wood, so that ever betwixt them and the river was there a space of tillage and pasture."²⁴

Next in order of publication is The Roots of the Mountains, "the tale of the great tribes in touch with the civilization of the Plain and at war with the invaders from Eastern deserts . . ." It is "less aloof--wherein it both gains and loses: there is a richer, fuller

²³ May Morris, XVII, xiv-xv.

²⁴ Morris, XIV, 5.

quality in it . . . there is a certain spirit of chivalry in the air . . . It is the poet's song of the budding of the Middle Ages."²⁵ Also, according to Mackail, The Roots of the Mountains was "the one which had given him [Morris] the greatest pleasure in writing." And Mackail adds that "For combination and balance of his qualities it may perhaps be ranked first among his prose romances."²⁶

The locale of this tale, as the title signifies, is somewhere amongst the foothills of a great range of mountains. There are cliffs and forests and plains; there is a winding river in the "plain meads" and it is called the Weltering Water. It is clear already, here in the second of Morris' true romances, that the author was well aware that the social in-gatherings of early man were to a great extent determined by geography; that is to say, that ideal locations wherein there was an abundance of water and wood, and possibly a natural rampart of mountains for protection against weather and enemies, attracted tribes and family groups during the period of transition from a nomadic existence to a settled way of life. It is equally apparent that Morris entertained a romantic appreciation of what historians are apt to call "the barbarous way of life." In other words, Morris patently preferred the ideal of social equality that was upheld by the members of "uncivilized"

²⁵ May Morris, XVII, xv-xvj.

²⁶ Mackail, II, 239.

societies--an equality based upon the categorical necessity of individual fitness for a rugged way of life, an existence wherein men competed with alien (i. e. , unrelated or unaffiliated) groups on a similar basis to that which underlay their competition with unorganized nature. These were societies whose leaders were chosen for their good qualities, not for their good connections.

The Glittering Plain, published next after News from Nowhere and The Roots of the Mountains, contains little of value to this thesis. It is truly a "fairy romance," purely a fantasy. Of course, it does contain a theme which recurs in subsequent romances, a theme constantly recurring in the various sagas and medieval romances--that of a land, sometimes containing a magical well or fountain, wherein everlasting, or at least long-lasting, youth may be acquired by the deserving; but this theme will be treated more fully in the discussion of The Well at the World's End.

May Morris tells us that when The Wood Beyond the World came out, some reviewers tried to make the romance into an allegory reflecting Morris' social opinions. On this occasion Morris wrote a letter to the Spectator from which she has quoted the following: "I had not the least intention of thrusting an allegory into "The Wood Beyond the World"; it is meant for a tale pure and simple, with nothing didactic about it. If I have to write or speak on social problems, I always try

to be as direct as I possibly can be."²⁷

Golden Walter, the hero of The Wood Beyond the World, lived in Langton on Holm, by the sea. Now, this location is of interest, because William Morris apparently was not by any means as interested in seaside locations as he was in the interior of the lands he imagined or in part faithfully reproduced. The influence of his Icelandic excursions is pronounced in a number of his romances; but even where he regards the sea as an object of interest or beauty, he seems to have been far less concerned with the coastal waters themselves than with either the prospect of the shore as viewed from the sea or the inland terrain of islands and mainlands. The land and its mineral and vegetable excrescences were his passion; and Morris retained this feeling despite the fact that a great part of the population of his fiction preceded, co-existed with, or are descended from the Teutonic rovers who took to the sea at an early stage in the history of European civilization: the Danes, Angles, and Saxons who invaded England in independent and overlapping waves. In The Glittering Plain, it is true, Morris does give brief descriptions of two or three short sea voyages and of some volcanic island terrain--descriptions unquestionably inspired by his first trip to Iceland--²⁸but in these four romances the author seems

²⁷ May Morris, XVII, xxxix.

²⁸ Morris, VIII, 11, 17.

much more comfortable ashore and far inland.

Presumably for this reason Morris spent little time describing Golden Walter's voyage or the port itself, which was his home. The main body of the tale is concerned with the Wood beyond the World, the human inhabitants of which are few indeed. The most detailed description of terrain in the story portrays the land of the Bear Folk, an exceedingly primitive society, who occupied "A dale of the downs": "There was a wide valley below them, greener than the downs which they had come over, and greener yet amidmost, from the watering of a stream which, all beset with willows, wound about the bottom."²⁹ There were no rocky places in this land.

This, then, is the same sort of ideal location we have encountered in the three preceding romances--a sheltered valley warded by high mountains on one side and by forested ridges and plains on the other, and containing an abundance of pasture land, well watered by a clear stream. As for the Wood itself, it contains all the conventionally indigenous beasts, both carnivorous and herbaceous, such as wildcats, wolves, and deer. The vegetation, which varies little in all the romances, is more fully described in tales yet to be discussed.

Next in order of publication was Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair. In this story, which, incidentally, was begun as a metrical

²⁹ Ibid., XVII, 98.

romance, the society is much more feudal than were those of the preceding tales. Indeed, it would be possible to place Child Christopher and his contemporaries in eleventh or twelfth century England, or Germany or Normandy, but for the author's rather disconcerting habit of mingling the elements of his tales--taking certain physical characteristics of temporally variant civilizations and bunching them all together in one unidentified period. In taking advantage of this prerogative of the story teller Morris is, of course, being quite consistent in his plan--conscious or unconscious--of using the medieval romancers as models. Moreover, this maneuver is justified by its results, at least in the eyes of the casual reader; for even in this day of the historical novel--with the accent on "historical"--Morris' prose romances make pleasant reading. In any case, this consistent inconsistency of Morris has an important implication for my thesis. The abundant evidence of such "breadth of handling," as May Morris has it, this interchanging of historical minutiae, simply confirms the supposition that Morris was strongly inclined to ignore facts which for varying reasons he considered unpleasant in themselves, or at least inconsistent with his conception of the best possible period in the growth of man.

In the words of historians James Harvey Robinson and James T. Shotwell, "The term Middle Ages is, then, a vague one." In Professor Robinson's text, which was revised and enlarged by Professor Shotwell,

the Middle Ages are said to comprise "the period of nearly a thousand years that elapsed between the opening of the fifth century, when the disorder of the barbarian invasion was becoming general, and the fourteenth century, when Europe was well on its way to retrieve all that had been lost since the break-up of the Roman Empire."³⁰

It is reasonably certain that Morris would have agreed in principle to the above statement, for the centuries between A.D. 500 and 1400 were unquestionably his favorite ones, especially the thirteenth and fourteenth; but it is doubtful if he would have been in accord with the sentiment implicit in the phrase "disorder of the barbarian invasion" and especially in the word "lost." So far as Morris was concerned, the barbarians knew far better how to live than did the Romans.

As has been indicated, the atmosphere of Child Christopher is ultimately medieval as most people now understand the term. Oaken-
realm, its Outer March, and its neighboring states are distinctly feudal areas. The story concerns usurping, warring kinglets, mistreated heirs, robber barons, and outlawed gentry and freemen. At moments it is reminiscent of the tales of Robin Hood and of the medieval romances of Sir Walter Scott. But the language and the overall dreamlike unreality of people, places, and things are exactly the same as in the preceding romances. One is actually surprised

³⁰ James H. Robinson and James T. Shotwell, History of Western Europe (Boston, 1946), p. 6.

not to encounter fairies, griffins, undying youths, and others of their kind, though there is no really unnatural natural history in any of the romances. The effect is more like that produced by Malory in his Morte d'Arthur than like the effects of Scott or Conan Doyle or Stevenson. In addition, there are castles which could not have been built before the thirteenth century--in England at least--standing not far from houses which might have belonged to the Wolfings of approximately the fifth century or to the later inhabitants of Burgstead in Burgdale at the roots of the mountains. Of course, the Middle Ages in general terms were not subsequent periods of sweeping change in domestic habits, in the ways of war, or even in architectural developments; and yet, the inhabited surface of England, for one, did change considerably in appearance after the Conquest. During the last years of the eleventh century England was transformed from an isolated stronghold of the descendants of Teutonic rovers, a country not much changed in appearance from the time of Julius Caesar, into a Norman fief with all that this condition implies of French influence.

However, for my purpose, little is added by this romance. There are the inevitable woods and clearings, mountains and plains, streams and rivers.

The Well at the World's End, which was next in order of publication, is in two volumes in The Collected Works. The setting of this story is predominantly English, though there are pieces of scenery

that have a distinctly Icelandic cast, and the names of places and of individuals are either post-Conquest English or Norman French. Ralph, the youngest son of the kinglet of Upmeads, wanders over great stretches of countryside, some areas of which are quite closely described. Once again, however, it is very difficult to orient this tale in any particular century. But for the sake of convenience, and despite the inconsistent presence of such characters as kinglets, I shall place Ralph and his contemporaries in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

The land which contains Upmeads--a sort of mythical England - Iceland--is comparatively well populated, with the exception of waste areas, areas which we shall see are a necessary part of Morris' Utopia. Even the woods are populated, as they were in the England of Edward I, who had to rid some of them of powerful bandits. There are, however, certain places which were populated once long ago and are no longer: "And in a little while they were come out of the thick woods and were in a country of steep little valleys, grassy, besprinkled with trees and bushes, with hills of sandstone going up from them which were often broken into cliffs rising sheer from the tree-beset bottoms."³¹ In these valleys are mounds and other traces of ancient habitations which help to date the incidents of this tale as having taken place some

³¹ Morris, XVIII, 196.

centuries after the time of the Wolfings.

The most detailed description of terrain occurs in the second volume and describes the waste land which lies before the mountains that guard the Well at the World's end:

When they had come to a place where there was a little pool in a hollow of the rocks they made stay there, and slept safe, but ill-lodged, and on the morrow . . . came to a long rocky ridge or crest . . . and when they had come to the brow thereof, then were they face to face with the Great Mountain, which now looked so huge that they seemed to fill all the world save the ground whereon they stood: there were great jutting nesses with straight-walled burgs at their topmost, and pyramids and pinnacles that no hand of man had fashioned, and awful clefts like long streets in the city of the giants who wrought the world, and high above all the undying snow that looked as if the sky had come down onto the mountains and they were upholding it as a roof.

But clear as was the fashion of the mountains, they were yet a long way off: for betwixt them and the ridge whereon those fellows stood, stretched a vast plain, houseless and treeless, and, as they beheld it thence, grey and ungrassed (though indeed it was not wholly so), like a huge river or firth of the sea it seemed, and such indeed it had been once, to wit a flood of molten rock in the old days when the earth was a-burning. ³²

Behind one of these jutting nesses is the Rock of the Fighting Man, the "very Gate of the Mountains." It lies "out there behind a ness which thrusts out from the mountain-wall, and . . . stands like a bastion above the lava-sea, and on its sides and its head are streaks ruddy and tawny, where the earth-fires have burnt not so long ago . . ." ³³

³² Ibid., XIX, 35-6.

³³ Ibid., p. 37.

There were no foothills or downs betwixt the plains and the mountains, nought save a tumble of rocks that had fallen from the cliffs, piled up strangely, and making a maze through which the Sage led them surely.³⁴

They climbed up around the huge ness,

. . . and behold! the side of the black cliff plain and smooth and shining as if it had been done by the hand of men or giants, and on this smooth space was carven in the living rock the image of a warrior in mail and helm of ancient fashion, and holding a sword in his right hand. From head to heel he seemed some sixty feet high, and the rock was so hard that he was all clean and clear to see; and they deemed of him that his face was keen and stern of aspect.³⁵

The Water of the Wondrous Isles, which followed the story of the Well, is more of a fairy tale than any of the others, except perhaps The Glittering Plain. In this story the town of Utterhay serves as the stationary leg of the compass, so to speak, about which the moving leg performs its revolutions in tracing the activities of the principal characters. "The said town was hard on the borders of a wood, which men held to be mighty great, or maybe measureless; though few indeed had entered it, and they that had, brought back tales wild and confused thereof."³⁶ This wood was called Evilshaw.

On the other side of the wood from Utterhay lay the Water of the Wondrous Isles. It was to the shore of this lake that the sorceress

³⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

³⁶ Ibid., XX, 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

brought the child Birdalone whom she had stolen from her mother on the outskirts of Utterhay:

Thitherward went they, and . . . came to the shore of a great water, and thence was no more land to be seen before them than if it had been the main sea itself, though this was a sweet water. Albeit, less than a half mile from shore lay two eyots, as it might have been on the salt sea; but one of these sat low down on the water, and was green and well bushed, but the other, which lay east of it and was nigher to the shore, was high, rocky, and barren.³⁷

There is a vivid and rather poetic description of this shore-side edge of Evilshaw in the middle of March and in late May. In March, "when all birds were singing, and the young leaves showing on the hawthorn, so that there were pale green clouds, as it were, betwixt the great grey boles of oak and sweet chestnut; and by the lake the meadow-saffron new-thrust-up was opening its blossom." And in May "the harebells were in full bloom down the bent before her."³⁸ There were fritillaries, white clover and dog-violet in the meadows about the cottage and along the shore; and there were alder thickets--"huge ancient alders, gnarled, riven, mossy, and falling low over the water."³⁹ The lake itself supported such fowl as coot, mallard, and heron, and now and then a swift wood-dove would fly across it. Also there were gersfalcons, ospreys, and ernes.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

The two little islands mentioned above are perfectly normal ones; but the Isles called Wondrous most certainly are not. The first of these strange islands visited by Birdalone in her spell-driven "Sending Boat" was the Isle of Increase Unsought, which was ruled by the evil sister of Birdalone's equally evil step-mother: "The flowery grass came down to the very water, and first was a fair meadow-land besprinkled with big ancient trees; thence arose slopes of vineyard, and orchard and garden; and looking down on all, was a great White House, carven and glorious."⁴⁰ The principal magical quality of this island was the unsought increase--what was needed by way of material sustenance literally cropped up unaided by active husbandry. The only occupants of the island were the Witch-Queen and her three female prisoners, with Birdalone as a transient fourth who was soon aided to escape by the above three on condition that she find their lovers and send them on the proper path of rescue.

The next island Birdalone visited was that of the Young and Old. The Young were a little boy and a little girl; the Old was an elderly man with a weak memory and a penchant for potent brew. The two children met Birdalone as she landed: "She was in a grassy plain, somewhat over rough and broken to be called a meadow, and not enough be-timbered to be called a wood; it rose up a little and slowly

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 53-4.

as they left the water."⁴¹ The three unusual inhabitants lived beneath a makeshift shelter in the ruins of a great castle.

The third Wondrous Isle was the Isle of the Queens, "which sat low and green, like a meadow exceeding fair, on the bosom of the water, and many goodly trees were sprinkled about the green land."⁴² There were reeds and rushes at the water's brim; and there was a new and beautiful house a short distance inland, which was occupied only by dead women frozen in lifelike attitudes, some grouped on the hall dais about a dead king stretched out on a bier.

The Isle of the Kings was next on Birdalone's weird itinerary: "an isle rugged and rocky, and going up steep from the shore; and then, held as it were by the fangs of the rocks and pikes of the higher land, was a castle, white, high, and hugely builded, though, because of the rock-land belike, it spread not much abroad."⁴³ This castle, also new-builded, but obviously made for war, was occupied only by dead men, some grouped on the dais about a dead queen. Now there certainly ought to be some connection between these two islands--the Kings' and the Queens'--but if there is one, it is left entirely to the reader's imagination to discover. After all, this romance is a fairy tale.

The last of the Wondrous Isles is the Isle of Nothing: "flat

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴² Ibid., p. 92.

. . . and scarce raised above the wash of the leeward ripple on a fair day; nor was it either timbered or bushed or grassed, and, so far as Birdalone might see, no one foot of it differed in aught from another."⁴⁴ As the name of this island suggests, it was uninhabited, except temporarily by Birdalone and fleetingly by a vision of her fairy godmother, Habundia, who helped Birdalone off the spellbound nothingness.

Finally the Sending Boat carried Birdalone to her objective--the objective she had acquired through willingness to return a favor on the Isle of Increase Unsought; and this was the Castle of the Quest: "about noon she deemed she saw a little cloud in the offing that moved not as the other clouds . . . and thus betwixt sleeping and waking she wore away three hours: then she stood up and looked ahead, and lo, the white cloud had taken shape, and was a white castle far away . . . sitting, as it seemed, on the very face of the water."⁴⁵

This castle--known as the White Ward by the Water, though the inmates called it the Castle of the Quest--was situated on the mainland presumably somewhere on the shore opposite to Birdalone's erstwhile home on the lake by Evilshaw. The holders of the castle were the Gold Knight, the Green Knight, and the Black Squire (who was by this

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

time a knight also), and they had given their home its name after the abduction of their lovers by the Queen of the Isle of Increase Unsought.

Of the inland terrain beyond and about this castle only a few scenes are worth noting in this latter phase of the romance. There is a pool bordered with blue-flowering mouse-ear; and there is the Black Valley of the Greywethers, where the black ground is littered with large grey stones, some of which are grouped in strange fashions up and down the narrow valley. These stones are suspected to contain the imprisoned spirits of the first people on earth--the Earth's first children--who were thus punished for some reason we know nothing of. These solidified "unmanlike wights" are deemed capable of granting certain wishes, but only if the one thing he or she most strongly desires is the subject of the expressed wish. If the supplicant wavers or changes his mind, then he may be turned into stone to become a servant to the Greywethers. Lastly, at one time Birdalone is held captive in a thicket of hornbeam and holly (reminiscent of the wood around the author's childhood home), and at another moor-hens may be heard crying from the water and wood-doves moaning in high trees.

Toward the end of the tale Birdalone makes return visits to the Wondrous Isles and finds them considerably changed: the Isle of the Kings has twenty-two fair and alluringly dressed damsels waiting for a man; the Isle of the Queens supports a group of mentally mixed-up and physically tattered knights and squires; the Isle of the Young and

Old contains a community of youngsters--the oldest being fifteen; the Isle of Increase Unsought has become a waste with nought living upon it but carrion creatures. Birdalone has to swim from this island back to her foster-mother's cottage on the shore by Evilshaw. Habundia helps her out as she has done throughout the tale; the witch is as dead as her sister when Birdalone arrives; and shortly thereafter the story of The Water of the Wondrous Isles comes to a happy end.

The last of the completed prose romances is The Sundering Flood; in my opinion, the best of the lot. But, whether or not it is the best-told story, The Sundering Flood certainly takes first place in the category of well-planned settings; therefore, it seems justifiable to assume that the land of the Sundering Flood, as it is pictured herein, is more nearly a composite presentation of the topography of Morris' Utopia than can be found in any one of the other nine completed and four unfinished prose romances grouped in The Collected Works. If this assumption is valid, then the topography of the land of the Sundering Flood, plus a few bits of scenery described in preceding and succeeding romances, should form the complete frame and backing of Morris' Utopia; a frame within which may be placed the domestic environments described in this and the other stories, thus filling in the details of a background against which Morris' heroes and heroines may be seen moving about fulfilling their destinies.

It is well known that William Morris, the medievalist, loved to

read of, dream about, and write about the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries above all others; and it is well known that he was fascinated by Iceland itself and by the literature of that country, especially because both--still in his day at least--retained a distinct and prevalent flavor of the Middle Ages. Of course, he loved his peaceful England; but he was a vigorous, imaginative man, and one who possessed that vivid sense of contrast which was an essential characteristic of the medieval personality, especially of the artistic personality. In his own words:

The land [England] is a little land; too much shut up within the narrow seas, as it seems to have much space for swelling into hugeness; there are no great wastes overwhelming in their dreariness, no great solitudes of forests, no terrible untrodden mountain-walls: all is measured, mingled, varied, gliding easily one thing into another: little rivers, little plains, swelling, speedily-changing uplands, all beset with handsome orderly trees; little hills, little mountains, netted over with the walls of sheep-walks: all is little; yet not foolish and blank, but serious rather, and abundant of meaning for such as choose to seek it: it is neither prison nor palace, but a decent home.

All which I neither praise nor blame, but say that so it is: some people praise this homeliness overmuch, as if the land were the very axle-tree of the world; so do not I . . . others there are who scorn it and the tameness of it: not I any the more: though it would indeed be hard if there were nothing else in the world, no wonders, no unspeakable beauties . . . ⁴⁶

May Morris, who was certainly a well-qualified student of her father's character and habits, tells us that the romances which followed The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains

⁴⁶ Ibid., XXII, 17-18, "The Lesser Arts."

"were frankly holiday-work," implying thus that he thoroughly enjoyed creating these tales, and that they were expressions of his dreams and therefore to some extent pictures of his Utopia. She adds that "In making a general survey of the prose-writings from first to last one is struck by a certain thread of continuity running through the whole."⁴⁷

What, then, is this "thread of continuity?" Was the spinning of it not inspired at least by the author's love for a certain period of the Middle Ages, for certain countries and certain literatures? And, by the same token, must it not have been spun from that vast amount of material so interesting to Morris, which Margaret Grennan has labeled "things" (as opposed to the intangibles explored by Henry Osborne Taylor), things such as "brasses, windows, illuminations, early printed books, domestic furnishings, the costumes of men, the appearance of towns, and even the face of nature in those days"?⁴⁸ Certainly it was spun thus and the spinning thus inspired. And ideally, then, the last completed romance should be the most complete, wherein the thread of continuity is the best spun; in short, it should be what it is: the best plotted, best told, and the fullest story Morris ever wrote in prose--the culmination of his efforts to recreate the art of

⁴⁷ May Morris, XVII, xvj.

⁴⁸ Cf. ante p. 6.

the medieval story teller.

Before further developing this theory concerning The Sundering Flood it would seem wise to discover what contributions are made by the four unfinished romances toward what will be the final presentation of Morris' Utopia. In the order in which they are printed in Volume XXI of The Collected Works, these romances are Kilian of the Closes, The Folk of the Mountain Door, The Story of Desiderius, and The Story of the Flower. All of these, according to May Morris, are of the "late romance-writing time," and thus they apparently fit no particular chronological order.

In discussing these stories May Morris makes a statement in which she displays what I can consider only as ignorance of an historical fact--a fact which may be of no particular importance to this paper, but which ought to be of interest generally. She does not seem to be entirely familiar with English agricultural history. In her description of a vineyard in Kilian of the Closes she says, "it and the Story of Desiderius are the only two tales planned and started, where the action is definitely laid in the South--Kilian is at least in some vine-country."⁴⁹

She is unquestionably right about the location of Desiderius; but with regard to Kilian's vineyard let me refer the reader to an eminent authority on the medieval period, Professor G. C. Coulton. He states

⁴⁹ May Morris, XXI, xv.

that there was a native wine distilled and drunk in parts of England during the late thirteenth and throughout most of the fourteenth centuries (1280-1380). He cites as proof certain records pertaining to the vineyard of Sir Giles de Trumpington, whose manor included the village of Trumpington. This gentleman raised his own grapes and distilled his own wine from them.⁵⁰

It is most unlikely that William Morris did not know of Sir Giles and the wines of Trumpington. In any event, there is absolutely no indication in the fragmentary Kilian of the Closes, other than the one supposed by May Morris, to the effect that the story was to take place in "the South."

On the other hand, she makes some remarks about The Story of Desiderius which are both apt in this instance and undoubtedly correct:

Of Desiderius I can only say it is to my lasting regret that this tale of the encounter of Barbarian and Roman was not worked out to the end. Even if, as we know was the case, the writer's sympathies could not be with the decaying civilization, his intuition would have built up a life-like picture of the clashing interests of the period. . . . his enthusiasm for all the art that grew out of that conflict . . . would have quickened into emotion--the eloquent emotion of which we have a taste here and there in his lectures on art when these times of change came to be spoken of. Some promise of his rich handling of the Roman pageant is there already in these few pages, and, as we read, Verona, the white waters of the Adige, the marshlands about the tower and domes of Ravenna, rise before us in his half a dozen sentences,

⁵⁰ G. G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama (New York, 1947), p. 68.

shadowed with the fear of the roots of the mountains and the blindness of the proud life that held itself to be "eternal."⁵¹

The Folk of the Mountain Door has the ring of an Icelandic family saga; the action of the opening fragment takes place in a northern land in the season when "The midwinter frost was hard upon the earth, so that few waters were running, and all the face of the world was laid under snow."⁵² The door in the mountains from which the folk of this land take their name was a "yawning gap" that led "strait way into the heart of the mountains, and there was no other way thereinto save this; for other where, the cliffs rose like a wall from the plain country."⁵³

Up the pass they went till it widened, and there was a wide space before them, the going up whereto was as by stairs, and also the going up from it to the higher pass; and all around it the rocks were high and sheer, so that there was no way over them save for the fowl flying; and were it not winter there had been a trickling stream running round about the eastern side of the cliff wall which lost itself in the hollow places of the rocks at the lower end of that round hall of the mountains, unroofed and unpillard. Amidmost the place the snow was piled up high; for there in summer was a grassy mound amidst of a little round meadow of sweet grass, treeless, bestrewn here and there with blocks that had been borne down thitherward by the water from the upper mountain; and for ages beyond what the memory might tell of this had been the Holy place and the Motestead of the Folk of the Door.⁵⁴

The Story of the Flower is a metrical romance--or the beginning

⁵¹ May Morris, XXI, xv.

⁵² Morris, XXI, 305.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 305-06.

of one--just as was the first draft of Child Christopher. And perhaps Morris would have resorted to prose in this tale as well, but we shall never know. All that need be said about it is that it has a Continental flavor, an echo of Froissart and the ballad-singers, an echo of the chansons sung by the jongleurs of medieval Europe.

CHAPTER III

The Sundering Flood is the last of the completed prose romances, and, as has been indicated, the setting of the story is described with the greatest clarity and detail. None of the others--or at least none of them as they are reprinted in The Collected Works--contains a map of the territory described. In Volume XXI of the May Morris edition a very neatly drawn map fronts page 1. In Part II I have reproduced this map to the best of my ability, substituting a numbered key or index for the lettered-in place names so as to avoid cluttering.

There are a few insignificant discrepancies in the relationship between Morris' map and his verbal description--insignificant because by this time the reader who has read each of the other prose romances has come to expect a certain rather careless inconsistency in the

treatment of descriptive subject matter. This is a fault which detracts very little from the pleasure of simply reading these romances, but it is a fault which must be considered in such a study as this. Indeed, it has become increasingly apparent that May Morris was correct--and understandably apologetic--in making her frequent admissions that her father tended to shrug off some of the more unpleasant responsibilities incurred by the conscientious self-critic; for instance, careful planning supplemented by careful proof-reading. What light this trait may throw upon Morris' character will be considered later.

According to May Morris, the central romantic plot of The Sundering Flood--a situation wherein two lovers are separated by a great river--was taken from a "modern" Icelandic novel. She does not give the name of this novel, but she adds that "for the rest, the description of the sheer cliffs and the black water in my father's own tale take one back to the early days of Icelandic travel when the first sight of volcanic mountain heights seemed as much to overwhelm him with their terror as to move him by the majesty of their untrodden mysteries."⁵³

On the map you will see that the land of the Sundering Flood has in addition to the river itself the following, and by now familiar, salient physical characteristics: the northern boundary is The Great

⁵³ May Morris, XXI, xj.

Mountains; the southern boundary is the sea; the river flows from these mountains southward into the sea; about midway on the Flood's course is a Desert Waste, south of which is another lesser range of mountains through which the river runs by way of the Mountain Gorge; somewhat below this is a great forest--mostly on the east side of the river--known as the Wood Masterless; and between the Wood and the sea, on the coast itself, is the City of the Sundering Flood. This city lies on both sides of the estuary and contains a good harbor, or haven, within its walls; in fact, the river is navigable back up almost to the Mountain Gorge. But let us listen to Morris himself as he describes this land:

It is told that there was once a mighty river which ran south into the sea, and at the mouth thereof was a great and rich city, which had been builded and had waxed and thriven because of the great and most excellent haven which the river aforesaid made where it fell into the sea. And now it was like looking at a huge wood of barked and smoothened fir-trees when one saw the masts of the ships that lay in the said haven.

But up this river ran the flood of tide a long way, so that the biggest of dromonds and round-ships might fare up it . . . And moreover, when the tide failed, and there was no longer a flood to bear the sea-going keels up-stream (and that was hard on an hundred of miles from the sea), yet was this great river a noble and wide-spreading water . . .

Other rivers moreover not a few fell into this main flood, and of them were some no lesser than the Thames is at Abingdon, where I, who gathered this tale, dwell in the House of the Black Canons . . . Yea and some were even bigger, so that the land was well furnished both of fisheries and waterways. ⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Morris, XXI, 1-2.

Now this part of the Flood is certainly not impassable; but Morris --or he who lives in the House of the Black Canons--tells us how it came to be called the Sundering Flood:

For ye must know that all this welfare of the said mighty river was during that while that it flowed through the plain country anigh the city, or the fertile pastures and acres of hill and dale and down further to the north. But one who should follow it up further and further to the north would reach at last the place where it came forth from the mountains. There, though it be far smaller than lower down, yet is it still a mighty great water, and it is then well two hundred miles from the main sea. Now from the Mountains it cometh in three great forces, and many smaller ones, and perilous and awful is it to behold; for betwixt those forces it filleth all the mountain ghyll, and there is no foothold for man, nay for goat, save at a hundred foot or more above the water, and that evil and perilous . . . and none has been so bold as to strive to cast a bridge across it. ⁵⁵

We already know that the Flood comes from far beyond the Mountain Gorge, but I sincerely doubt if Morris did until he had written these first few pages. Note, for example, how he speaks of "three great forces, and many smaller ones," as though these were the sources of the river. Of course, one might say that large rivers generally are fed at intervals throughout, and that if one such should pass through a mountain range, it would very likely receive most of the water drained from or springing out of the heights near it. This certainly might be the case here, but on the map there is no more than one "great force," and that is the river itself as it comes down out of the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

Desert Waste above. Again, perhaps Morris meant that the river bed of the gorge was split into three large channels, thus dividing the main current into "three great forces." He has described such stretches in his journals of Icelandic travel. But the map, and it is a very detailed one, shows only one current.

Since we know that the river stems from mountains far beyond the Mountain Gorge range, let us look northward through the eyes of the story teller who lives near Abingdon on the Thames:

. . . then again ye have the flood before you, cleaving a great waste of rock mingled with sand, where groweth neither tree nor bush nor grass; and now the flood floweth wide and shallow but swift, so that no words may tell of its swiftness, and on either side the water are great wastes of tumbled stones that the spates have borne down from the higher ground. And ye shall know that from this place upward to its very wells in the higher mountains the flood decreaseth not much in body or might, though it be wider or narrower as it is shallower or deeper, for nought but mere trickles of water fall into it in the space of this sandy waste, and what feeding it hath is from the bents and hills on either side as you wend toward the mountains to the north, where, as aforesaid, are its chiefest wells.

Now when ye have journeyed over this waste for some sixty miles, the land begins to better, and there is grass again, yet no trees, and it rises into bents, which go back on each side, east and west, from the Flood, and the said bents are grass also up to the tops, where they are crested with sheer rocks black of colour. As for the Flood itself, it is now gathered into straiter compass, and is deep, and exceeding strong; high banks it hath on either side thereof of twenty foot and upward of black rocks going down sheer to the water; and thus it is for a long way, save that the banks be higher and higher as the great valley of the river rises toward the northern mountains.

But as it rises the land betters yet, and is well

grassed, and in divers nooks and crannies groweth small wood of birch and whiles of quicken tree; but ever the best of the grass waxeth nigh unto the lips of the Sundering Flood, where it rises a little from the Dale to the water; and what little acre-land there is, and it is but little, is up on knolls that lie nearer to the bent, and be turned somewhat southward; or on the east side of the Flood (which runneth here nigh due north to south), on the bent-side itself, where, as it windeth and turneth, certain slopes lie turned to southwest. And in these places be a few garths, fenced against the deer, wherein grow rye, and some little barley whereof to make malt for beer and ale, whereas the folk of this high-up windy valley may have no comfort of wine.⁵⁶

The land of this northern river valley was better on the east side than on the west. Wethermel, the hero's homestead, is on the east side, "beneath a low spreading knoll, the broader side whereof was turned to the southwest . . . The said knoll of Wethermel was amidst the plain of the Dale a mile from the waterside."⁵⁷ Wethermel stood almost alone; there was a cottage, Burcot, to the north at the head of the Dale, and there were other steads further south. The crown of the bent or knoll on the east was covered by a wood "of bushes good for firewood and charcoal, and even beyond the crown of the bent was good sheep-land a long way."⁵⁸ Wethermel stood in the East Dale; the parts of the valley opposite and across the river were called West Dale. Across the river from Wethermel were "two little knolls rising from the field, and betwixt them and about them a shaw of small wood . . ."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

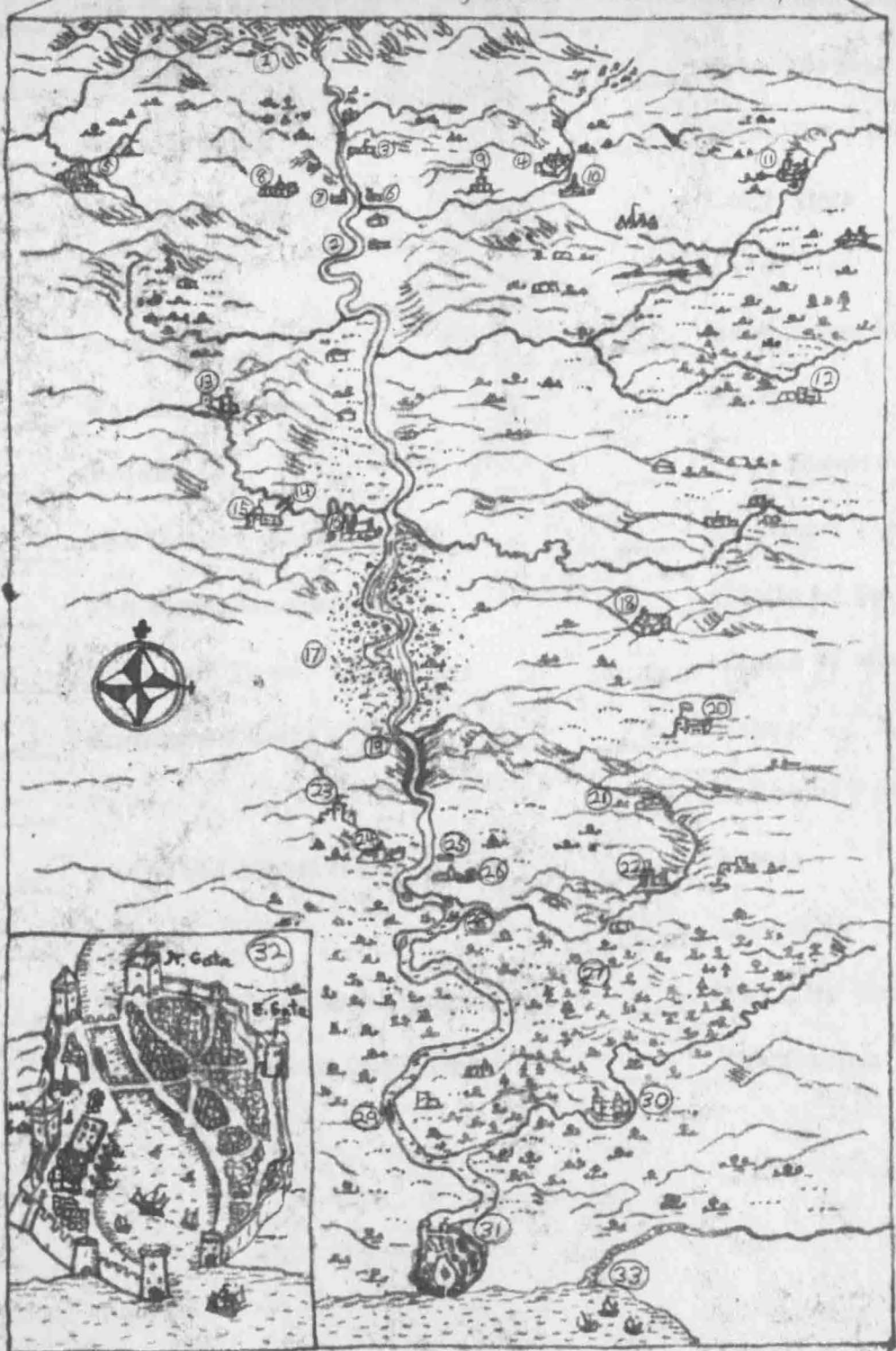
⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

This was Hartshaw, and there was a stead beyond.

The people of these two lands were friendly and they met--if one may use that term--yearly at opposite "mote-steads." The east mote-stead was seven miles from Wethermel. Part way down stream from Wethermel towards the motestead the river cut through a knoll at the Bight of the Cloven Knoll. Here the Sundering Flood has dark green depths, and there are thought to be land-wights and dwarfs about this place, as elsewhere in the Dales. Indeed, Osberne, the hero, as a young lad meets one of these dwarfs and receives a gift from him; and his "good fairy" is a supernatural being known to Osberne as Steelhead, apparently a warrior of old who has been sent to look out for the well-fated lad.

The Land of The Sundering Flood--Morris' Utopia



Key to Map on following page...*

*

<u>1</u>	The Great Mountains	<u>2</u>	The Sundering Flood
<u>3</u>	Wethermel	<u>4</u>	Eastcheaping
<u>5</u>	Westcheaping	<u>6</u>	Allhallows Ch. E.
<u>7</u>	Allhallows Ch. W.	<u>8</u>	Longryggs
<u>9</u>	Bullmeads	<u>10</u>	Abbey
<u>11</u>	Deepham	<u>12</u>	Riverlease Stead
<u>13</u>	Warding Knowe	<u>14</u>	Bridge
<u>15</u>	Brookside	<u>16</u>	Grey Sisters
<u>17</u>	The Desert Waste	<u>18</u>	Unnamed Town
<u>19</u>	The Mountain Gorge	<u>20</u>	Castle of the Fish
<u>21</u>	Unwalled Town	<u>22</u>	Castle of Woodneb
<u>23</u>	Unnamed Castle	<u>24</u>	Abbey
<u>25</u>	Ferry	<u>26</u>	House of Friars
<u>27</u>	The Wood Masterless	<u>28</u>	A Ship
<u>29</u>	A Ship	<u>30</u>	Longshaw
<u>31</u>	The City of the Sundering Flood	<u>32</u>	The City (Inset)
<u>32</u>	Landing-place of Outlanders	<u>34</u>	The Carfax

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PART TWO

CHAPTER I

It would be a simple matter to continue with the type of selective quotation which has filled the preceding pages. However, this paper is designed not only to support an hypothesis in the ordinary scholarly fashion, but also to demonstrate by careful reconstruction that this hypothesis is worthy of support; that certain fragments of Morris' prose romances can be formed into a composite presentation of his Utopia. I know no better means to insure the success of such a design as this than the use of imagination. We already know the importance of The Sundering Flood to any study of the prose romances, one particular element of this importance being the map reproduced in this part of the paper; and we should be prepared to admit that in a discussion of fiction the critic or student should be allowed as much freedom of

the imagination as the author of the studied works has allowed himself.

Almost all of the description which follows has been drawn from the romances; however, for the sake of authenticity, I have taken the liberty of inserting on occasion some illuminating details supplied by two prominent medievalists, G. G. Coulton and L. F. Salzman. Every one of these details is to be found somewhere in Morris' works, but they are scattered throughout his lectures and verse as well as his prose romances--too scattered to admit of being quoted, or even remarked in footnotes.

Let us pretend, then, that we have been privileged to surmount the obstacles of time and space and that we have come alive in the fourteenth century; let us pretend that we have just arrived at the City of the Sundering Flood aboard a ship much like that large merchant vessel which is shown in the harbor on the map. We are here to tour the countryside, to visit homesteads and castles, towns and cities; in short, we are here to learn as much about this land as we can in the few months we could spare for this trip. We are here at the instigation of the man who has come with us as our guide and mentor, William Morris.

We became acquainted with Morris one night while we were guesting at the House of the Black Canons near Abingdon-on-Thames. Of course, we had already heard of him, for he is well known in many parts of England as a poet and teller of tales. By trade he is a clerk,

and he has travelled far and wide in the service of important masters.

The night we met him, Morris, seeing by our dress and manners that we were travellers, engaged us in a conversation which centered upon some travels he had made recently in this very Land of the Sundering Flood. He was most enthusiastic about this land, for, as he said, it seemed to him the one country in the world which combined all that was best of natural endowments with all that was best of man's contriving. In short, he believed that no other people in the world had attained to such a state of perfection as that which existed in the Land of the Sundering Flood in this Year of Our Lord 1351. When we expressed some amazement at these statements, he hastened to assure us that this fabulous country was really not so different in appearance from other parts of Europe. Indeed, one might find countrysides like our own, rivers like the French, mountains like those in Spain or Italy or Austria, and even such strange and terrible countryside as that of the Northlands whereof we had heard. But, he said, this land also has a people who have learned to live, to build, and to decorate even as well as they who know best how to do these things in all the known lands of the Earth.

Before the night was over, Morris had shown us a map of this greatly interesting country, lent us a book wherein he had told a history of one of the heroes of this land, and offered to come as our guide whenever we might think to travel there. Needless to say, we accepted

this offer at first opportunity.

On the voyage Morris gave us many details about the City of the Sundering Flood, supplementing the description we had found in his chronicle of Osberne, the Red Lad. While we gazed at the map he had drawn on his first journey, he described the plan of the city defenses, which are very great and all of stone. He told us that from outside these ramparts one can see "little of the town because of the enormity of the walls; scarce ought save a spire or a tall tower-like roof here and there."⁶⁰ He said that the map could give no idea how great and impressive the city really was.

Now we are in the haven and can see that Morris was right indeed. Coming into the roads, we passed between the two water-gate towers, which are, as we had learned, the southern extremities of the two tremendous walls which embrace the river-divided city like encircling arms. These great seaward bastions seem to rise right out of the water; indeed, their portcullised gates seem to have been designed to admit seagoing craft of small size.

From our position in the waist of the ship we can see the crenellated top of the great square tower which encloses the East Gate. There is a pennon fluttering from the battlements there--the city standard. We can see the top of the North Gate tower too, but

⁶⁰ Morris, XVIII, 262.

houses hide the intervening wall from our view. However, we can see part of the wall which extends from the East Gate to the roadstead entrance. Directly above us is the largest of the two bridges which cross the river within the city. We cannot see it very clearly through the swaying forest of spars and rigging which attests to the thriving commerce of this port; but we know it is a boat bridge like the other, though considerably wider and longer. It crosses the river just above the oval harbor basin from a point in front of the great church on the west bank--we can see its spires--to the foot of a wide street which cuts across the east bank city from the waterside to the East Gate. Some distance down toward us from the west end of this bridge are water stairs for boaters and ferrymen just like those on Thames' side at home. Diagonally opposite these, below and behind us on the east bank, are other water steps. Ships line the quayside ahead of us from the water stairs almost to the water-gate tower far below, and there are many great warehouses down that way. Indeed, it is clear that the west bank quayside is where most of the business of trade in ships' bottoms is carried out, for there are many more craft of all sizes tied up here than there are behind us on the other side.

As we gaze about us while our ship draws closer to its berth, we remember Morris' description of this city as a "monstrous castle." And so it is; but we can see that there is a castle within it, just beyond the quayside. It rises up before us, "chamber on chamber, till its

battlements," as Morris tells us, "are level with the highest towers of the wall"⁶¹ behind it. We know that this structure contains the palace of the king who once ruled the city, a palace which is now the residence of the Porte. And we want very much to see more of this palace, for our guide has told us that it is truly a marvel of architecture and interior decoration.

There is our guide now, beckoning to us from the poop hatch, calling us to come and see that our luggage is all packed and ready to go ashore. He is an interesting figure of a man, this William Morris. He seems to fit into these surroundings, strange and new to us as they are, much more completely than he did in England, even in that House of Canons he calls his home. This is a hard thing to explain, for he is dressed in very ordinary fashion; his apparel is of the sort one may see on men of his calling almost anywhere in Christendom. We have seen him always dressed in a black cloth gown that reaches to his ankles and is embroidered about the collar and cuffs. It has wide sleeves gathered in at the wrists and a hood with a sort of bag hanging down from it at the back. There is a broad red leather girdle around his waist, on one side of which hangs an embroidered pouch and a pen and ink case made of hard leather chased with a hunting scene, while on the other side hangs a small sheath-knife.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 263.

⁶² Ibid., XVI, John Ball, 218.

No, it cannot be his dress that holds our attention now. We are familiar with it and with him; therefore, it must be his manner. He is a short, stocky, rather portly man in his early forties--surely not a striking figure; and yet, right now, with his large head thrown back, his bushy red beard and thick sandy hair tangled and tossed about by the fresh inshore breeze, and his arm raised to beckon us, he is a commanding--nay almost impressive--figure of a man. Perhaps this impression is due as much to our heightened sensibilities as to Morris' air of happy excitement and supreme confidence. Nevertheless, we are glad that he will be our guide and companion on this new adventure.

It is late evening before we finally get ashore; so Morris decides to put off our sight-seeing tour until tomorrow morning. Tonight we will go straight to our inn and refresh ourselves with food and rest; for it has been a long and strenuous voyage from London. Our inn is in the East City across the harbor; so we must take a barge from the ship across to the opposite landing. When we arrive, it is almost dark and the street noises have died to a murmur, since all good souls are either at supper or in bed by now. To reach our lodgings we must walk down along the quayside, then up a narrow street leading due east across town. The wide street which parallels the quayside of East City is called Water Street, and the houses along this street are truly impressive. All along beneath the dwellings there is an arched passage like the ambulatory of an abbey, and we are told that this

cloister stretches all the way up to the North Gate and all the way down to the Water Gate wherever there are houses. The dwellings themselves are all of stone on Water Street.⁶³

Behind us the setting sun has disappeared below the great walls and towers of the West City; and the sky above them is turning from rose to pale green, while stars have appeared over our heads. The least burdened of the three seamen who carry our luggage precedes us bearing aloft a torch which he has just lighted. As we turn up the narrow cross-town street, we notice that the shops here are closed, and only now and then may we see a dim light through a shuttered window or partly open door. The shop signs hanging above us creak in the night wind, and the flickering torchlight aids us to see that all the houses in this quarter are built partly of stone and partly of timber, the whole exterior being washed with preservative white lime, thus making the restricted way a much brighter one by both day and night.⁶⁴ Most of them have two or more stories and they all seem to be roofed with tile. In fact, as we could see earlier from the ship, almost all the lesser buildings in the city seem to fit this description, a type of building only now becoming common in English cities other than London,

⁶³ Ibid., XVIII, 263.

⁶⁴ Morris makes many references to white walls and the half-and-half structure of houses. Coulton (Medieval Panorama, p. 307) refers to Morris and adds detail concerning whitewash. Cf. post Appendix B.

yet obviously a familiar style here.⁶⁵

Soon we come out onto a much wider street and turn right. There, off to our left, we can see the dark expanse of the east wall rising above the house roofs. We take no more than a few steps after our turning before the torch bearer stops at a gate in a long wall higher than the tallest of us. This is the entrance to our hostel, where, Morris tells us, we will find better lodging than we have ever bought before. And when we have entered, we see that he meant what he said; for the court within is very large and contains a garden filled with sweet-scented flowers and orchard trees. There is lighting here from rushlights in stanchions fixed to pillars that support an archway running all the way around the square court against the wall. There is light coming from the open door of the guest house as well, and by this light we can see a fountain built of varicolored marble stones in the center of the court. The guest house is a longish building, built of red brick, which parallels the wall of the court through which we entered. Set in the house wall on either side of the door are long traceried windows that reach down close to the pavement of the cloister. And we can just see, running along beneath the lead roof high above the windows, shadowed portions of a frieze of figure subjects in baked clay.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ L. F. Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages (London, 1926). Cf. post Appendix C.

⁶⁶ Morris, XVI, News from Nowhere, 13.

All this we take in in a moment, for we are presently within doors and standing in a hall floored with marble mosaics. Above us are the shadowed reaches of an open timber roof. There are no windows on the opposite side, but there is a long space of wall below the roof beams painted gaily in a fresco which we think is similar in subject to the frieze outside; and beneath this painting is a row of arches leading into chambers. ⁶⁷

The hall is well lighted with fine candles, and our host and his servants welcome us with many expressions of good will. It is clear that our guide made many friends on his earlier journey.

The furniture and general fittings of the hall and of our chamber are beautifully made of the best wood, cloth, and metals; and they are highly ornamented in a very skillful fashion. The tableware is of the finest, beautiful even to our eyes, which are used to the sight of fine gear of this order. The crockery is for the most part beautifully ornamented lead-glazed pot ware; the only porcelain being a few pieces of fine old oriental ware. The glass is various in form, and both elegant and quaint, though it is bubbled and horny in texture, as are such pieces everywhere we have been. ⁶⁸

Our meat is plentiful and of the best quality of plain fare. We

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

ask for no delicacies or especially fine wines, though Morris assures us that a wide variety of such things is available. Our appetites demand wholesome plenty rather than scarce oddities designed to caress or inspire a jaded palate. And soon, our corporeal needs well seen to, we retire to our chamber for a long-awaited rest upon stable foundations. The day has been one of great excitement and we retire in pleasant weariness, content in the knowledge that the days to follow will afford a plenty of new and fascinating experiences.

On the morrow we rise early, prepared to see as much of the city as we can; for the following day we must depart on the first stage of the journey that will take us throughout the length and breadth of the Land of the Sundering Flood.

As we venture out into the street from which we entered the court of our inn last night, we discover that it is long and wide. Indeed, it runs almost the length of the East City, from North Gate to a point about midway of the wall between East Gate and Water Gate, where, in an angle of those massive outworks, there are stairs leading up to the battlements. We turn to our left and start northward up this broad way toward the Carfax or central square.

From the shops on either hand and along the narrow streets leading off from this one the sawing and scraping of carpenters, the tick-tack of weavers' shuttles, the tap of the coppersmith's hammer, and the ringing of the blacksmith's anvil come forth to mingle with the singing

of folk at their work and the bustle of busy ones moving about the streets. There is much color to delight the eye--the red, green, or parti-color of gild liveries, trade uniforms, and the liveries of barons' or knights' retainers, with here and there a splash of brown or black, or other somber hue, costuming a member of the clergy or someone of our guide's profession. And further up the street, only a little distance from the great Carfax, our ears are assaulted by the stentorian, brazen voices of masters, mistresses, and apprentices inviting us to buy their wares. The shops in this quarter, which is a market very much like the Cheapside in London, are wooden lean-tos fronting their owners' dwellings. They have little penthouse roofs projecting forward, and their outside shutters let down into the streets to form counters for the exhibition of wares, which are of every variety.⁶⁹

The Carfax, which resembles the hub of a great wheel from which all the principal streets of the city extend like spokes, is the largest of its kind that we have ever seen. But now it is so full of traffic--carts and wains loaded with produce from the countryside beyond the walls, and citizens and strangers going about their business--that we can see little of its detail, except that it is paved with great stones. We know that it is the central market of the city, and we have ascertained that that most of the congestion of people and vehicles is centered about a

⁶⁹ Morris mentions shops and markets on more than one occasion in the prose romances; also, color was of great importance to him as an artist. Coulton supplies the details here; Appendix B.

tall fountain in the middle of the open space. Our guide has turned left and we guess that he is leading us down toward the great bridge we saw last night--the means by which we will cross to the West City.

When we arrive at the intersection of the street we are on and Water Street, we can see once again the cloistered way that goes all along below the houses of the great and wealthy which front upon the teeming river. By daylight we can observe the shapeliness of the pillars that support the arches of the cloister. Everywhere there is stone there are carvings of imagery and knots of flowers. We can see that the windows of these dwellings above the gallery are all glazed and as fair as might be.⁷⁰

Crossing the great bridge, we have a fine view of that stretch of the lower river which flows between the two bridges. There are many barges, and other craft of the sort that are not sea-goers, river ships that can pass easily through the bridges by lowering and shipping their masts.⁷¹ Of course, we know that both bridges can be opened to permit the passage of great round-ships and dromonds, but there are none of these in sight this morning.

At the other end of the bridge we come out onto a great open space not so thronged with people as was the Carfax, but still alive

⁷⁰ Morris, XVIII, 263.

⁷¹ Ibid.

with much movement and color. Most of the traffic, both afoot and wheeled, is coming up to the bridge from the quayside down to our left and from the warehouses further down.

When we have made our way some few paces out onto this great open space, we can see before us that magnificent church whose spires we observed from our ship the evening before. It is built as all great churches should be, with its chancel at the east end, facing us, and its nave to the west, up against the great wall. And on the south side of the nave is a projecting porch, most handsomely builded. Indeed, though it is one of the most beautiful churches we have ever seen, we are not surprised, for Morris told us that this great structure was "dainty and delicate as might be," and that its steeples and bell-towers were "high and well builded, and adorned exceeding richly."⁷²

Within, it is cool and dark, and we find that there is much fine decoration of furnishings such as the rood screen, and of the building stone itself. The walls are painted; the windows are tall and filled with smooth glass stained in beautiful colors with scenes from the Book and the lives of saints--glass through which the sunlight streams in soft-colored rays like rainbows in a deep valley just before dusk. The walls and pillared vaults are great and high, reaching up into the shadows of the roof; and the pillars themselves are carven about. But we have seen such sights before--at Norfolk, at Lincoln and elsewhere

⁷² Ibid., p. 264.

in our homeland and abroad--and Morris tells us that there are other churches in the land which, though they be smaller and perhaps not so fine, yet are of greater interest. These we will visit on our journey; so now we leave this great building and start across the open space up to the northern part of the West City.

The houses before us are grouped together in a region bounded by the walls on the west, the great end-tower on the north, the quayside on the east, and the open place which we are crossing on the south. When we come amongst them, we discover that these dwellings are all as elegantly built and ornamented as their noble owners can afford to have them. Each house stands in a carefully cultivated garden filled with flowers and fruit trees. The trees, with the exception of a bay here and there, seem to be mostly cherry and pear trees, though there are occasional groups of limes.⁷³

Soon we have seen enough of this fine quarter and we are ready to go back down the city to the palace, our next destination. But it is almost mid-day by the time we pass below the great bridge; so we stop at a small quayside tavern for some refreshment. When we have seated ourselves, Morris asks us if we are not impressed by what we have seen. Our answer is a definite "yes"; and we agree that we are most impressed by the appearance of the folk who inhabit this city. All seem to be frankly and openly joyous, and almost everyone is gaily

⁷³ Ibid., XVI, News from Nowhere, 41.

dressed. Indeed, we are so struck by their apparent condition and attitude that we are at a loss for words to express our feeling. It is Morris himself who finds the most apt phrase. He asks us if we do not think that it is a "great nobility of expression"⁷⁴ that seems to characterize not just a few, but the whole population of this wonderful city; and we must agree. In fact, we even think we know at least partly why this is so, for we have read our companion's own history of Osberne, the Red Lad, in which he told how the folk of this city overthrew their tyrant king with the assistance of Osberne and his captain, the great baron of Longshaw. And Morris tells us that we are right, but that there are other reasons too, which he will say nothing about until we have been in this land some time longer. Now we remember how it is told in the book that the revolt of the people against their king began in the frank of the city--in the dependent countryside beyond the walls--and in the upland districts along the Flood--even before it began in the city itself.

In a short while, feeling much refreshed, we start again on our tour. The tavern we have just left is not far from the group of buildings which stand between the palace grounds and the great open place. Most of these buildings, which we believe to be the offices of merchants, are low structures surrounded by courts, and they are very handsomely

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

built and ornamented; but from their midst rises a large octagonal building with a high roof. It is not unlike certain examples of Florentine architecture in outline, except that it is surrounded by an arcade or cloister.⁷⁵ And this is the Gild Hall of the city.

The palace court and garden is enclosed by a low wall, and from the southern end of this court rises the High House itself. From here we can see the upper part of the walls and their buttresses, and we can see the lead-covered roof pitched steeply above them between pointed towers and pinnacles. Morris has described this building as being of a "splendid and exuberant style of architecture." Indeed, we agree with him that it seems to combine the best qualities of the architecture of northern Europe, with which we are familiar, with those of the Saracen and Byzantine styles, examples of which we all have seen on our cheap-ventures and pilgrimages; and yet, there is no copying of any one of those styles.⁷⁶

Once within the palace itself, we are bound to agree with Morris' description of its interior. In fact, there is so much to see that we come away after an unnoticed passage of hours with only scattered impressions of its magnificence--impressions that can be best expressed by the most articulate of our group, Morris himself. He had told us,

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

as I remember his words, that the High House was like "a piece of the Kingdom of Heaven for loveliness"; and so indeed it was. He reminds us now how many pillars there were of bright marble,

and gilded, and the chapters carved most excellently: not many hangings on the walls, for the walls themselves were carven, and painted with pictures in the most excellent manner; the floors withal were so dainty that they seemed as if they were made for none but the feet of the fairest of women.⁷⁷

The king's chamber, which now is the state chamber of the Burgreve, where he meets in closed session with the members of the Great Council and the Porte, was--as Morris again has said--"peerless of beauty and riches . . ."

the ceiling done with gold and over-sea blue; the walls hung with arras of the fairest . . . The chairs and stools were of carven work well be-painted, and amidmost was a great ivory chair under a cloth of estate, of baudekin of gold and green, much be-pearled; and all the floor was of fine work alexandrine.⁷⁸

There were many other things we saw and marveled at, but we will have to remember them later rather than think about them now; for, although the afternoon is nearly spent by the time we leave the palace grounds, we nevertheless decide to see as much of the remainder of the city as we can before returning to our hostel. Morris suggests that we cross over to the east side once again and climb onto the walls

⁷⁷ Ibid., XVIII, 267.

⁷⁸ Ibid., XVII, 118.

by the North Gate tower. From there we will be able not only to observe somewhat of the city defenses at close hand, but also to look out over the city in one direction and the countryside of the frank in the other.

The sun is sinking behind the west walls for the second time since our arrival in this great city, when finally we stand before the towering structure which guards the North Gate. The gate itself is huge, like a hall within, quite long, and very high and most fairly vaulted.⁷⁹ In the middle of this hall we turn to our right, pass through a noble arch, and begin to climb a flight of stairs. We climb for what seems a long time before we reach the top and come out onto the parapet between the battlements. From this lookout we can see the City of the Sundering Flood spread out below and before us. The levelled rays of the sun strike glints from windows and house roofs; the harbor water near the East City quayside sparkles amongst the shipping; the noises of a busy city come up to us with striking clarity, though muted by distance; and all seems a very picture of peaceful and productive communal existence.

We turn about now and look out over the frank beyond the walls. There is the broad, gilded surface of the Flood winding northwards past the far corner of the tower on our left. And far off, beyond some low hills in the foreground, we can see the dark stain that marks the

⁷⁹ Ibid., XVIII, 262.

southern extremity of the great Wood Masterless. Between the Wood and us, and extending in a great arc as far as we can see from north to south, is the frank of this powerful city. All around the eastern walls and beyond to a range of low bents or knolls over which we cannot see, within our whole sweep of vision, there are gardens, pastures, and fertile cornfields about the steads of franklins and the scattered villages of those outlying districts.⁸⁰ It is an ideally pleasant panorama; indeed, our eyes are filled with the beauty, our senses with the peace, of this land--a land truly worthy to be called home by a proud and happy people.

We are loath to leave this spot, but Morris reminds us that we have preparations to make for tomorrow's journey before we may sleep. And, as we turn reluctantly toward the stairs, the bells of the great cathedral in the West City begin to sound the Angelus. Before we have descended the first flight the bells of more than a hundred churches and all the monasteries within the walls have joined in a chorus, and we imagine we hear faint echoes from the countryside beyond.⁸¹

Back in our chamber at the inn, we gather what belongings we have taken from our chests and bags, replace them, and lay out our travel gear for the morrow. Morris is out in the court with our host

⁸⁰ Cf. post Appendices B & C.

⁸¹ Cf. post Appendix C.

making arrangements for our departure. We are to leave early in the morning by up-river barge for a point almost a full day's journey from the City. There we will disembark and proceed eastward by road along the edge of the Wood Masterless to Longshaw, where we will be guests of the great baron, and perhaps learn somewhat from him of his old friend and brother-in-arms, Osberne, the Red Lad.

CHAPTER II

Dawn of our third day in the Land of the Sundering Flood breaks through air so cool and clear that we are assured of fine weather for our trip. The first true brightness of day finds us already through the upper bridge and passing beyond the North Gate tower, gliding easily along on the smooth bosom of the Flood. Indeed, we are soon past the tower, for we are moving with the speed of a fast-walking man. Our bargemen roused us early and loaded us aboard with no waste of time, so as to catch the first surge of the incoming tide. Now, with only two sweeps rowing in leisurely fashion, we may progress at the same pace until past noon, when the tide will begin to ebb.

At first, we cannot see far beyond the banks on either side, for the morning mists still hover and swirl above the luxuriant reaches of

weeds and rushes on the tide-flooded shores. But before long the sun has risen high enough to dispell the mists, and gradually more and more of the land on either hand is unveiled to our view.

Here, just beyond the city walls, there are many dwellings on both sides. These are the houses of fishermen, and others who depend upon the river for livelihood, as well as the country houses of nobles and middle class citizens and of those franklins who farm acres of the rich land beyond. The former are small and mostly of wattle and daub construction, and they lie close to the banks; but the larger ones stand a little way from the river, and some are of red brick roofed with tiles, while most are of timber and plaster. Before the largest of these are gardens going down to the edge of solid ground behind the rushes, and in these gardens the flowers are now blooming luxuriantly. The faint breezes of early morning carry delicious waves of summer scent over the eddying stream to our nostrils. Behind these larger houses we can see many great trees, mostly planes, which enhance the beautiful scene.⁸²

During the morning hours that follow we pass beyond the protected land which lies close under the walls of the city into country less populated, where the husbandmen's steads lie further apart and only now and then do the roofs of a little village break the skyline of trees and grassy bents. We are passing now around a westward-turning bend

⁸² Ibid., XVI, News from Nowhere, 9 & 23.

beyond which, Morris tells us, lies an up-country cheaping town where large ships often tie up and unload their goods. Indeed, we think we can see the masthead of a seagoing vessel on the east bank just around the bend ahead, and we become excited at the prospect of other pleasant sights in store.

There it is--a large round-ship like our own back in the haven of the city. Its yards seem barely touching the windows of a stead hard by the shore, and its bowsprit thrusts forth over the middens and the rooting swine and querulous hens.⁸³ Drawing closer, we can see that the ship is tied up to a landing place on the bank right before the stead. Indeed, it would seem that this husbandman combines two ways of life in one: he is farmer and ship lader, crop grower and dock worker at once.

The scene before us, and especially the sight of the little church, reminds me of Morris' words, as they are written in his story of Osberne. He speaks of ships such as that one in a place such as this, and tells how the "uneasy lads and lasses sitting at high-mass of the Sunday in the grey village church would see the tall masts dimly amidst the painted saints of the aisle windows."⁸⁴ It is an evocative picture, and it makes one think of his own life, led as it has been as much in search of

⁸³ Ibid., XXI, 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

adventure as in search of gain.

The afternoon passes more slowly than the morning, for there is less to see that we have not already seen the like of, and we are becoming impatient to reach our destination. About an hour past mid-day the tide begins to ebb, and our bargemen step a tall thick mast, hoist a lateen sail, haul in all but the stern sweep, and wait--obviously hoping for the best. Some minutes pass, and the barge is losing way, beginning to turn broadside to the increasing current, despite the steersman's efforts. The sail hangs limp and the barge master looks anxious; but there seems to be a freshening of the air. The erstwhile stillness, broken only by the gurgle and suck of moving water, the creaking and straining of wood, and by our own voices, is giving way now to a murmur and hushing amongst the reeds and rushes on the near bank. Yes, the sail is filling; we have stopped floating downstream; the southwest is blowing true for us, and we are on our way once again. Morris tells us that if the wind had not blown fair, perhaps we could have made our way upstream by reaching from shore to shore before the wind and along its thrust; but more than likely we would have been forced to pull for the east bank and allow ourselves to be tracked up by the draught of horses and bullocks.⁸⁵

Soon we can see that the Flood before us is widening, becoming almost a lake. Our barge turns slightly now, heading toward the eastern

85 Ibid.

shore, which seems to have gotten farther and farther away in the last few minutes. Morris tells us that this widening of the Flood is caused by the entrance of another river into the main body. It is the wide mouth of this tributary that gives the confluence of the two waters the appearance of a small lake. This tributary runs from far away in the northeast down along the edge of the Wood Masterless and past the House of Longshaw. Our landing place is a short distance up the tributary, on its southern bank.

When we arrive at the landing, we estimate that we have more than two hours of daylight left us; and Morris assures us that we will be well along on our journey before sunset. There is a stead at the landing place where we can purchase horses, both pack and saddle, for the remainder of our travels throughout this land--or until we needs must buy others.

Within an hour we have disembarked, loaded our pack animals, mounted, and started on our way. From its straightness the road we are now on might be a piece of Roman road back in England. Copses are scattered over the rolling country before us, and below us and off on our right hand are the bents of the uplands we saw yesterday from the city walls. Among those distant knolls we glimpse signs of two or three villages and hamlets. On our left hand runs the tributary river, its course marked clearly by a wavering line of thick green grass, and trees and shrubs.

Not more than an hour has passed when we reach a fork in our road. One branch is a continuation of the main route, and it leads straight ahead in the direction we have been going; the other turns to the left and goes, as Morris tells us, down to the river. This is the one we take. In a little while we come to the bank of the river, and here the stream is wide and shallow. This is a fording place, and we can see where our road comes out upon the far bank and then disappears among the great boles of the forest that stretches as far as we can see up and down the other side. And this great forest is the Wood Masterless.

Once we are across the stream and into the wood, Morris tells us that it is less than an hour's ride from here to the glade where we will camp for the night. He adds that this part of the Wood is entirely safe for travellers, thanks to the power of the Baron of Longshaw, whose sway extends over a great part of this land. We are glad to know this, for the stillness and the deep shade of this wild place, in addition to the name of the Wood itself, are enough to send a chill up and down the bravest man's backbone. Until we heard Morris, we thought it possible that at any moment we might discover masterless men lurking amongst the great oaks, sweet chestnuts, planes, sycamores, and beeches through which our road--now a mere path--winds onward to the safety of Longshaw.

During the next hour Morris, to our satisfaction, is proven right. Nothing out of the ordinary happens, though twice we are startled by

deer leaping across the path--once a doe and faun, and once a fine large buck of six points or more. Soon the river is left behind and we can no longer hear the sound of running water. This final portion of our day's journey is marked only by the lessening of the river-bound breeze that had eased the heat of the open plain, by the buzzing of flies, by the lengthening of the scattered rays of direct sunlight which strike down through our leafy cover, and by the pleasant scent of trodden bracken along the wayside.

We reach the glade of which Morris spoke with some moments of daylight yet to spare; and we are tired enough to enjoy fully this our first night without the shelter of rafters or deck beams since departing London. On the morrow we are early on our way. Throughout the day the Wood remains the same in appearance as before, and nothing remarkable occurs, until an hour or so before sunset. Indeed, we have become so lulled by the gentle movements of our mounts and the seeming endlessness of our peaceful surroundings that when suddenly the wood thins before us, we suffer a shock of surprise.

At one moment the path stretches ahead into a sharp curve around the great bole of an ancient oak like so many we have passed; and at the next we are beyond the tree and there before us, through a thinning screen of young growth, spreads a wide plain of emerald greensward. The bracken-strewn path becomes once again a white and dusty road; and looking along an angle off to our right hand, we can see the familiar

river cleaving the plain. As we leave the last of the trees behind and with our eyes follow the river upstream, we see that it winds about the foot of a long, low ridge, whereon are orchards and gardens a-many; and all above them rise so many buildings and towers and walls of stone that to us it seems as if we have before us a fair town.⁸⁶ And this we know to be Longshaw.

Now, as we stare ahead, excited and eager, our eyes catch the glints of sunlight flashing from windows amidmost of the towers and walls. These gleams come from the near side of a very great and exceeding fair hall, whose pinnacles and spires are bathed in the rose glow of the sun now setting behind us in the west--behind the great Wood Masterless, the Sundering Flood, and the world beyond. Beside the hall there is a church fairer yet; and before it--lower down the hill, and on either side--are huge towers, stern and stout, and all without either fretwork or ornament. The details are clear to us, now that we are rapidly drawing closer. There are many of these great towers surrounding the hill, one built in a position where it may be of aid to the other; and down by the riverside stands a bailey of such size and strength, and so cleverly placed, that we doubt we have seen another like it. And Morris tells us, to our amazement, that these walls harbor five thousand men-at-arms besides the other folk who dwell for the most part in the

⁸⁶ Ibid., XXI, 162-64.

House of Longshaw.⁸⁷

The sun has not yet set when we come beneath the great walls by the west gate and pass through into the stronghold. Many fair buildings stand on the sides of the bent that goes up before us, but above them all rises the great hall of Longshaw. Whereas it stands high on the bent, a great stair or perron of stone goes up to it, and this is of much majesty.⁸⁸ Above the stair rise the great walls and towers of the hall; and up aloft, limned against the darkening sky by the red rays of the sun, we can see chimneys betokening a-many great hearths. Below these are windows with fair seats in them, and arched doors and carven pillars below them, and many things beautiful.⁸⁹

We dismount at the foot of the perron and, leaving our horses with servants who come scurrying forward with many bows and smiles--for this is a happy and courteous household--we climb upwards and pass through a porch, which is pillared and lovely, and then through a door in a beautifully carven oak screen into a great hall most nobly builded. On the right and left tall pillars go up gleaming toward the roof,⁹⁰ and at the other end of the hall--which is at least thirty fathoms in length--is a great carven oak chair raised upon a dais, and before it is the high table, of oak as well. The pillars are of stone and the vaults too, and

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

⁸⁸ Ibid., XX, 58.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

the floor is of great flags of polished marble. There is a fine large hearth of stone in the center, wherein no fire burns as yet.

We are met by the steward of the house, to whom Morris is known, and who informs us that Baron Godrick will be most pleased to entertain us as long as we wish to remain his guests. Sir Godrick is aloft in his chamber; so the steward takes us there now to meet with him.

We are led up the hall, past the dais, down a passage with closed doors on either side, and out through an open door in the far wall onto a cloistered way, beyond which lies a beautiful garden. At the far end of this gallery we find a flight of stone steps leading up to the solar, and beside us, along the wall on our right hand, there are tall windows filled with stained glass. These, we are told, look out from the ladies' bowers and the rooms where gentle folk may entertain one another.⁹¹

The steward stays before a great door at the head of the stairs. He motions us to wait, and swiftly enters. In a moment the door is opened wide and we are bid to enter. The chamber is four-square and vaulted; and the vault is upheld by a pillar of red marble. The walls are all of fine stone close-jointed, and the floor also, but of marble polished to the gleam of still water. The windows are not small and are filled with leaded panes of clear glass, and there are oaken shutters beyond, and the chamber is light in every corner because of these

⁹¹ For a few of the details in these passages I am indebted to L. F. Salzman. Cf. post Appendix C.

windows. But there is no one within except ourselves and the steward, who stands by a small door in the opposite wall. There is no furniture in the room save a narrow bench of oak and three stools of the same, a great and stately carven chair dight with cushions of purple and gold, and in one corner a big oaken coffer,⁹² upon which there are two or three books handsomely ornamented. And the walls where there are no windows are hung with handsome arras showing woodland scenes and the like.

In a moment Sir Godrick enters through the little door by which the steward is waiting. He comes quickly forward and greets Morris and ourselves with much friendliness. Sir Godrick, though past middle age, is tall and stout, and obviously still used to exercising his muscles. His skin is berry-brown from the sun and weather, and lined yet firm; his hair is yet full and dark, though shot over here and there with grey; and he has withal a pleasant and friendly look about eyes and mouth. His dress, though simple enough for such a noble, is of fine web; the surcoat being light green with a golden spray embroidered on the breast, and his belt being of filigree silver-work.⁹³

The remainder of our stay at Longshaw is made most pleasant by a continuation of the warm welcome extended to us upon our arrival. The Baron can tell us little of Osberne, for it has been some while since

⁹² Morris, XX, p. 61-2.

⁹³ Ibid., XVI, News from Nowhere, 12.

last they met. On that occasion, however, all was well with the Red Lad and with his home, the goodly stead of Wethermel. Sir Godrick tells us that Osberne is expected to visit him here at Longshaw within a few months; but, though we are asked to stay, we cannot wait so long. Morris suggests that perhaps we shall find Osberne still at Wethermel when we reach it, and then--if we have time--we may travel with him back here to Longshaw. This is pleasing to the Baron and he no longer urges us to stay; so on the morrow of our third day at Longshaw we take our leave and start northward once again.

CHAPTER III

Our ride through the great Wood Masterless takes nigh eleven days of the store of time yet remaining to us for this journey. On the first day, after riding through a thick and close wood for some five hours, we come out onto a plain not much be-timbered, and on the far side of this plain, where the wood thickens once again, we make camp for the night. During the next six days we ride on through a wood that is diverse of kind and thinner than about the House of Longshaw, and all through this wood goes a clear road. On two separate evenings we meet chapmen going through the wood, and we talk with them, share our camps with them, and in the mornings part company to go our different ways. On the seventh day we ride onto broken ground, whiles with much tangled growth and whiles treeless, and this is a two days' ride, and many are the wild deer herein; but nought untoward befalls us during this time.

On the ninth day we come once again amongst great timber-trees with wood lawns betwixt, and but little underwood. For three days the wood holds thus, and at last on a clear evening some two hours past sunset we come out of the Wood Masterless onto an open and rolling plain, seemingly well grassed and nigh treeless.⁹⁵

Two hours more we ride on into the night, and now, suddenly, looming great and black before us against the sky are the masses of the tofts of Woodneb Castle, the hold of one Kilian, knight and liegeman of the Baron of Longshaw. At the top of the northernmost of these tofts there is a light in the upper window of a tall, square tower. Withal the yellow-litten windows of a long house show on the plain below the tofts; but little else of the house may be seen, save that, as we draw near, the walls break out in doubtful light here and there as our torches smite them.⁹⁶ There is a river between us and the walls, a water not half so wide as that which runs before Longshaw, but wide enough so that it must be bridged from the plain to a strong bailey below the walls of the house.

We cross the little bridge and come to the gate, and here Morris finds a horn whereon he blows loudly thrice; thereafter the gates are opened to us and we pass through them into the court. Now we come to a deep porch, where we quench all our torches save one, and enter a

⁹⁵ Ibid., XXI, 162-4, in reverse.

⁹⁶ Ibid., XVII, 159.

great hall through it. The hall is lighted with candles, but not very brightly, save at the upper end; but amidmost a flickering heap of logs sends a thin line of blue smoke up to the luffer.⁹⁷ There are endlong tables in the hall whereat a goodly company of men-at-arms and other folk do yet sit at drink. And at the far end is a high table raised upon a dais before the master's chair.

A steward leads us up onto the dais where we meet our host, who greets us very kindly, saying he has had word from Longshaw telling of our intention to visit him. Sir Kilian is about thirty years of age, tall and broad-shouldered, his hair brown and curling close to his head, little beard and thin, and that daintily clipped to a point; straight nose and red lips, his skin clear brown because of the tanning of the sun; his cheekbones somewhat high, his eyes well asunder from each other, great and grey; a strong body and well-knit.⁹⁸ His dress is modest, it being of fine woven dark blue cloth cinched about his waist by a brown belt with a clasp of damascened steel beautifully wrought.⁹⁹

We are seated near him, and after we have been served from dishes of marchpoul and galantine, our host presses us to try more of the wines set before us. We do, and we find them delicious. Sir Kilian then tells us with pride that these wines are from his own vineyards

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., XXI, 253.

99 Ibid., XVI, News from Nowhere, 7-8.

out on the bentside beyond the tofts. ¹⁰⁰

We spend the remainder of the night most comfortably at Woodneb. On the morrow we are late starting, for it was agreed by all that we should rest as long as possible before continuing our journey. Thus we are forced to make camp in the open on two successive nights before we come within sight of the House of Friars, which lies in its acres on the very brink of the Sundering Flood. Yes, we are once again in sight of that great river, for we have turned completely about. We left the Flood at our backs nigh a fortnight ago, and now we face it at a point more than an hundred and fifty miles upriver from the City.

It is well past mid-day when we ride through the out-pastures and closes of the Friars' land and come in sight of the out-lying bowers and cots, and the walls and roofs of the House itself. But we are not to stay here this night. These friars are of an order not in close relations with the Black Canons of Abingdon; and, anyway, our road leads down to the riverside some distance above the Friary, where there is a ferry serving folk who would cross to and from the Abbey on the other bank. And here the great river, though not so wide as when last we saw it, is still a mighty great water. The stretch before us seems placid and not difficult to cross. But, as we soon learn, the current is far swifter than it was; nor is it deep enough, except in narrow channels, for craft much

100 Ibid., XXI, pp. 253 et sqq.

larger than our ferry.

Not till we are well out on the Flood do we have a clear view of the House of Friars behind and below us on the bank we just left. Though it is not large, it seems not in the least poor. There is a sun-gilded chapel roof, and there--through a screen of orchard trees growing beside the northern walls--we glimpse a long, many-pillared cloister stretching along the grassy slopes that lead down to the waterside. But soon our attention is drawn to what lies ahead of us. Morris calls to us to turn about, and points before him to a mass of buildings rising above a wide plain of greensward that goes up from the river to some low bents beyond.

The buildings nearest us, and yet some distance from the ferry landing we now approach, are mainly penfolds and byres, out-bowers and cots, such as those about the House of Friars on the other bank; but these are in greater number and many of them larger by no little. And from their midst, long and great, rises the Abbey church; and now, for the current is carrying us in upon the shore somewhat downriver of the place, we see the low sun's rays glittering on the church's gilded vanes and the wings of the angels high upon its battlements.¹⁰¹ Here too there are orchards and closes about the walls, and on the bentside behind we can see the low dark growth of vineyards.

We are most courteously welcomed at the Abbey, where the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., XVIII, 23.

brethren have just issued from vespers; and later we are handsomely fed and entertained at the Abbot's table, then directed to a sleeping chamber in a new guest-house beyond the refectory.

On the morrow we start out early upon our road to the north. We have, so Morris informs us, a long and difficult ride ahead before we shall again have the comforts of rich meat and drink and a bed within walls. By the next day we shall be well into the mountains of the river gorge--the Mountain Gorge range; and beyond them lies the Desert Waste, itself a two days' ride from beginning to end. Nor will there be any guesting for us, beyond that afforded by an humble cot we should reach tonight, until we have crossed the Waste.

Early in the afternoon we come into the foothills of the range. Our road is rutted and dusty and narrow now, as it winds upward amidst rocks, bush, heather, and gnarled scrub timber scattered over the bents and knolls about us. This is a wild place, but not yet wilder or more desolate than similar country we have travelled through in our own northlands.

About three hours past mid-day we top yet another steep slope and see, way off to our left and above us, a white castle upon a high bent. It is seemingly not old, nor yet new, but fair enough, builded part of stone and lime, part of framed work, but it is but middling big. ¹⁰²

102 Ibid., XX, 103.

In answer to our questions, Morris tells us that he does not know the name of this castle, but that it is held by a liegeman of the Abbot with whom we dined last night. We are destined to learn no more of this place, for Morris adds abruptly that we must hurry so as to gain the shelter of a herdsman's cot whereof he knows. This cot lies in a fold of the mountains now looming darkly before us, and it is past nightfall when at last we reach it.

All the next day we travel into rougher and rougher country. Sometimes our way is but a path, dangerously narrow, winding tortuously along the edge of a precipice; whiles it goes up steep-walled and rubble-strewn passes between peaks that grow ever higher and higher; and whiles it comes out upon great rock shoulders. Ofttimes we must dismount and lead our animals with great care over footing so treacherous that even goat signs are few amongst the rocks and shale. When night comes, we find shelter beneath a great outcropping of mossy stone that slants outward above a wide, cave-like recess in its base, along which runs the path. There is a trickle of fresh, cold water here, running down the rock wall from a cleft above us. Morris says there must be a spring within the cracked and riven mass that now hides the stars from our sight.¹⁰³ And this night we go to sleep with a dull roaring in our ears-- a sound which signifies the nearness of the Mountain Gorge.

¹⁰³ These passages were inspired by the Icelandic Journals, Vol. VIII of The Collected Works.

On the morrow--not much rested, but eager for a sight of the famous Gorge--we hurry as fast as we safely can upward toward the crashing roar of the Flood, a sound which grows rapidly louder in our ears until it is nigh deafening and we know we are not far from the Gorge. Indeed, now we begin to feel a dampness on our faces and hands; we can smell water; and a cloud of spray so fine that it is mist hovers beyond and above us, filtering the sun's rays and forming sketchy rainbows amongst the damp dark rocks. Our beasts begin to snort and shy, pulling against taut reins, rolling their heads and eyes. Soon Morris tells us we must dismount and tether our horses, for they will not abide the sight of the Gorge, nor is there safe footing for them where we shall go.

We are in a narrow, shallow defile, and the Gorge lies off to our right over that side of the passage. We scramble up the side and along a space of broken rock till we come to a great boulder beyond which--through a lofty shimmering screen of spray--we can just see the opposite wall of the Gorge. We move on slowly now, clambering down to the boulder; and then Morris stops and motions to us to come carefully up to his side. We can hear nothing for the roar of rushing water, but we can see it now, down there through the myriad sunlit droplets thrown up by the torrent. And here the mighty Flood is truly an awesome sight. The frothy torrent rushes by fully an hundred feet below us, and surely no living thing could go nearer than we. There is no purchase on those

steep-walled cliffs all slick with wetness; nowhere from top to bottom on either side is there foothold even for goats; and, were it possible to reach them, nothing could stand a moment upon those few jagged black rocks thrusting up from the swirling, tossing waters. We understand now why there is no bridge across the Flood anywhere in these mountains; for here it is indeed a flood that sunders, and here certainly it is a sight both awesome and magnificent.

Soon, however, we must return to our beasts and so continue upon our journey. Night will be upon us in a few more hours, and Morris wishes to reach a campsite wherewith he is familiar down on the northward-looking slopes of the range.

We spend the night in a place much like the last; but we reach this camp before the sky is fully dark, while there is still light enough to see far into the distance north of our high-up resting place. The western sky is turning from rose to green, from green to purple; the clouds look like lumps of metal in a forge, dark on the near side and the top, red gold and molten on the bottom and the other side; and the east, where all the shadows are wending, is a void of blackness beneath an azure, star-frought dome. And there, far below and before us, stretches the Desert Waste, an empty flat expanse of grey and black, of sand strewn with rocks; and there too is the dimly glimmering serpentine Flood cutting it down the middle.

On the morrow, an hour before mid-day, we come out upon the

Waste. Down here the heat of the sun is very great and soon will be greater yet. Our way lies up along the rivercourse, through an utter waste of rock mingled with sand. Nowhere, as far as we can see, is there a tree or a bush or a sign of grass; and the Flood beside us flows shallow and swift, its course lined with great stretches of tumbled stones which have been borne down by the spates from higher ground. And here it is far wider than at any place we have seen.¹⁰⁴

At mid-day we stop to rest for some hours, finding what shelter we can from the burning sun for ourselves and beasts beneath cloths stretched from rock to rock along the riverside. There is water a-plenty, though it is no great pleasure to drink of it, and we have brought ample viands with us from the Abbey--also fodder for our beasts upon the back of one. We will not move from here until the sun has gone far down in the west, and then we shall ride on into the early hours of the morning, for the nights are cool--nay even cold at times--in these wastes.

Dawn of the second day of our desert journey finds us entering upon land where there is grass again, yet no trees--land that rises into bents going back on either side, east and west, of the Flood. And here the river is of much the same width as it was back below the Mountain Gorge. Some two hours after sunrise we stop at the foot of a little grassy knoll to rest ourselves and our weary beasts. There is fresh fodder here for animals, and we partake of the last of our meat and the wine of the Abbey.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. ante pp. 24-5.

This night we shall once again be sheltered within walls; for, as Morris tells us, the House of Brookside stands only a few miles away from here-- at most a day's leisurely ride to the northwest. The convent of the Grey Sisters is nearer and right upon the river, but it is our intention to ask for guesting at Brookside.

Some time past the middle of the day, having left the Flood far enough behind so that it is out of sight, we ride up onto a rise of ground that is the foot of a somewhat high bent, and here we draw rein. Morris points off to our right where we can see, made small by the distance, the glittering spires of a great church rising amidst roofs and the tops of walls and a profusion of trees; and now once again we can see the Flood, a narrow gleam of light winding past the clump of buildings between grass-grown banks. And those buildings are the convent of the Grey Sisters, where Elfhild and her aunt found shelter on their way to the meeting with Osberne on the edge of the Wood Masterless. We have come a long way, but we have just made a beginning.

Before us, in the direction we have been going, the land slopes down from some high bents far off in the north and west toward us and the Grey Sisters. Indeed, these bents come all the way around to the one upon whose foot we now stand, thus forming a rough half-circle about the sloping meads before us. And in this haven--which might have been a garth of the giants or an amphitheatre of pagan gods, perhaps even of the First People--is the House of Brookside. It lies not

far to the west and somewhat north of the Grey Sisters. Indeed, they are within sight of one another. And we too can see Brookside from here, though nought but the top of a tower that blends into the rocky bentside beyond it. However, we shall be approaching the walls before much time has passed, and thus may observe the place with care while there is still light. Morris has told us that it is a most interesting house and fortress.

We ride down onto the rolling greensward, cross a marshy little stream, and head toward Brookside. When we are within a half mile of the castle, we turn and ride around the walls so as to come up to it from the front. The castle stands upon a hill nowise high, and before it runs a little river that begins in the highlands to the northwest and comes down across the meads, goes on past the Grey Sisters and into the Flood. Before Brookside this water is bridged with a goodly stone bridge; and the house itself is most strongly built of stone. It is long and defensible by reason of its towers and walls, yet no mere stronghold, but a goodly dwelling.¹⁰⁵

The family of Sir Mark--the young knight who succored Elfhild from the evil chapman--was left without heir when Sir Mark was slain in battle while fighting against the Baron of Longshaw; and when his mother died, no one was left to assume headship and control of the House of Brookside. Morris tells us that the present holder of the

¹⁰⁵ Morris, XXI, 217.

estate was awarded it by the lord of all these lands hereabout as a favor to the Baron of Longshaw, when the latter defeated this lord in the war which cost Sir Mark his life.

Now we are entering the gate into the castle court, where we are met by sundry men-at-arms, one of whom goes to make known the reason for our presence to the master of the house; and presently out comes a goodly youth, fair haired, and with a kind, happy look upon his face. He says that our guide's name is known to him and that any friend of Sir Godrick is many times welcome at Brookside. Straightaway we are led into the great hall, which is long, but not very high. Its pillars are thick and big, and its arches beetling; but it is clear that the young man, hight Sir Walter, and his folk love this better than flower-fair building, for it is very ancient and of all honor. Ancient withal are its adornments, and its halling is of the story of Troy, and the stark woven warriors and kings look out from it stern and solemn, as they wend betwixt sword and shield on the highway of Fate.¹⁰⁶ They look out just as they did from these same hallings in this same hall years past when Elfhild stayed here. Indeed, we easily recognize all that is about us from Morris' description of this house, as it is written in his chronicle of Osberne Wulfgrimsson, known as the Red Lad. Clearly our host is proud that his dwelling is of such fame, and so well known to us, who come from

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 220.

a land far away. He shows us to a handsome bower built off from the solar, and bids us make free of the hospitality of his house so long as we wish to stay. We thank him, but we are obliged to tell him that we must depart on the morrow, for we have yet a great distance before us and not enough time to permit tarrying along the way.

CHAPTER IV

On the morrow we break fast before sunrise, meanwhile planning which of two routes we shall take to Westcheaping, our next major goal. Morris informs us that we can follow the Flood up along the verdant, populated valley of its course into West Dale--and this is an easy, but a somewhat lengthy journey; or we can follow the Brookside water up into the highlands northwest of here, stay the night at the castle of Warding Knowe--a place of interest--and then continue along the valley rim of the highlands into Westcheaping. Now this last route is the quickest, though by no means the easiest way; and we decide in its favor, for our time is limited and we have long been inured to difficult travel.

We leave Brookside, well sped by Sir Walter and his kindly folk, just as the morning sun appears over the far eastern side of the valley of the Sundering Flood. Our way is a well marked path that follows the

crooked course of the little river up into the rough uplands beyond Brookside, which form the northern wall of the haven of Brookmeads. The bents are grass-grown for some distance, but by mid-morning we come into an uphill region strewn with great black rocks and nought but brush and scrub growth. And for the remainder of the day, until some two hours before sunset, our path winds upward through similar wild country. The little river, now a mere brook, oftentimes is broken by short falls and miniature rapids; whiles it cascades into deep pools; and whiles it nearly disappears in narrow gyhills cleft by the rushing water through solid, moss grown mounds of rock, whence comes the muted, hollow sound of the rill.

This country is much like that which is composed of the foothills of the Mountain Gorge range on the side nigh the Abbey and the unknown castle, and at first we find much of interest to occupy our attention; but, when at last we have come within sight of the tofts of Warding Knowe, we are all--both men and beasts--full wearied of this journey. It is with considerable pleasure that we view the strong white walls of that hold, their stark outlines softened as they are by the rose hues of sunset.

Warding Knowe rises from the summit of a steep knoll, held as it were by the fangs of the rocks and pikes of the higher land.¹⁰⁷ The

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Cf. ante p. 27.

stream we have been following flows swiftly past the bent, heading almost due east, and then bends sharply down southward along the path we are on.

We are made welcome by the castelan himself, a grim and grizzled ancient, hight Sir Alwyn, who had fought beside Sir Mark, the Blue Knight of Brookside, in the array of the league of the west-land barons who were allied against Baron Godrick of Longshaw in the wars whereof we have been told. But Sir Alwyn had been spared his holding for that he had survived the wars and always had dealt honorably with his foes. Now Sir Alwyn leads us into the great hall, which is beset with huge round pillars that bear aloft a wide vault of stone, and of stone are the tables--for there is no timber fit for building in these highlands; and the hallings that hang on the wall are terrible pictures of battle and death, and the fall of cities, and towers a-tumbling and houses a-flaming.¹⁰⁸

On the morrow we depart early from Warding Knowe, much refreshed and well supplied for the long journey ahead. The next day we come down into a flat countryside, well grassed, and watered by a river running due east into the Flood, which winds southward far off to our right. We stay the night in a little copse, and the following day we enter a wood which encloses us for all that day and the next. The third night we rest in a herdsman's hut, and on the morrow once again

¹⁰⁸ Morris, XXI, p. 196.

we enter the highlands. During all our journey since Warding Knowe these same highlands have been constantly on our left hand, not far from the plain and the wood. Now we climb into them, for we must cross them to reach Westcheaping, a two days' ride hence.

On the seventh day of our journey from Warding Knowe, when the fair morning is still young, we come to the end of the downs and see Westcheaping lying below us overlooked by a white castle on a knoll, and with a fair river lapping it about and winding on through its fair green meadows even as Morris had told. From amidst its houses rise up three towers of churches above their leaden roofs,¹⁰⁹ and the trees of many gardens are visible. The first mass is over and maids are gathered about the fountain when we come down into the market-place. The square is very great and clean, paved with stones all over; tall and fair houses rise up on three sides of it, and on the fourth is a great church that shines like dark gold under the sun, and the painted and gilded imagery shine like jewels upon it.¹¹⁰

Morris leads us across the square and up a wide and busy street toward the north side of town. He has told us that we shall seek out one Clement, a chapman with whom Morris struck up a firm friendship upon his first visit to this land.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., XVIII, 23.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

In a little while we come to a house upon the upper part of which painters and stainers are at work to make it as bright and goodly as may be with red and blue and green and gold, and all fair colors. The chapman's booth stands before this goodly dwelling, and--as we soon discover--it is full within of many wares. There are pieces of good and fine cloth plumed with the seal of the greatest of the cities, and silk of Babylon, and spices of the hot burning islands, and wonders of the silver-smith's and the goldsmith's fashioning, and fair wrought weapons and armor of the best, and everything that a rich chapman may deal in.¹¹¹ Indeed, we see here such wares as any one of us would give much to take back to England for cheaping; and this is so even though we be wool merchants and Morris a clerk.

Now, as we stand and look about us, out from the house comes goodman Clement himself and gives a loud cry of greeting upon seeing Morris standing with us. This chapman, by his bearing and apparel is surely a man of parts. He and Morris could be brothers, they are so alike in figure and presence; however, Clement wears a goodly long gown of grey welted with silver, of thin cloth meet for the summer tide,¹¹² and this contrasts somewhat sharply with the dusty drabness of Morris' apparel. We know--though Morris has cautioned us to say

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 215-16.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 9.

nothing of it--that Clement Chapman is merely the name this worthy man took upon himself many years ago, when he gave up his title to the inheritance due the son of a king--even though in reality he be but a kinglet of a little land. Yes, it is true that this man was christened the son of royal parents; for his true name is Blaise, prince and knight of Upmeads, whereof his father once was king and where now his brother Ralph doth rule. But these--and the wherfor of them--are matters known only to a few; and though Morris has told the story of such a man in one of his books, therein were two men, not one, and this was done upon the request of him who has taken the name of Clement. And now this goodman gives to us a hearty welcome and bids us enter his house. ¹¹³

If Clement's house is goodly without, within it is better; for there is a fine chamber panelled with wainscot well carven, and a cupboard of no sorry vessels of silver and latten. The chairs and stools are as fair as may be; no king's might be better. The windows are glazed, and there are flowers and knots and posies in them. Also, whereas the chapman's warebowers are hard by the chamber, there is a pleasant mingled smell therefrom floating about. The table is set with meat and drink and vessels of pewter and earth, all fair and good. ¹¹⁴

When we have eaten, Clement indicates that he would show us his

¹¹³ To avoid confusion of references I have combined the persons of Blaise and Clement in one. In Morris' story they are two distinct individuals.

¹¹⁴ Morris, XVIII, 10.

solar, insisting the while that we must spend the night therein. After some kindly argument we, perforce, agree to do as he asks. Therewith he leads us up a stair into the chamber above, which is all fairly dight and hung with rich arras of the Story of Hercules; and here too is a goodly cupboard of silver vessels, and some of gold, and the cupboard is of five shelves as is but meet for a king's son.¹¹⁵ The bed which Clement has given over to us is great and well carven and hung with goodly web from over-sea, such as the soldan useth.

In the evening we sit with Clement before the fire in the great chamber and listen to his talk with Morris for hours past the time of supper. These two are discussing the Great Mountains and those wonders which lie beyond that mighty wall. Some say the end of the world lies beyond; and there are many tales still current in this land of the magic well that is supposed to flow everlastingly there, at the world's end. Indeed, Morris himself has written down such a story; and it is in this book that he tells how Ralph, Blaise's brother and the present ruler of Upmeads, attained to that well with his lover, who is now his Queen, by his side.

While we listen, we watch goodman Clement; and watching him, it comes to us in a moment of wonder that this man, who looks no older than Morris, must have seemed no younger when our guide saw him last;

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 229.

for we have heard him speak familiarly of happenings which occurred before our fathers' time--speak of them as though he were a witness thereof! We wonder, but we say nothing. We do not dare; for there are many things beneath the sun whereof no man knoweth, and there are some whereof only a very few can tell. Perhaps we sit now in companionship with two such men as these last, Clement Chapman and William Morris. There is something strange and unwordly at times about both of them.¹¹⁶ But they are speaking of the Well at the World's End.

It seems that this well is very difficult to come upon, for one must first cross the great mountain wall, and those who succeed in this--and they are few--have yet more difficulties to surmount; so that he who reaches the well at last must be one who is most well-fated indeed, who is well thought on by the Great Ones--the First People--and who has the good wishes of all manner of wights and holy ones. And when we speak up bravely and say that we would like to go unto this magic place, to drink of this fountain of youth--should it really exist--Clement turns to us with a smile and says, "You may search, of course. Dreams are denied to no man. But it is good to remember that though the waters of the Well give one exceeding long life, yet he must die; for the Gods have

¹¹⁶ This paragraph and the one following are part fiction and part extracts from The Well at the World's End; it is simply a means of introducing the legend of the Well.

given death lest we weary of life."¹¹⁷ Moreover, we are told, only those who know themselves to be pure in heart have any chance of reaching the World's End, and of coming back therefrom renewed and refreshed. These are such of whom the world hath need.

After this we are silent; but it is in our hearts that we yet may try this venture ere our span is ended. Meanwhile we have the present one to finish; and now it is time for sleep. We must be on our way by dawn. It is yet some eight days' travel into the heart of the Great Mountains, for we shall go by way of Longryggs stead into the Flood-side lands of the West Dale, thence up along the bank of the Flood unto the mountains. Only there, just below its wells, may one cross that great river which is bridgeless, fordless, and ferryless for all its length above the Mountain Gorge. And this crossing in the Great Mountains is both difficult and perilous; nor is it known to any but a few, for not many have crossed it there and come back to tell of it. And this crossing is not many miles east of the pass by the Rock of the Fighting Man that leads unto the Well at the World's End.¹¹⁸

On the morrow we rise later than we should, take leave of goodman Clement, promising to return when we may, and--after crossing a fair bridge over the little river beyond the town--ride on the rest of the day

¹¹⁷ Italics mine; Morris, XIX, 65.

¹¹⁸ In fact, Morris denies that it is possible to cross the Flood anywhere above the Mountain Gorge. However, we have to do it somehow.

through country broken into downs, bents, and grassy knolls. We come, just before nightfall, to the outlying meads of Longryggs. Before us is a broad space of greensward and tilled land, and through it runs a pleasant little brook. On a grassy knoll, but a short way from the bank of this brook, beyond the tilled land, is a long framed house, somewhat narrow and nought high, and surrounded by a low garth wall that encloses the out-bowers, byres, and cots as well. We ride up and are made welcome by the folk, who have watched us drawing nigh for some while, and they bid us enter. Within we find a fair little hall, with shut-beds out from it on the further side, and kitchen and store-bowers at the end.¹¹⁹ Indeed, this is a type of dwelling that has remained unchanged in many lands for longer than any living man can tell.

On the morrow we strike off to the north once more, skirting Hartshaw knolls and the stead where Elfhild dwelt--for this place is no longer habited by ought but herdsmen seeking shelter from inclement weather--and by nightfall we are in Hartshaw Wood. Here we make camp; and here for the first time we feel a pinch of cold that is far removed even from the coolness of a desert night, for now are we nearing the land which lies at the feet of the Great Mountains. Indeed, when the sun has risen on the third morning of our journey from Westcheaping, and when we have passed out of the little wood, we glimpse before us what seem:

¹¹⁹ Morris, XVII, Child Christopher, 167.

to be clouds hovering high above a great, blue-shadowed wall on the horizon; and this we know to be the ramparts of that mighty range. We know also that those seeming clouds are snowclad peaks, and we feel a chill--even under this bright sun--in anticipation of the climate that awaits us.

For three more days we ride on toward the mountains, and they seem no nearer on the third than they did on the first; but on the fourth day, as we come to the brow of a long rocky ridge, we are at last face to face with the Great Mountains, seeing them as they look from comparatively near to hand. Now they look so huge that they seem to fill all the world save the ground whereon we stand. But clear as is their fashion, they are yet some way off; for betwixt them and the ridge whereon we stand stretches a wide plain, grey and sparsely grassed. Morris tells us that this plain, which seems like a huge river or firth of the sea, was indeed a flood once--a flood of molten rock in the old days when the earth was a-burning.¹²⁰ And we are told that behind one of those jutting nesses with the straight-walled burgs at their topmost is the Rock of the Fighting Man, the "very Gate of the Mountains," in Morris' words.¹²¹ However, our way does not lie in that direction. We are not seeking the fabled Well--not this time; rather are we in a hurry to start southward

¹²⁰ Cf. ante p. 19.

¹²¹ Ibid.

on our return journey. To do this we must bear somewhat to the east and enter the valley of the Flood where it commences as a deep gyhll in the forefoot of the Great Mountains. There we shall find a place where we can cross back into the east side of the land of the Sundering Flood.

On the next day, the eighth since we bade Clement Chapman farewell, along about an hour before sunset, we make our way around the easternmost corner of a huge ness, and there before us is a wide space opening into the Mountains. The broken plain is behind us, and for some time past we have been hearing a moaning sound, as of the wind amongst high places. But now the sound is much louder, and we know it is not the wind. There before us, in the center of the wide place, is a great chasm splitting it in twain. We cannot tell the depth of this chasm, but we know that it is the cradle of the Flood. The sound we heard is now like a roar of thunder, and a great spume mounts above the place as a cloud. The going up into this wide place is as by stairs, and also the going up from it to the higher pass, which leads straightway into the heart of the Mountains; and all around it the rocks are high and sheer, so that there is no way over them save for the fowls flying.¹²² And all down this great hall of the mountains, unroofed and unpillared, comes the roaring Flood from its wells in the highest part. Up there is there more than one spate which comes rushing down through the rocks into that deep gyhll

122 Cf. ante p. 35.

which is the cradle of the Flood--the upper part of the great valley which goes down, with lowering sides, all the way to the Desert Waste far below. The crossing place is up at the far end of the mountain hall, and there we camp for the night, with the sound of rushing waters loud in our hearing.

Early on the morrow, beneath a cold and cloudy sky, we begin the crossing. There are three separate forces of the Flood to be forded, one after the other. And here these forces run shallow over wide places of broken rock and tumbled down stones. They are shallow, but swift; for in a little space downward from us they come together into a narrow channel, running with terrible force, and then pour down over a high falls into that deep gyhll below. The fordings can be made here because the rocky beds are never more than two feet below the surface of the water, and because the swiftness of the current has kept the rocks and stones clean of moss. Yet these are most perilous and difficult fordings, and we approach them with great care, fear starting sweat upon our skins even in this cold place.¹²³ However, the Gods are with us, and it yet lacks nigh two hours of mid-day when we ride out safely upon the east bank of the Sundering Flood, high up in the mountain hall where it has its beginnings. Of course, the Flood's chiefest wells are further up in the heart of the mountains, but we have not time enough to explore

¹²³ The above was inspired by various passages in the first Icelandic Journal, Vol. VIII of The Collected Works.

that region.

On our way down the mountain hall toward the plain we ride close together so that we may hear one another's speech above the roaring of the falls and cataracts, and Morris tells us more of the legends concerning the Great Mountains.

It seems that once upon a time, many hundreds of years ago, long before that time when William the Norman came to our English shore and there defeated Child Harold and his folk upon Senlac field, this mountain hall extended right through the Great Mountains and came down upon the other side, appearing there much as it does here. It would have seemed then, to the eye of an eagle, somewhat like a sand-glass, or the body of a honey-bee, bent down from the middle on either side. And in the land beyond that far part of the hall lived a mighty people who controlled this passage from that side; and these were known as the Folk of the Mountain Door, or, more commonly, as the Folk of the Door. It is not known what happened to these folk in the last days of their waning from great power; but one winter--and it was the most terrible in the memory of men--some few years before King William's coming to England, the frozen rocks above the Mountain Door cracked and fell beneath the weight of snow and ice that roofed them, tumbling down into the narrowest part and filling it. And thus was the Door forever closed to man.

It was some years after this time, so the legend goes, that some

of Harold's champions who had escaped the conqueror found their way to the Land of the Sundering Flood, and penetrated to the heart of the Great Mountains, over there in the west above the town of Westcheaping. It was these men, we are told, who found the new pass and carved upon a mighty rock thereby the sign of the Fighting Man--the sign beneath which King Harold fought and died on Senlac field. What befell these champions no longer is known. Perhaps they crossed the mountain wall, and perhaps a few at length made their way to the Well at the World's End. If so, one or two may have lived close unto our time; but no one has heard tell of such.

Having finished his tale, Morris cautions us to remember that it is just a legend.¹²⁴ However, he has told it so well that we feel bound to suggest that he make it into a book; and indeed this idea seems to please him much, for he remains silent and thoughtful the rest of the day.

By nightfall we are once again in the broken plain that lies at the feet of the Great Mountains, and here--finding a place where there is a little pool in a hollow of the rocks, and hence a good space of grass--we make stay and sleep safe, but ill-lodged. On the morrow we shall proceed into the northernmost part of the East Dale.

¹²⁴ Indeed, it is; for I have used my own imagination to suggest the possibilities of that unfinished romance, The Folk of the Mountain Door.

CHAPTER V

It is six days from the time we crossed the Flood until, on a warm evening, we come up to the little cot of a herdsman that sits on a bight of land formed by the confluence of a westward running stream and the Flood itself. And this place is known as Burcot. Here we ask for a night's guesting and are bid welcome. On the morrow we rest late, for it is not many miles from Burcot to Wethermel, the home of Osberne Wulfgrimsson; and we do not wish to be overly wearied and worn from travel when we meet the famous Red Lad and his folk. We know Osberne is at home, for the worthy herdsman of Burcot has told us that not two days since a folk-mote of all those East Dalers who bear kinship to the House of Wulfgrim was held at Wethermel, and the chiefest of them was there to welcome all to the feasting and to give out his rede whenso it was sought.

We decide to ride a little way from the Flood, so as to come upon Wethermel from the high places behind it and betwixt the stead and East-cheaping town, which lies some fifty miles from the Flood. This way, Morris tells us, we will view the stead as it is looked upon by the Dalesmen returning from war or cheaping venture; and this view is thought to be the prettiest of all.

Now on a fair evening late in June, a little ere sunset, we come amongst the black rocks and rough places that crown the bent which looks down west over the Dale. And when at last we have won through this rocky tangle and have opened Wethermel, and nought lies before us but the grassy slopes and the wide-spread valley cleft by the line of the Sundering Flood; now, when we see in the clear air the grey houses of Wethermel lying together, and the smoke of the evening cooking fires going up to the heavens, and the sheep wending on, thick and huddling before the driving of tall men, and the kine moving toward the byre with the women amongst them, now we feel that at last we have completed the most difficult part of our journey.¹²⁵ There below is a home truly worthy of the name; there is an air of peace about the place--a serenity that comes only from the knowledge of strength and the plenty that strength gives to those who will but use it rightly.

The house--that is to say, the Roof belonging to the kindred of

125 Morris, XXI, 107.

Wulf, or the Wolf--stands on a slope leading down towards a bluff on the riverbank a mile away, and all betwixt the stead and the river is a space of tillage and of pasture for kine and horses and sheep; and half-way up the bent whereon our horses stand is more pasture and corn-land, while just below us and about us is a wood of bushes good for firewood and charcoal.¹²⁶ And as we sit, looking upon the goodly stead and dwelling below, Morris tells us in a low, halting voice, suited to the atmosphere of this time and place, that in the days when Wethermel was built all the men "of one branch of kindred dwelt under one roof together . . . nor were there many degrees amongst them . . . but all they of one blood were brethern and of equal dignity. Howbeit they had servants or thralls, men taken in battle, men of alien blood,"¹²⁷ and many of these were later freed and took the name of Wulf and married amongst the kinship; and some of them moved up or down the dale to build steads of their own. And in days not so long ago, when after many lifetimes, marriage, war, famine, disease, and age had so thinned out the kindred that only one true son's son of the sons of Wulf, hight Wulfgrim, was left, then was the House in danger of dying completely out. All men thought that Wethermel was unlucky, and few hirelings would dwell there. But, even though Wulfgrim and his wife died young, and there was left in the house

126 Ibid., p. 6.

127 Ibid., XIV, 5-6.

of older people only the father and mother of those twain, yet was there a little lad who had to name Osberne Wulfgrimsson.¹²⁸ And now is Wethermel once again a goodly seat and chief house of a growing kindred.

From where we sit we can see clearly that the house itself is a great hall and goodly, built of stone and turf well limed. It is long, and next to it on all sides except toward the river are there many bowers and cots round about the penfolds and byres; and there are booths for the storage of wares, and for crafts and smithying that are unhandy to do in the house;¹²⁹ and withal these are the dwelling places of the lower servants--there are no thralls at Wethermel now.

By now the folk down there have noticed us, and there is much quick movement amongst the buildings, as of men standing to arms and women-folk and children hurrying within doors; for they cannot know yet whether we be friends or foe, and in these upcountry places there is not the same security from rievers and roving bands of outlaws as there is below in the well-peopled regions about the city on the shore. It is time for us to ride down to them, making no show of force.

As we come up to the outlying byres and penfolds, some few well armed carles come forth from before the hall and stand awaiting us. And, as we draw even nearer, out from their midst steps a stalwart person in

¹²⁸ Ibid., XXI, 6. The geneological background of Wulfgrim has been imagined; but Morris' tale of the Wolfings affords ample material for such imagining.

¹²⁹ Ibid., XIV, 6.

glittering raiment, who can be none other than Osberne, the Red Lad himself. It must be he, for no other would stand thus or have this man's appearance; and now there is the beginning of a smile on his goodly face, as he seems to recognize our guide. He stands as tall as the tallest of his men, and some are great bodies indeed. He wears a grey hawberk of fine ring-mail, a scarlet coat underneath, embroidered; a gold ring is on his left arm; he is girt with a great sword, and bears a bow and quiver and a shield; and on his head he wears a beautifully fashioned basnet beneath which a thick fall of yellow hair as fine as silk comes down to his shoulders. His eyes are as grey as his hawberk, and his face is the handsomest we have seen amongst any people. ¹³⁰

We rein in our mounts and get down to go afoot up to Osberne and the folk. And now does Osberne truly smile, and he strides quickly forward to clasp Morris to his breast, all the while saying, "I knew you would return, I knew it . . ." Soon we are surrounded by friendly faces and hear ourselves being welcomed in diverse hearty tones, all kindly.

Within moments we are being escorted up to the hall porch and in through the door, while servants go about caring for our mounts and burdened beasts. The door by which we enter is not so high that a man might stand on the threshold and his helmcrest clear the lintle. Indeed, Osberne must bend his head to pass through. And this door is in one

¹³⁰ Ibid., XXI, 25. I have given Osberne Steelhead's appearance for the simple reason that nowhere does Morris fully describe his hero.

end of the hall beneath the gable. The hall itself is long and great: two rows of pillars go down it endlong, windows there are above the aisles thus made, and in the aisles are the sleeping places of the folk, and down the middle under the roof are three hearths for the fires, and above each hearth is a luffer or smoke-bearer to draw the smoke up when the fires are lighted. At the far end of the hall is the dais, and a table thereon sits thwartwise of the hall; and in front of the dais is the noblest and greatest of the hearths, and round about the dais, along the gable walls and hung from pillar to pillar are woven cloths pictured with images of ancient tales and the deeds of the kindred of Wulf,¹³¹ and amongst these are some newer than the rest that picture deeds and images we recognize from Morris' tale of Osberne, the Red Lad.

Now comes forth from a door beyond the dais Osberne's wife Elf-hild, and some of her womenfolk. She is clad in a gown of fine green stuff embroidered with roses and lilies, and her hair is knit up as a crown about her beauteous head, which sits upon her shoulders as the swan upon the billow. Her hair has darkened since the days of her youth, and now is brown mingled with gold, as though the sun were in it; somewhat low it comes down upon her forehead, which is broad and white. Her eyes are blue-grey and lustrous, her cheeks a little hollow, but the jaw is truly wrought, and fine and clear, and her chin is firm and lovely

¹³¹ Ibid., XIV, 6.

carven; her lips are not very full, but red and lovely; her nose is straight and fine; and her color is clear and sweet, but not blent with much red.¹³² Indeed, both she and her famous husband are as young seeming as though neither had seen more than half their forty winters.

When we have washed and changed our raiment, we sit down to feasting; and long does this last, far into the night. We sit upon the dais with Osberne and his lady, deep in talk. At the beginning of the meal we were joined by the oldest surviving son of the house, a bright and beautiful lad of eleven summers, as bold and tall as his father must have been at his age. But now we are none but elders at the high table.

Earlier we had asked to be shown Boardcleaver, Osberne's famous sword, and we had examined it with awe. The pommel and cross were of gold, wonderfully fashioned; the grip was wrapped about with golden wire; the sheath wherein lay the deadly white edges was of brown oxhide leather, studded about with knops of gold and silver; and the peace-strings were of scarlet silk with golden acorns at the ends.¹³³ Now one of us brings up the subject of warfare, hoping to discover how the Red Lad feels at this time about such matters. We know, of course, that much as he prefers peace to fighting, nevertheless he has had to ride out with his Dalesmen more than once since those great wars in which he won

¹³² Ibid., XXI, 112.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 50-1.

such lasting fame. In our questioning we cannot help employing this word "fame," and it seems to be the key, for suddenly Osberne breaks in with a laugh, saying, "Ah, yes, some deal I know that fame. I have thought on it much during the years." And we sit expectant, while our host smiles down at the table for a silent moment. Now he speaks again: "I know fame. Ah yes, once before I said it; and then you were there, friend William, you and Sir Godrick. How did it go? Somewhat like this":

when we draw together before the foemen, and our men cry out, The Red Lad! The Red Lad! in no faltering voice, and even therewith the foemen's ranks quaver, as the trees of the wood when the wind comes up from the ground amongst them; and then I ride forward with Boardcleaver in my fist, and the arrows fly away about me for fear, and the array opens before me, and we plunge in and find nought there, and the rout goes down the green meadows. Yea, so it is, and many deem it fair. But then comes the quiet of the night, and my comrades are as though they were dead, and my praisers are voiceless, and I am alone; and then meseems it is I that have been overthrown and thwarted . . . Nay, let me go back to my folk, and the land that I know and that endures before me when others have faded out. There will I abide whatso may come to me. . . . 134

"So I spoke then; but when I am here, in the Dale by the Flood, yet am I not free from the calls of friends in need, of those hard beset who would have me succor them. And I must go; but no longer in search of fame . . . no longer."

134 Ibid., pp. 184-5. This passage was included because it seems to express more succinctly than any other passage in this or any other of his romances Morris' romantic conception of the heroic temperament and, particularly, of battle. More will be said about this in the concluding chapter.

All are silent when Osberne finishes, and we sit still remembering how he is made to say much the same thing in Morris' book, and we ponder the meanings thereof, and wonder.

On the morrow we rise late, but much refreshed, and after breakfast we hold conference with our host. Now we learn that he may not accompany us back down to a meeting with the Baron of Longshaw, for within the month he must attend a special mote of the folk of both dales to be held down at the cloven motestead by the Allhallows churches. But he will go as soon as he may, following the course of the Flood down to the edge of the Wood Masterless, where there is a town well known to the folk of all this land of the Sundering Flood. Hard by this town is there a ruined castle on the shore, and there, if we and Baron Godrick consent--Osberne will meet us. Perhaps he will even be the first to arrive; for his way is far quicker than the one we shall take. Meanwhile, he urges us to stay as long as possible at Wethermel, whereas there is much he would like us to see. But we say that we must leave within the next day or two, for our time is running short. "Then," says Osberne, "stay at least until you have seen the motestead and our church of Allhallows." And we agree to do this much, if we can go straightway from the motestead on to Eastcheaping, not returning to Wethermel. So the next morning we rise early and pack all our gear, readying ourselves with sorrow to depart this goodly place for the first and perhaps the last time.

The motestead is some seven miles downriver from Wethermel and we are there while the morning is still young and fair. This is a wide grassy place, going flat right up to the lip of the Flood, where it drops sharply into the deep, swirling waters. Here the bank is a sheer rock cliff, which is fashioned into staves--as it were organ-pipes--all along the water;¹³⁵ and it is the same on both sides. But here also the Flood is narrowly compassed by having cut its way through this rocky ground, and the folk of the two dales can speak with one another above the sound of rushing water, if they stand close upon its sundered lips. In the center of each stead is a grass-grown mound whereon the chiefest leaders of the folk may sit, and round about these mounds are great rocks for the seating of others.

The church of Allhallows on our side, as on the other, is most handsomely builded and all of stone; and it sits within a walled court surrounded by gardens and orchard trees. We enter the church through a round-arched door, which is very richly carven; and there is a sculpture over the doorway and under the arch, which figures St. Michael and the Dragon. The nave is not very large, but it is as well built and handsome as one would expect from the exterior. The roof is of curved wooden rafters with great tie-beams going from wall to wall. The windows are not over big and are glazed with white fretwork, with here and there a

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

little figure in very deep rich colors. Two larger windows near the east end of each aisle are cut so that the church grows lighter toward the east, and thus can we see all the work on the great rood screen between the nave and the chancel. Now all this work glitters bright in paint and gilding newly done, for that the special mote will be held soon. A candle glimmers in the loft above the screen, before the huge rood which fills up the whole space between the loft and the chancel arch. There is an altar at the east end of each aisle: the one on the south side stands against the outside wall; the one on the north stands against a traceried and gaily painted screen, for that aisle runs on along the chancel. There are a few well-carven and moulded oak benches near this second altar; otherwise, the floor of the nave--which is paved with glazed tiles, is quite empty, and the shafts of the arches rise out of it all white and beautiful, as though out of a dark sea. ¹³⁶

We leave this fine little church with the feeling that it is a perfect demonstration of the sort of thing which makes a people united and great. Here, exemplified, is the pride of these dalesmen and the willingness of all the folk to contribute their time and wealth and skill to a cause that can only bring them closer to one another. And somehow we feel this hallowed spot--hallowed both to the gentle Christ and to an older, sometime stronger, pagan creed of blood brotherhood--to be a most fitting

¹³⁶ Ibid., XVI, John Ball, 262.

place for us to part company with our friends of Wethermel and the Dales. We do so unhappily, but with the hope that soon we shall meet them again.

Behind Allhallows Church East, and running along beyond its southern wall, is a goodly little river that is a tributary of the Flood. We will follow this river along its northern bank to Eastcheaping. And a little past mid-day, having partaken of meat and drink brought by Osberne and his fellows, we take leave of these friends and start upon our further journey. They have ridden with us some two miles along the road, but now they must turn off to the north, for that way lies Wethermel. With the sound of their farewells still in our ears, we jog our mounts into a trot and soon are beyond sight of them.

Along toward sunset we come around a bend in the river and see before us wide grassy meadows and tilled fields; and amidst the meadows, on a green mound overlooking the river, is a white castle, strong and well built, though not of the biggest. And this is Bullmeads, the hold of one Hugh, second son of that Sir Medard who was Burgreve of Eastcheaping in Osberne's youth. In a little while we come up to the gate, which is not yet closed, and pass through into the court, where we are met by sundry men-at-arms. One of these goes off at our bidding to inquire of Sir Hugh if we may have guesting for the night. And presently out comes the steward, who bids us enter the hall. Within we see that this is indeed a goodly house, as Osberne had told; already is the hall

well dight with bankers of goodly figured cloth, and on the walls is a goodly halling of arras of the Story of Alexander.¹³⁷ The steward bids us follow him up to the solar, where Sir Hugh and his lady await our coming.

On the way Morris reminds us that this castle once was a minor hold of a great lady, who--some say--was gifted with certain powers not ordinarily found in mankind, and who by request of the folk ruled much of the land hereabout in days gone past. For this reason, he adds, we must not be surprised at the goodliness of its building and adornments. And in a few moments we enter a room where we are greeted by Sir Hugh--a portly, ruddy man, past middle age, with a kindly face--and his lady, who is a meet partner of her husband in appearance.

This chamber is such that we might indeed have been greatly surprised had we not been warned by our guide. Its roof is all done with gold and blue from over-sea, and its pavement wrought delicately in Alexandrine work. On the dais is a throne of carven ivory, and above it hangs a canopy of baudekin of the goodliest fashion, and there is a foot-carpet before it, wrought with beasts and the hunting of the deer. As for the walls of this chamber, they are hung with a marvelous halling of arras, wherein is wrought the greensward and sundry peaceful scenes thereon.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid., XVIII, 99.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

After a goodly supper, spiced with much interesting conversation relating to the days of Osberne's youth and the war that Eastcheaping had with the Baron of Deepdale, we are shown our bed and so go to sleep in peace and comfort. On the morrow we rise early, break fast with Sir Hugh, and find ourselves well upon the road to Eastcheaping ere the sun has risen far above the horizon before us. At mid-day we pass by a stone watch-tower builded on a little knoll amidst a wheatfield, and below it some simple houses thatched with straw.¹³⁹ And here we stop to partake of the meat and drink supplied to us this morning by Sir Hugh's good wife.

When we are refreshed and our horses well breathed, we ride on, passing through goodly acres and wide meadows, with here and there a homestead on them, and here and there a carle's cot. Then we come to where there is a thorpe of the smallest on rising ground, from the further end of which we can see the walls and towers of Eastcheaping. Thereafter right up to the walls are no more houses or cornfields, nought but reaches of green meadows on both sides of the river plenteously stored with sheep and kine.¹⁴⁰

When we come up to the wall we see that it is well builded of good ashlar, and so high that we may not see the roofs of the town because of it--

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

nought but the top of a tower or spire here and there; but on the wall there are many tall towers, strong and white. The road leads straight up to the east gate of the burg, and before it there is a strong bailey. We come up to the very gate, on the far side of a bridged moat that is both deep and clean;¹⁴¹ and this moat is filled with water from the river that is let in on the far side of the town and let out on this side, off to our right where the moat meets the rivercourse. Now when Morris was here before, there was nought on the other side of the river but the great abbey and a scattered thorpe; but Osberne and Sir Hugh both have cautioned him lest he be surprised at some changes which have occurred in recent years. However, from where we are we cannot see beyond the great walls before us.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 63.

CHAPTER VI

When we pass through the gate into the streets of the town, it is easy to see how Osberne could have been amazed at the sights about us, when first he came to this place; for to one so fresh from the outlands it would be "a great wonder," as Morris wrote it in his book, "to see so many houses built of stone and lime all standing together, and so fair, as he deemed them . . ." ¹⁴² There is a clear space between the houses and the inside of the wall, and seemingly this space goes all around the town; also there are wide ways leading from each ort out of the central square. Indeed, the plan of this town is much the same as that of the east part of the great city on the sea, though of course Eastcheaping is much smaller.

¹⁴² Ibid., XXI, 73.

We do not intend to stay the night in the town, but rather to ask for guesting at the abbey on the other shore of the river; so we make our way through the streets toward the river gate and the bridge leading therefrom across the water. It is when we come to the gate and ride beneath its arches, that we first notice a great change in this town from the way Morris described it. This bridge is the same one that was here before, but then it was a bridge like many others, though more beautiful than most. Now, however, crossing upon it is like riding through a hall exceeding long, with many passages and doorways leading out from it beneath arches on either side, which are the entrances of shops and booths; and now and then beneath an arch we can see glazen windows set in the upriver wall. All the work of building and adornment that has made this change was recently done, and Morris is truly amazed.

When we come out upon the far shore, we find ourselves in the midst of a part of the town lesser by no great deal than that part across the river. No longer is this a scattered and dependent thorp, for here there are just such narrow, shop-lined streets, dwellings, and outlying steads as one might expect to find in any thriving cheaping-town. But here there are no walls, as in the old town. The great abbey lies off to our right on the shore beyond the outskirts of this new built part of the town, and we hurry along in that direction so that we may find a place on the river whence we can look back at the bridge.

Soon we find such a place, where the road comes right down to the

lip of the water hard by some few small-boat landing places, and here we stop and turn about. At this point the river is about as wide as the Thames is somewhat above London town. The bridge is of stone arches, splendidly solid looking, and as graceful as they are strong; high enough also to let ordinary river traffic through easily--and there is some deal of barge traffic on this part of the water. Over the parapet show the buildings we know to be booths or shops, all beset with painted and gilded spirelets;¹⁴³ and these are supported by beams set slantwise beneath them, going from floor to bridge-side, where they are set into the stone. All in all, it is a most interesting structure. Morris keeps saying that it resembles--nay surpasses--the Ponte Vecchio at Florence, which was not yet as complete as this when last we were there, though that has been some few years now. To us, however, it seems more like London Bridge, though 'tis not so long nor so high as that. But now it is becoming late afternoon, and we must be on to the abbey of monks where we hope to stay the night.

This abbey is both fair and great, and the church thereof as well fashioned as most. Within are great pillars and arches and a central vault above, and the pictures on the walls and in the windows are well and pleasingly made, and so are the hangings and other braveries about the altars.¹⁴⁴ We are well gusted this night, and on the morrow we set

¹⁴³ Ibid., XVI, News from Nowhere, 81.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., XXI, 73.

out early for Deepham, a distance of some fifty miles due east of East-cheaping town. It will take us the better part of two days to cover this distance, for the way is not always easy.

There is a good highway for the first part of the journey, but toward the middle of the day we ride out upon a causeway that crosses a marish place of considerable extent, which is much beset with willow and alder, and is an evil place for the going of heavily laden horses.¹⁴⁵ However, the causeway is craftily made, and we are well past the place before night comes upon us. We camp in a little close where there is a good spring, and set out once again early on the morrow.

It yet lacks two hours of sunset when we ride into the tilled lands and pastures of Deepdale. There are sundry thorpes, steads, and cots scattered about within view, and some distance before us rise the walls and towers of Deepham. There is a goodly river winding about the place, which is called the Weltering Water by some and by others Deepham River, and behind the thorp^e rises a high, rocky bent whereon is the castle of the Baron of Deepdale. Many, many years ago, Morris tells us, the first people who dwelt in this place widened and deepened the water about them and bridged it over to the plain meads beyond; and athwart the throat of the space left clear between the water and the bent they built them a strong wall, though not very high, with a gate amidst and a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

tower on either side thereof. Moreover, on the steep side of the bent, which was but a stone's throw from the gate, they made them stairs and ladders to go up by; and on a knoll nigh the brow they built a watch tower of stone strong and great, lest war should come into the land over the hills. ¹⁴⁶

Now these old fortifications are still visible, but they have been considerably strengthened and sometimes extended a good space beyond the original line; and yet, Deepham is no great place even now--it is nought like Eastcheaping, which is fast becoming a great city, though this is a richer land than the East Dale. When we have passed through the gate, and ridden some way into the place, we can see that many of the houses are very ancient indeed; and these lie amidst of gardens and orchards but little ordered into streets and lanes, save that our way goes clean through everything from the tower-warded gate to the bridge over the water, which is warded by two other towers on its hither side. And there are two reasons why these ancient dwellings yet stand undamaged, and looking much as they did when first they were built. One reason is that all are built of stone and lime, with much fair and curious carven work that the weather could do little harm to; the other reason is that the folk of this burg have always been mighty as men and closely allied one house to another. And even now this is true. Indeed, the Baron of Deepdale

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., XV, 3.

is a son of the chiefest house of that ancient kindred.

Morris, who has been inside some of these handsome old dwellings, tells us that within they have a hall and a solar, with shut-beds out from the hall on one side or two, like unto the house at Wethermel, and with whatso of kitchen and buttery and out-bowers their builders deemed handy.¹⁴⁷ However, we do not have a chance to see these things for ourselves, for there is no one living here now of whom Morris may freely ask guesting; so we spend the night in a little hostel down by the riverside. When we ask our guide why we did not go up to the great castle that has been built about the old watch-tower on the brow of the bent, he informs us of the bad blood which has existed for generations between the folk of Deepdale and the folk of Eastcheaping, who are allied with our friends of the East Dale. Nor is Morris acquainted with the present Baron of Deepdale, though he has heard of him, and that nothing to his good.

On the morrow we leave Deepham by the bridge across the river and start southward once again. For the next two days we travel through a well-peopled country of plains that are broken now and then by downlands, and once we ford a little river. Late on the second day we come into a thick wood, and this is more than a two days' ride. Then, late on the fifth day of our journey from Deepham, after riding over some bents

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

that are yet in that wood, we come down upon a river of considerable width and force, running due west; and beyond this fair water, through sparse growth, we can see a wide valley floored with grasslands. And on that side of the river is a goodly stead that we know to be called Riverlease. This stead is alone in our view, for the valley is more suited for pasture than tillage, so that it is not thickly housed. Albeit, when we have crossed the river by a ford and have come up to the stead, we see that it is big and of many houses much peopled; and as it is evening, the folk, who have seen our riding, are standing outside these houses awaiting us, some with weapons.¹⁴⁸ And, according to Morris' book, this is just as it was on that day when Osberne and Sir Godrick came riding to Riverlease.

We are made full welcome in the great hall of the kindred, partly because these are kindly folk and partly because we are strangers who have travelled far and more than likely have news of interest to those who dwell in this out-of-the-way place. As to the hall itself, it is great and goodly and of a size with Wethermel; but it is not built of stone and turf. Instead, it is framed of the goodliest trees of the wildwood squared with the adze, and betwixt the framing filled with clay wattle with reeds.¹⁴⁹ And it is nigh an hundred feet long from gable to gable.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., XXI, 150.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., XIV, 5.

We sit at the high table in the great house of Riverlease feasting and talking late into the night; and on the morrow we may not take our leave of the goodman and his folk until the middle of the morning has gone by. But for the next four days our way lies through much fair country, and it is an easy journey for man and beast. On the second day we cross a river wider than the Thames at Abingdon, going over by a ferry from one small thorpe to another. And at even-tide of the fourth day, after riding over some downs, we come into an upland of high bents and grassy knolls; and there before us is the town of Cheaping Knowe, which Morris shows on his map, but does not name, for that he knew it not until now. We come to the gate a little before sunset, and nigh to the walls the land is bare of trees and thickets. The walls are strong and tall, and a castle stands high up on a hill, about which the town is builded.¹⁵⁰ But Cheaping Knowe is no great place, and rather poor; for it does not lie near a navigable water, and the country beyond is mountainous and bare, until one reaches a grassy valley that lies at the feet of the Mountain Gorge range.

We stay the night in Cheaping Knowe, and on the morrow strike out for the mountains. The next day we ride into that valley whereof we have heard, and at about mid-day we pass the Castle of the Fish, rising whitely from a grassy knoll in the near distance. But we have no wish to

150 Ibid., XVIII, 248.

stay there, for our way lies westward of it, through a pass in the mountains. We ride through this pass some twenty-four hours later, and by nightfall we have crossed a little river in a deep valley--and this is the upper part of that stream which passes Woodneb Castle, a day's ride southward--and then we come up to the outlying houses of that unfenced town which Sir Godrick and Osberne once saved from the Black Skinners. Here we are made full welcome by the folk, when they have learned that we are friends of both their benefactors. And on the morrow, having sent a messenger to Longshaw with a request that Sir Godrick meet us at the place decided upon, we strike off more to the west than heretofore, through a wide sloping grassland that goes all the way down from this high-up valley to the lip of the Sundering Flood.

CHAPTER VII

On the third day after leaving that mountain valley we come at last to the bank of the Flood; and now we are once more standing by the Woodneb Water, for at this point the two meet, and the little river is absorbed by the wide Flood. This is the farthest point upstream from the City on the shore to which seagoing vessels can make their way. But right now there is no traffic on these broad waters, and, though we wait till nightfall, nothing appears; so, against Morris' will, but for our own sakes and the good of our beasts, we turn about and ride the few miles north to the House of Friars. There we are kindly received and given a chamber in the guest house. The brother who guides us there informs us that a river-ship is expected to arrive on the morrow at the landing place where we were until this evening. It will not return downriver, however, until all its burden of merchandise has been unladen and the

friars have stowed aboard the wine, wool, and corn they wish to ship to the cheaping towns below, and this may require another full day. Well, we have made good time since leaving Wethermel and the motestead, so perhaps we should not try to hurry now. In any case, we have but the one choice, which is either to wait for the boat, or to go by road along the shore. This last we do not wish to do, for that our beasts are so worn from the hard, fast travelling we have done over the past two months. So we decide to wait.

Finally, on a bright sunny morning having as yet heard nothing from Osberne, we clamber aboard a deeply laden, two-masted river craft, considerably larger than the barge that carried us upriver from the City on that spring day which seems so long ago. And in a few minutes we have cast off upon the next to last leg of our journey. Three days later, on a fine evening we disembark at a tiny landing on the eastern bank of the Flood. We sold our horses to the Friars, since they were extremely way-weary and we would have no need of them on the river--our main road for the rest of the way; thus we must needs walk to the town where we are to stay until Osberne and Sir Godrick arrive. This is a town which for some time now we have realized must be of considerable importance in the history of this land. Why else has Morris said so little about it, when we know that he has been there? We think on this while we walk.

Our road is straight, white, and dusty, and it goes up before us

over a low bent well grassed and grown with flowers. The evening is cool and pleasant after the heat of day; nor do we object to stretching our legs after three cramped days aboard that river craft.

It seems as though only a few minutes have passed, when suddenly we top the gentle rise and see before us the grey and ancient walls of the town, its roofs and towers and spires standing up within.¹⁵¹ Now on either side the road, and just beyond the ditch which runs along it, is a small close of about a quarter of an acre. It is neatly hedged with quick and nearly full of white poppies, and, as far as we can see for the hedge, there are also a good few rose bushes. These last are of the bright red, nearly single variety from which rose water is distilled. Elsewhere the land about the town seems quite unhedged, though it is all under tillage of various kinds, mostly sown in the small strips characteristic of English farming and the farming of this land. A tall, white, and seemingly new spire rises from the other side of a copse not far off.¹⁵² In all, the garden-like trimness of everything about us is just what we had expected after travelling throughout this land of the Sundering Flood. There seems to be no waste or ugliness in any place where there is a settled way of life.

Not more than an hour has passed since we began our walk, when

¹⁵¹ Ibid., XVI, A Dream of John Ball, 215-16.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 217.

we enter the town. The streets are wide and almost all the houses are built of oak framework filled with cob or plaster, and all are well white-washed. A few houses have their lower stories built of rubble stone, but their windows and doors are of well-moulded free stone. There is a good deal of imaginative carving about most of them, and every house seems to be roofed with the same kind of oak shingles, most of which have weathered to a greyness like stone. But one house is so newly built that its shingles are yet pale and yellow. This one is a corner house and its corner post contains a carved niche wherein sits a gaily painted figure of St. Clement; so we know that this is the dwelling of a blacksmith.¹⁵³

Passing the church, whose spire we saw from the road, we notice that it is large of its kind, and that its chancel is so new that stone dust still lies white on the mid-summer grass beneath the carvings of the windows. About twenty paces from the east end of the churchyard wall stands a tall cross of stone, as new as the chancel. The head of the cross is beautifully carved with a crucifix amidst leafage; its base rests on a set of wide stone steps, octagonally shaped; and the whole structure rises above the center of a wide open space formed by the meeting of three roads from other villages.¹⁵⁴

We walk on now to the Sign of the Rose, the tavern where we shall

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

refresh ourselves and spend the night. And now Morris tells us, with the smile of one who has kept a secret well, that this is the place where he met some of the men who took part in the preliminary uprising that led to the overthrow of the king of the great city--an uprising of which he witnessed the beginning. He promises to tell us more of these incidents when we are comfortably at table inside the tavern.

When we have washed some of the dust of travel from our persons at the trough in the tavern yard, we enter the big room eager for drink and meat, and even more eager to hear our companion's tale. The interior is furnished in much the same fashion as are similar rooms at home and all over northern Europe; and yet, there is something about this particular place which hints of the past, of a time when important things were said and done within these walls.

Along one side of the main room there is a carved sideboard upon which is arrayed an assortment of bright pewter pots and dishes and wooden and earthen bowls. Up and down the length of the room goes a stout oak table, and a carved oak chair stands in the chimney corner. These, except for the rough stools and benches on which the company may sit, are all the furniture. The walls are panelled with oak boards to about six feet above the floor, and above that some three feet of plastered space wrought in the pattern of a rose stem stretches all around the room. And there is a huge plaster rose, brightly painted in its proper colors, on the hood of the great chimney. ¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 220-21.

We seat ourselves and a young girl comes to wait on us. She is a handsome, well-rounded lass, who smiles prettily at us as she takes our order. Her long dark hair hangs down her back unbound, there is a rose wreath about her head, and she wears a close-fitting gown of bright blue cloth gathered about her loins by a broad, daintily wrought silver girdle. Morris asks for native mead, telling us that it is as good as, or better than, any English brew--even the Kentish.¹⁵⁶ And so it is.

While we slake our thirst and wait for more company to arrive so that we may sup, Morris tells us somewhat of the events which led to the revolt of the people of this township against the lords set over them by the king of the City. These events took place in the early spring of that year in which Morris first set foot upon the Land of the Sundering Flood. He had come into the village at about the same time of day as had we-- though it was a day in April then, not in August--and he had found a gathering of folk in the wide place about the cross. The men were all armed in some fashion. Most were bowmen, who carried short swords as well; and some carried bucklers too. Part of the growing company had defensive armor, such as steel caps and body armor like the English "jack," or coat into which pieces of horn or iron have been quilted; and a few had steel or steel-and-leather arm or thigh pieces. There were some well armed mounted men amongst them too, and all were listening

156 Ibid.

to a tall, brown-garbed friar who spoke to them from the steps of the cross. 157

Morris goes on to tell us how, before the evening was well advanced, that small gathering had become a small army, an army which some hours later was to defeat the forces of certain knights and barons who had come to disperse the rabble. Thus, here in this very township, had the revolt of the peasants begun. He promises to show us the field of battle on the morrow, for it lies beside the road we must take to reach the castle on the shore not far distant.

Morris concludes his tale with a remark that strikes us into silent thoughtfulness. He says he feels certain that some day soon the freemen and serfs of our own land will ally themselves and rise up to demand personal liberties such as those earned by the folk of this happy place. "But," he adds, "I do not believe they will succeed unless they have such leadership as was afforded these folk by the Baron of Longshaw and Osberne the Red; and even then they must have the people of the cities with them body and soul." We think about this, but we make no comment; for we, to whom travel is a part of existence, have spent little time on thoughts of the plight of some of our countrymen. And now we feel that it is wiser to change the subject than to begin a discussion of matters to which we have given so little thought; thus we call for more drink. Morris is

157 Ibid., pp. 219, 226-27.

nothing loath to follow our lead, and he calls attention to the earthen pots in which the delicious mead of the country is served. They are glazed green and yellow, and some of them have quaint devices worked onto the surface. ¹⁵⁸

After we have drunk deep of our second serving, our little group remains silent for a moment; and then, just as Morris is about to speak again, in through the door come tramping a file of tall, stout, rough-looking yet open-faced young men, carrying bows in cases of linen all yellowed with wax or oil. They have quivers at their backs, and obviously they have just come from the practice butts outside the town. Laughing and joking, they join us at table and call loudly for mead and ale. Most are dressed gaily in red or brightish green or blue cloth jerkins, with hoods on their heads--or thrown back--which are generally of a different color. Their arms and buckles, their belts and the finishings and hems of their garments are all well and most handsomely made. In short, they very closely resemble our own English yeomen in appearance. Some are black-headed, some are red; but most have hair burnt by the sun to the color of tow;¹⁵⁹ but it is noticeable that all have the same frank and joyous look as did the people of the City when we were there, and as did nigh everyone else we have seen in this land. Indeed, as we have

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 219.

noticed, such folk as these seem even more free of care--if that be possible; for they are not people of business, but countrymen whose lives are measured by the seasons. And yet, Morris whispers to us, these are the younger brothers or the sons of those who fought in the revolt of which he has told; nor is this land always one of peace, as we have come to think. For the first time Morris tells us that the Wood Masterless, for example, yet harbors outlaws--masterless men--in that part without the sway of Longshaw, and it lies but a mile or two away behind the town. And now and again the barons of the land on both sides of the Flood seek to exert influence over one another, calling to their services adventuresome young men of high mettle. But we feel that this is as it should be, and it does not appear from his expression that Morris would seriously disagree with us. Indeed, we have learned much already of his own strong character, quick temper, and generous spirit. And the most eloquent passages in those books of his that we have read are concerned with warfare and heroism, with questing adventurers and high minded young lovers. And indeed such are those friends of his whom we have met in this land.

In less time than it takes to tell, after the arrival of the company, we are served the evening meal of salt pork and rye bread and both mead and ale. We eat from oaken trenchers and drink, this time, from great pewter tankards.¹⁶⁰ It is as wholesome and satisfying a country supper

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

as we have ever had. While at table, we engage but little in conversation with the rest of the company. Beyond a random expression of polite interest in our business and the length of our stay these young men make no demands upon us for entertainment. Their own thought and easy bantering seem enough to occupy their attention, when it can be diverted from the offerings of the well laden table.

None of these fellows appears known to Morris, nor he to any of them; and soon we take our leave, well sped by a hearty good-night wish from two or three, and seek the out-bower in the yard which will be our resting place.

We sleep in peace and are aroused at dawn by the tavern maid, who calls us in to a break-fast of ham, fresh bread, and ale. The maid's father and brothers offer to guide us to the places of interest hereabout, but when Morris tells them he knows his way, they let us go without further suggestions.

We have not gone far along our road, which appears a continuation of the one that brought us into the town last night, when Morris stops and points off to our left. When we come up with him, for he has been striding ahead, he informs us that the battlefield of the revolt lies out there between the road and the river, and he proposes that we take the time to observe the actual site from close at hand. We are entirely willing; so Morris leads the way across the roadside ditch and out upon a little grassy mead that separates the road from a close not far distant.

oft enough have proved their worth on hard fought fields of war, both at home and over sea.

However, we have already spent the coolest hour of day and we have much yet to see; so it is turn about and back to the road at a fast walk. As we go on down the road together, we question Morris further concerning the uprising; how it began and who were the leaders. He tells us that Osberne and the Baron were not here when the folk of the township fought the king's men, but that some few men-at-arms who had been in the pay of the knight to whose castle we are now going had defected to the side of the people, whereas many of them came from the countryside hereabout. The principal leader chosen by all the folk was one William of the Green; and this Will Green, as he is better known, had once been the sergeant over those men from the castle. For reasons known only to himself he had left his master's board a year or so before this time, and had returned to his own house to work the few acres which the men of his name had held freely and unbound to any lord for longer than could be remembered. And that knight, who valued Will Green highly for his might and bravery in battle and for his ability as a leader of men, was greatly angered at losing him; so within a few days of his departure that overbearing lord had sent a force unto Will Green's stead with word that he must come forthwith to swear fealty to him who now proclaimed himself Will Green's overlord, or suffer imprisonment and the forfeiture of all his possessions. But it so happened that the leader of the little force sent against him

valued Will Green's friendship more than the bond of service, freely taken, which held him in that knight's employ. Thus it came about that Will Green and all the men-at-arms who came to take him went together that day into the Wood Masterless and lived as outlaws until the day when they came forth to do battle in the forefront of the township's array against their well-hated erstwhile master.

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Now we ask Morris what has become of this William of the Green, for we are greatly interested in him; and he tells us, with another of those sly smiles, that in a few minutes we will be standing at the door of that very house which Will Green refused to acknowledge as anyone's property but his own; in fact, we are passing through the outlying acres of his stead even now. It seems that last evening, when we had gone out to the trough in the tavern yard and Morris had waited inside for a moment before joining us, he had been asking our host concerning yeoman Green's welfare and whereabouts. Morris had learned then that the old veteran--for such he is now, being of an age with Sir Godrick--was in the Wood hunting, but that he would be home by morning. Morris had said nothing to us at the time, for he dearly loves to surprise his friends with fascinating bits of information withheld until the last moment, when their revelation can be coincided with observance of the actual places involved

162 Needless to say, this chapter is full of original fiction; but the premises and many of the facts upon which Will Green's story is based are to be found scattered throughout Morris' romances.

and a meeting with the heroes of his tales, when possible. Nor do we object, for he has never failed to make every aspect of this venture truly fascinating.

Now we are turning down a lane to our right that goes between thick hedges of yew, and on either side the hedges are closes, with tillage and pastures beyond. And before us is the house, a goodly one indeed, built half of stone from the cleared fields and half of framed timber wattled with clay, and all well whitewashed. The roof is of thatch and the eaves come well down over the second story. Seeing our approach, Will Green steps through his door and comes to meet us, and it is clear from his smile that he recognizes our guide. Though well past middle age, he still has the figure of a young man. He is very tall, well over six feet, big boned and lean; his face is long and heavy jawed and dark from the sun; his eyes are clear grey and deep set beneath a low, wide brow; and his bare head is well covered with thick, dark hair, greying on the temples. He wears a green jerkin of coarse but serviceable web gathered about his narrow loins by a great belt of oxhide clasped in silver. He greets us with evident pleasure, taking Morris about the shoulders with one great arm, and leading us into the house.

The room we come into is indeed the house, for there is nothing but it on the ground floor, but a stair in the corner goes up to the chamber or loft above. It is much like the room at the Rose, but bigger; the cupboard better wrought, and with more vessels on it, and handsomer. Also

the walls, instead of being panelled, are hung with a coarse loosely woven stuff of green worsted with birds and trees woven into it. There are flowers in plenty stuck about the room, mostly of the yellow blossoming flag or flower-de-luce; but in the window near the door is a pot full of those same white poppies we saw by the road yester-eve on the other side of town; and, as it is nigh mid-day, the table, which is covered with a white cloth, is all set forth with meat and drink, a big salt-cellar of pewter being in the middle. ¹⁶³

When we are seated at table, partaking of some of the venison our host brought back from the Wood, we discover that Will Green had news of our arrival ere we came to the town. It seems that the messenger we dispatched from the thorpe of the Skinners reached his goal in good time, for within three days of our sending--about the time we arrived at the meeting of waters below the friary--a messenger from Baron Godrick came to this house with word of our plans, so that Will Green might meet and welcome us on our arrival. He had not done so, he said, because he had not thought we would be here so soon. Knowing Morris, but not that we had already been there, he had thought that we would visit the great Abbey across the Flood from the House of Friars. He tells us now that the messenger from Longshaw gave him to know that Sir Godrick had been falling; that he had suffered a grievous injury some time past while

¹⁶³ Morris, XVI, A Dream of John Ball, 258.

hunting, but that the physicians had brought him nigh unto full recovery and that he himself felt well enough to travel.

We are sobered by this news, and we voice our concern; but Morris and Will Green both assure us that such a man as he could not possibly be slain by any beast alive, even a wild boar. And it is decided that we will go this afternoon to the castle, there to await the arrival of Osberne and Sir Godrick; for it is almost certain that the former will be here today--never has the Red Lad been later than necessity could make him to a rendezvous with friends, and in these peaceful times there is little that might delay him. As for the baron, his messenger had informed Will Green that the plan was for the old knight's party to start out from Longshaw a day after the messenger's departure, and that was four days ago. Thus our two friends should both arrive today, and they have planned to go straight to the castle, for it is nigher to Longshaw than the town and no more than two hours further down-river.

We walk for less than an hour before coming within sight of those great ruins which once were the castle and house of that knight who mistakenly made an enemy of Will Green. Yes, it had been the same folk of this township who, with the aid of one of Sir Godrick's captains, had destroyed this castle somewhat less than a year after the uprising had begun. They did so for that this hold was a very thorn in their sides while yet the knight lived and kept hirelings within his walls.

Certainly those buildings were once great and beautiful; but now

is all ruined and broken, and the house is roofless and floorless. Withal it is overgrown with ash trees and quicken-beam, and other berry trees and key-trees. But in the innermost nook of this mighty remnant, and using for part of its lowly walls two sides of the ancient ashlar ones, stands a squat tower, its other part built of wood, and all now much overgrown with roses and woodbine; and this is used as a watch-tower by the folk of the township, so that they may be warned of danger by water or from the land down along the Flood-side.¹⁶⁴ There is a little cot before the tower, about which there are bee-skeps and here and there young oaks and thorns, and this is the dwelling of the old veteran who watches from the tower in times of war and strife. Here we shall await the others.

Along about sunset we climb to the top of the tower so that we may look out to the northwest over the broad curving waters of the Flood, and eastward over the forested bents toward Longshaw. The sun is sinking in the west so that its rays now slant into our eyes when we look out over the river, but in a moment Will Green catches Morris by the arm and points to the water where it bends about a mile above the tower. And now we all can see the little barge come surging downstream close under the bank--see the barge and the tiny red clad figure standing straight in its bow. Osberne will be here soon. We turn about just in time to see the old tower warden suddenly point eastward, and to hear him cry, "A

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., XX, 87. I have added the tower.

messenger! A rider comes; there!" And so one does. As he gallops up to the ruins, we can see that he is clad in armor of mingled steel and leather, a plain basnet on his head, a sword girt to his side, and over his shoulder a long-handled bill-hook.¹⁶⁵ His breast and back pieces are covered by a light surcoat emblazoned with the ensign of the House of Longshaw, a White Hart collared and chained with gold and emparked on a green ground.¹⁶⁶

A few minutes later we stand with bowed heads and sorrowful hearts in the ruined court, listening to a tale of sickness and death. The messenger speaks in a voice choked with pain as well as exertion:

"I came here first, having been told you would await him at the castle. . . . It happened yester-morn . . . right after first mass. He was taken the day before with a spitting of blood, a seizure of the limbs, fainting spells. He had been readying himself with joy and eagerness to come here. And now . . . my good lord is dead!"

Before any of us has moved, we hear a shout from beyond the ruined walls, and in a moment Osberne comes running up to our sad little group. When he has been told the evil tidings, the Red Lad goes off quietly by himself, tears streaming down his face, to stand on a pile of building stones looking out over the woodland to the east. No one has to question

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., XVI, A Dream of John Ball, 217.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., XXI, 159.

the weight of his grief; it shows now in every line of his stalwart figure: the head thrown back, the arms folded across his chest, the legs wide apart. It is a weight he can bear as he has borne all others such as this, and will bear those to come, hardly but well.

This night we stay with Will Green in his house, and on the morrow we take leave of that worthy yeomen-soldier, parting in a mood yet sobered by our deep feelings, but with many expressions of good will and of hopes that we may meet again. Osberne will accompany us in his barge downriver as far as the meeting of Longshaw Water and the Flood. There, at the landing place whence we started for Longshaw seemingly so long ago, he will leave us and go on to attend Sir Godrick's wake and the installation of his heir in the honors of the House. But we, though we would go with him, must continue downriver to the City, where our ship awaits us.

The end of our stay in the Land of the Sundering Flood is nigh. On the way downriver we try to speak what is in our hearts, but words will not come to express the triple sorrow of losing one new-found friend by death, another by the common fate of all travellers, and finally that of leaving such a beauteous, free, and kindly land as we have found this to be.

Now, when once again we come to Abingdon-on-Thames, William Morris, the traveller, the teller of tales, and the writer of books must write a postscript to his chronicle of Osberne, the Red Lad. He had thought the tale finished with the telling of how Osberne parted company with Sir Godrick in Eastcheaping town; but now there are these words to

add: "And it is not said that he met the knight of Longshaw face to face again in his life."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

CONCLUSION

I have said that A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere must be contrasted with each other--not as "opposite extremes, but as the counterweights of realism and imagination which balance the scale upon the mean of ideal socialism . . ." ¹⁶⁸ Now the reader must be aware that a considerable amount of material from these two "Dreams" has been used in the composite--the larger percentage having been drawn from A Dream of John Ball. In extracting this material my secondary purpose has been not to contrast one with another, but rather to display evidence that the "thread of continuity" remarked by May Morris ¹⁶⁹ is not broken in these two tales, even though they differ in almost every

¹⁶⁸ Cf. ante p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. ante p. 32.

respect from the other eight finished and four unfinished prose romances of the later period; and I think this purpose has been fulfilled. It remains to be shown, however, that A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere may be contrasted and compared as the "counterweights of realism and imagination which balance the scale upon the mean of ideal socialism."

It must be clear that no treatment of the works of William Morris, and especially of his Utopian ideal, can be considered complete unless it contains some reference to his socialism. Indeed, the very word Utopia connotes some sort of socialist program: a state (either a nation or a collective state of being) cannot be considered ideal unless the pattern of its social life is as conducive to the pursuit of individual liberty and happiness as the idealist can make it. Now, it is generally recognized that for most people some sort of subsidization-without-strings is the categorical imperative upon which any Utopia must be founded. However, Morris' vision of an ideal world is refreshingly objective, at least in its economic aspects.

The society in the Land of Nowhere is not a free-loading proletariat governed only by the limitations of supply and demand; nor is it that even more fantastic pipe dream, a society which has found the means to release manna from heaven in unlimited quantities. Instead, this society is a perfectly normal one by utopian standards, wherein man creates all that he needs with his own hands, barter for what he cannot make--or cannot make as well as someone else--and derives almost all of his aesthetic

satisfaction from this very handiwork.

In the Land of Nowhere the children learn to read at the age of four, or earlier, through a process of association and observation resulting from unconditioned exposure to literature; they undergo no formal process of education. The two sexes are permitted to mingle freely, even on youth-club type outings in the woods, which may last for months. As they grow older, they learn French, German, Irish, Welsh, Latin, and Greek from persons who speak them, and history from books--if they like to read; but "early bookishness" is not encouraged, although trades and crafts are.

There are no prisons in Nowhere; factories have been replaced by "Banded-workshops" where folk collect to "do handiwork in which working together is necessary or convenient," such as pottery and glass-making. Heat and power are supplied when necessary by a certain "Force," possibly electricity, or even the sort of atomic power envisioned by Jules Verne; for there is no smoke and apparently no noise.

Free love is the procreative and recreational order of the day in Nowhere, so that divorce courts and such are entirely unnecessary. One simply mates when and how one and one's lover feel like doing so; and since all is common property, there is no need for legal action. And there is no "code of public opinion" to exert power over individual affairs. Indeed, there is complete equality between men and women. The latter naturally enjoy housework, and so they do it.

People live where and with whom they fit best; everyone contributes particular skills to the general welfare, or to his own, if he prefers to live by himself. The whole people is the parliament; there is no evidence of the ponderous legal machinery which both safeguards and burdens our "real society"; conscience punishes the rare criminal; and all these things are true of every nation in the world, not just Nowhere (England, of course).

There is no dangerous rivalry, no friction, between nations or races; rivalries between individuals are smothered by that public opinion which Morris disguises as "conscience." Differences at home and abroad are settled by majority decision. The meetings of these "popular" parliaments are called Folk-moots or Motes.

Work is done because it is pleasant and man is naturally creative. Everything is made for genuine use, adornment for aesthetic satisfaction notwithstanding. The level of popular taste in artistic representation is enunciated by the subjects most commonly chosen for friezes and wall hangings: the Seven Swans, the King of the Golden Mountain, Faithful Henry, and the fairy tales of Jakob Grimm; i. e., old-world myths. Books are not read as much as stories are told, just as it was in medieval times; and there is a total absence "of what the nineteenth century calls 'comfort'-- that is, stuffy inconvenience." In this congenial atmosphere the people live approximately twice as long as in the nineteenth century, and they do not show their age. Here we have what I make free to consider an effective

incorporation of that ageless fantasy of the Fountain of Youth, or the Well at the World's End.

In a conversation with two of the citizens of Nowhere--an antiquary and his nephew--Morris learns their answer to his question concerning medieval ferocity: "After all, the Medieval folk acted after their conscience . . . and they were ready to bear what they inflicted on others; whereas the nineteenth century ones were hypocrites, and pretended to be humane, and yet went on tormenting those whom they dared to treat so by shutting them up in prison, for no reason at all . . ."170

This acting upon conscience, as we have learned, is the controlling factor of social existence in Nowhere; but even so, a crime of passion is committed now and then. Man, still an animal, yet has the reflexes of one. While Morris is there, one young man kills another who has attacked him in a fit of jealousy over a girl both desire. One might suppose that the slayer was entirely justified in thus defending his life. But no; he is guilty of manslaughter and must be punished. However, since there is no law, it is he who must punish himself; he feels bound in conscience to go off by himself into the uninhabited places, where he can search his soul in solitude and eventually cleanse himself of sin. Individual remorse takes the place of the unified revenge tactics of lawful societies.

In News from Nowhere Morris has reached his own limits as an

170 Morris, XVI, News from Nowhere, 43.

utopianist; he has dreamt his most fantastic dream. If he has advanced untenable premises--and I think he has--nevertheless in this tale he also has implemented certain principles of moderate socialism which are entirely valid. Nor is there any doubt in my mind that News from Nowhere contains more solid clues to Morris' psychological make-up than any battery of tests possibly could have brought forth. But my purpose has been simply to convey the impression I have received of this ideal state as basically differing in no very marked degree from the author's medieval dream world: Nowhere is a land very closely resembling fourteenth century England, and its citizens are a people who admittedly feel a closer affinity to medieval concepts and attitudes than to those of any other period; the twenty-first century as Morris hoped it may be differs little from what he, as a medievalist, thought the fifteenth century would have been like had the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 succeeded.

Why was William Morris so unsuccessful as an active socialist? There are a number of reasons why; one of which is afforded by Mackail: "The lot of the poor, as a class, when he thought of it, had always lain heavily on his spirit . . . But the sufferings of individuals often only moved him to a certain impatience."¹⁷¹ Could it be that Morris was unaware of the historical fact--one of the principal tenets of social historians and philosophers--that mankind is solely and individually

¹⁷¹ Mackail, II, 100.

responsible for his own social condition in any given time and place; that his own greed, ambition, lack of "moral fibre," and so on have always and inevitably brought about his downfall from those heights to which his own "good" qualities had lifted him, and vice versa?

Mackail has also said that Morris was "sometimes strangely inconsiderate" of the feelings of his "social inferiors--or indeed of his social equals"--but that he was "habitually indulgent" towards their weaknesses.¹⁷² Morris had the one great fault of many otherwise clever socialists: he would make sweeping changes in the condition of the proletariat, through a sort of temperate anarchism combined with a mass destruction of machinery, all without first trying to raise the moral and spiritual level of individuals through personalized educational processes. He thought that vivid presentations, through lectures and the like, of the best aspects of medieval life would bring about a revival thereof. When these tactics did not arouse immediate spontaneous reactions, he was hurt and bewildered; for he had failed to understand fully those weaknesses he condoned; failed to understand that the sufferings of the average individual are far more important to that individual than anything else--so important sometimes that he would rather suffer than exchange his sufferings for a questionable relief.

Now, to me, this is a picture of a man who was ever inclined to the

¹⁷² Cf. ante p. 4.

making of snap judgments, to arriving at decisions intuitively rather than reaching them through a process of thorough reasoning. May Morris has unwittingly captured this facet of her father's character in a superb generalization that can easily be forgiven by anyone who recognizes the ties of consanguinity:

He [Morris] approached life as an artist and as such felt that it was social organization, not a medley of individual efforts--that in a random struggle no great work could ever be achieved: sincere art could only come from the free man, bound by his debt to life itself. The Communal existence of News from Nowhere was the thing he longed for, a community in which the most complex development had at last attained to a spacious and serene simplicity.¹⁷³

I have emphasized frequently throughout this paper one particular result of the application of the sort of thinking criticized above; a result which I have characterized as "a certain rather careless inconsistency in the treatment of descriptive subject matter," and as a shirking of "the more unpleasant responsibilities incurred by the conscientious self-critic," such as "careful planning supplemented by careful proof-reading."¹⁷⁴ This trait has been more succinctly defined by Mackail, who says that "incapacity or impatience of correction remained characteristic of Morris as a literary artist."¹⁷⁵ Finally, in speaking of professional literary criticism--a corrective and frequently inspirational influence, so recognized, though perhaps begrudgingly, by most competent literary artists--

¹⁷³ May Morris, XX, xxj.

¹⁷⁵ Mackail, I, 55.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. ante pp. 37-38.

Morris has pungently expressed himself thus: "To think of a beggar making a living by selling his opinion about other people! . . . and fancy anyone paying him for it!"¹⁷⁶ Such an attitude, though it may have been held temporarily, and even though it contains that kernel of truth which distinguishes irony from mere sarcasm, does seem to indicate that Morris felt criticism of art to be solely the prerogative of artists, and that worthwhile artistic creation must be as exclusive and spontaneous as photosynthesis or the germination of a seed--that true art, like natural phenomena, need not, cannot, be corrected. He is certainly not alone in this stand, but his position is somewhat less exalted than those of the Chaucers, Brownings, and Tennysons, and the Scotts, Ruskins, and Carlyles of the English language literary hierarchy. And yet, strangely enough, Morris was an exceedingly painstaking designer and handicraftsman! This is the paradox of the man--a characteristic that may mark him as only human, but one that marks him certainly as a most interesting subject for other, less gifted humans to study.

And what does all this have to do with Morris, the medievalist, and A Dream of John Ball? It has a great deal to do with them, and with his Utopia as I have presented it. For this one professional attitude and these two artistic creations consistently--inevitably, in fact--reflect their author's character and opinions; and as creations, or as a state of

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

mind, they are conditioned--moulded, as it were--by these very opinions and by their author's character. All this is absurdly apparent, of course; but I wonder how much thought has been given to it before now. With particular regard to the later prose romances, you will remember Margaret Grennan's criticism of preceding scholarship: "Too much discussion has centered on their expression . . . and too little has been said of the matter expressed. . . . no attempt has been made to relate this great mass of writing to that vision of the world that is distinctly William Morris'." ¹⁷⁷

Let us return now to the moment of transition from that never-never land, where the Houses of Parliament are used as subsidiary markets and manure storehouses, to that real land, where the common citizenry is engaged in an uprising which they hope will lead to the establishment and insurance of certain personal liberties.

There is a passage in News from Nowhere--one of many--which will serve very well as a transitional means by which we can move from the twenty-first century to the fourteenth. It is, so to speak, a section of May Morris' thread of continuity; and it concerns female clothing in Nowhere. In the Guest House Morris observed three young women most handsomely dressed:

they were decently veiled with drapery, and not bundled up with millinery . . . clothed like women, not upholstered like

¹⁷⁷ Cf. ante p. 3.

armchairs as most women of our time are. In short, their dress was somewhat between that of the ancient classical costume and the simpler forms of the fourteenth century garments. ¹⁷⁸ the materials were light and gay to suit the season.

In The Well at the World's End Morris describes, as he has done in a number of places in each of his romances, a lady's clothing. When Ralph, the hero, sees the Lady of the House of Abundance for the second or third time, she is wearing "a green gown, thin and short, and there-over a cotehardy of black cloth with orphreys of gold and colours."¹⁷⁹ Presumably this apparel is one or a combination of the "simpler forms of the fourteenth century garments."

A Dream of John Ball is not an exact historical re-creation, although close attention is paid to the accuracy of historical background; it is, rather, an idealization of a series of actual events. "But after all, the real triumph of A Dream of John Ball . . . lies in its embodiment of medievalism."¹⁸⁰ It is, in my opinion, as perfect a re-creation of the physical, moral, and emotional aspects of a past time as has ever been done. And, as the reader knows, I have made considerable use of these aspects in the last chapter of the composite.

William Morris idealized the Middle Ages; but he was not entirely unaware of the sharp contrast between the extremes of good and bad, of

¹⁷⁸ Morris, XVI, News from Nowhere, 14.

¹⁸⁰ Grennan, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., XVIII, 196.

creativity and destructiveness, of exalted spiritualism and unregenerate moral sloth between which the collective medieval character swung as on a pendulum. After all, things are not so different now: we may have gained greater control over our impulses, but what we have gained as individuals we seem to have sacrificed as nations; for the diverse national characters of the modern world are as susceptible to antipodal influences as any representative group of medieval men and women. But I have said that Morris was not entirely unaware. Margaret Grennan has called this incomplete awareness a preference for the "seamy side of the Middle Ages" over the "reverse of the modern tapestry."¹⁸¹

Morris had no use for the devious methods of self-delusion practiced by modern societies. Nor did he have any use for the Machiavelian tactics of empire builders, anarchists, or national governments; maybe these tactics smacked too strongly of that sense of the dramatic which he disliked so much wherever he found evidence of it--proudly displayed by his friend Rossetti, perhaps; or by Shakespeare and Browning. And it must have been the subtlety of these tactics he so detested, not their ruthlessness; for ruthlessness was an acknowledged characteristic of his beloved Middle Ages.

No, if there is an analogy which may help to clarify Morris' attitude in this matter, it is one concerned with the artistic use of colors.

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Cf. ante p. 6.

Clear, luminescent, and contrasting greens, reds, blues, whites, and blacks were the colors Morris so eminently preferred.¹⁸² Even the rich effusions of gold and silver in his writings had to be distinguished by the contrast between the redness of his favorite gold and the whiteness of gleaming silver. And all these were the colors so well loved and used by the medieval artist. But let us give Morris a chance to defend himself and these preferences of his. In a lecture entitled "Art and the Beauty of the Earth," he spoke as follows:

Time was when everybody that made anything made a work of art besides a useful piece of goods, and it gave them pleasure to make it. That is an assertion from which nothing can drive me; whatever I doubt, I have no doubt of that. . . .

Do not misunderstand me; I am not a mere praiser of past times. I know that in those days of which I speak life was often rough and evil enough, beset by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery; yet I cannot help thinking that sorely as poor folks needed a solace, they did not altogether lack one, and that solace was pleasure in their work. Ah, sirs, much as the world has won since then, I do not think it has won for all men any solace that Nature holds forth to us. Or must we forever be casting out one devil by another.¹⁸³

Now this certainly is a laudable and well expressed attitude; but has it not struck you as rather strange that not one single hero or heroine of any of Morris' prose romances--or any of his other works, for that matter--with the partial exception of some of the principal characters in the two "Dreams," is one of those "poor folks" about whom he had so

¹⁸² Cf. post Appendix B.

¹⁸³ Morris, XXII, 163.

much to say? Even the folk Morris portrays in News from Nowhere are definitely exceptional--for manners, beauty, morals, or skills--and they are certainly not poor. But of course their's is an ideal state. However, even in A Dream of John Ball there is nothing truly ordinary about those principal characters whom I have partially excepted from the entire heroic group. Will Green, for example is of the highest type of fourteenth century English commoner, and he is one of the wealthier yeomen in his township. And I believe I may state categorically that Will Green is as far down in the scale of social castes as William Morris was prepared to reach in his selection of heroes. It is true that in The Water of the Wondrous Isles Birdalone was born poor, but throughout the tale she is treated as a lady by all except her wicked stepmother; and it is true that Ralph of Upmeads in The Well at the World's End married a tavern keeper's daughter, but she had all the instincts of a noble lady, was the recipient of unusual gifts from a supernatural being, and eventually established her claims to equality with her royal lover by accompanying him to the Well and returning therefrom imbued with all the fine qualities those waters afford.

Nowhere in the works of Morris is there a Dickensian hero or sympathetic character such as one might expect to find in a leading role in the work of any socialist propagandist with a reading public composed of Tom, Dick, and Harry Average Citizen. And in itself this selectivity is no great fault. After all, Morris shares this relative snobbishness with such great contemporary literary lights as Count Leo Tolstoy and Dumas,

the elder, neither of whom ever was able to forget his aristocratic connections, even though one eventually turned against his own class and the other lived an unparalleled Bohemian existence. Of course, neither of them was a socialist per se; but that quality which Morris shares with them is snobbishness. It is true also that only a unique genius could make an entirely ordinary person into a romantic hero; but Morris, the socialist, did not even try! And nowhere in the studies of his life and accomplishments which I have read, nor in any of the works I read for this paper, wherein he refers to himself, have I found a single hint that William Morris ever underestimated his capabilities.

Now, of course, it is true that Morris had "retired from active socialism" before he got well into his new program of romance writing; but it is not possible for a true revolutionary--for any person of integrity--ever to divorce himself completely from his ideals, from the cause or causes he has chosen to espouse. If it were, then those of us who have it would have to surrender irrevocably our faith in human nature. No; an idealist is born and dies an idealist, no matter how difficult life has made it for him to remain idealistic. However, an idealist may and frequently does exchange one ideal--or one set of ideals--for another, perhaps more than once during his lifetime. Now it is my contention that Morris never was a thoroughly convinced socialist. He was very cleverly persuaded to become a propagandist for the cause of

a somewhat diluted Marxian socialism; but the motives which drove him to active participation were thoroughly selfish, as are the paramount motives of almost every revolutionary. After all, an ideal is by definition a very personal thing; idealists and confirmed cynics are equally self-centered, though they stand as far apart as the broad range of human interests can separate them. William Morris belongs in a very limited category--that of the single-minded idealist. He espoused only one cause for all his lifetime; his participation in active socialism was a temporary and misguided pursuit of what he thought to be his own particular ignis fatuus disguised as something else. When he penetrated this disguise, the process of disillusionment began; nor did it take him long to discover that his cause--that of instituting a thoroughly expurgated code of medieval concepts as the basis upon which a new society was to be founded--could not be served by the intrinsically materialistic socialism of his co-revolutionaries in the Federation.

It would seem, then, that William Morris, the quasi-socialist, was a bit of a hypocrite to begin with, and, in the second place, a dreamer determined to hang on to his pet illusions no matter what destructive evidence he or someone else might turn up. Now, there is not meant to be anything derisive in this last indictment of Morris. On the contrary, I have shown that I consider the stubbornness so characteristic of his type of dreamer to be a virtue in itself. To what corner would we turn for escape, if all of us saw only varying shades of grey and never permitted

ourselves to behold all the bright and beautiful colors and the rainbow combinations of our spectrum? But in this case his stubbornness--or particular virtue, if you will--makes Morris seem rather pathetic. Here is a man with a tremendous capacity for the enjoyment and appreciation of nature and the creativity of mankind, who nevertheless, like some strange mythological creature who has sinned against the gods, is denied foresight--can see nowhere but to the rear. By some voluntary twist of reasoning--doubtless an emotionally inspired one--Morris denied his sharp eyes and considerable powers of perception the right to function conjunctively in any direction but backwards. Afterward, even when he thought he was looking forward, he was seeing only a distorted reflection of that world which was within range of his hindsight. But let us hear Morris speak once more in his own defense. He is still on the subject of medieval seaminess:

The poor remains of the old tribal liberties, the folknotes, the meetings round the shire-oak, the trial by compurgation, all these customs which imply the equality of freemen, would have faded into mere symbols and traditions of the past if it had not been for the irrepressible life and labour of the people, of those who really did the work of society in the teeth of the arbitrary authority of the feudal hierarchy.¹⁸⁴

For the rest, men's desires keep pace with their power over nature, and in those days their desires were comparatively few; the upper class did not live so much more comfortably than the lower; so there were not the same grounds or room for discontent as there are nowadays. . . . now the contrast is no longer between splendour and simplicity, but

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century," 379-80.

between ease and anxiety, refinement and solidness.

The ordinary life of the workman, then, was easy; what he suffered from was either the accidents of nature, which the society of the day had not yet learned to conquer, or the violence of his masters, the business of whose lives was then open war, as it is now veiled war. Storm, plague, famine and battle, were his foes then . . . 185

He keeps returning to this phenomenon of social evolution: virtually the same differentiated strata have existed in all societies, but the sharpness of the contrasts between them has become blurred in Morris' sight by the infusion of Christian-socialist idealism--the shiboleth of égalité et fraternité. The artistic concept of life as being represented in terms of clear contrasting colors carries with it an acceptance not always conscious of the inevitability of violence in all states of nature: in at least one usage of logic contrast is opposition, and in this sense it is in varying degrees violent; and the sharper the contrast, the greater the inherent violence. This was Morris' artistic concept, and he was aware of that ubiquitous violence; but he mistakenly thought that the various strata of society in his day had changed character, whereas they had only changed appearance. Morris says, "now the contrast is no longer between splendour and simplicity, but between ease and anxiety, refinement and solidness." But in the relative terms we must employ here there is no difference between the "splendour" of one aspect of medieval life and the "ease" and "refinement" enjoyed by the nineteenth century industrial

185 Ibid., pp. 381-82.

bureaucracy; nor is there any real difference between the storm-plague- and battle-beset "simplicity" of one period and the anxious solidity of the other. As a matter of fact, one might say that "anxious solidity" is a contradiction in terms, if one wished to be pedantically critical; but we are dealing with poetic concepts, and the rather inept choice of such words as "solidness" and "anxiety" for use in a comparative sense can be defended on the grounds that Morris was first and last a poet. In any case, it is perfectly clear that "solidness" and "simplicity" share certain connotations, and that "suffering" and "anxiety" do also.

The hard fact revealed by this critical approach to our subject is simply that William Morris never reached full intellectual maturity; that his impatience of correction would not permit him to advance to that stage of intellectual development whence the truly constructive thinker can reach out and grasp his choice of those philosophical concepts which have, in the hands of an unhappily small number of predecessors, materially improved the human state of being; that his vision--and it was a great gift--was irrevocably focused upon a vast mirage; and that consequently his utopianism could not be in any way as constructive as it should have been.

But is all this so terrible? Why no, of course not. Morris' dream world has a tremendous appeal: though it is not food for growth, it is a condiment which serves to make the plain fare of practical study far more palatable than it might else have been. The works of William Morris

must never be excluded from the study of literature. He did not have the prophetic greatness or the genius for expression of Carlyle or Ruskin, the faith, lyricism, and perception of Milton, or the rare satiric facility of Carlyle, Swift, or Voltaire; nor could Ruskin, Burne-Jones, or Rossetti play Erasmus to his Sir Thomas More. But William Morris could and did produce an inimitable mosaic composed of exquisitely shaped, brilliantly colored tesserae depicting his conception of the best aspects of an adolescent world. If these depictions do not always approximate actuality, then that is because Morris had difficulty distinguishing between what we realists call fantasy and what we call reality.

Margaret Grennan has enunciated, not originally, but well, one of the reasons for Morris' failure to achieve true greatness in any of his diverse endeavors. She incorporates one of his most suggestive admissions in a passage discussing the prose romances:

The pagan naturalism of the stories is complete and pervasive. There is little rancor against any faith in them because the author is so calmly and finally through with all faiths. 'In religion I am a pagan,' Morris said, and the full truth of the statement can be felt only by the student of the romances. ¹⁸⁶

The words "calmly" and "finally" are very apt indeed. Morris did not possess even that paradoxically evangelistic spirit of the true atheist; nor even the apostolic fervor of the pre-Darwin naturalist. Denying the Christian concept of a trinity and the monotheism of Moses or Mohammed,

¹⁸⁶ Grennan, p. 141.

Morris proclaimed himself a pagan. He meant that he felt spiritually identified with the pre-Christian Scandinavian. He picked the right term to describe his religious preference, but he does not seem to have realized that his paganism was more truly ancestor-worship than Norse pantheism. The idea of Ragnarök or a Doom of the Gods, which was supposed to bring about the annihilation of the forces of evil in one cataclysmic clash between the good gods and the naughty ones, was the sort of notion he liked to play around with in idle moments. The poetic strength and beauty of Norse mythology has--or ought to have--a universal appeal; but Morris, the Victorian, did not really share Gudrun's or Sigurd's beliefs. Instead, he worshiped them and their kind. He was an Aryan, and his Teutonic ancestry was a more prized possession than any or all of his painstakingly collected illuminated manuscripts and missals. He would at the start have been hopefully deceived by Nazi propaganda; but he would not have been fooled for long had he lived during the thirties and forties. He would have discovered the inanities propounded as articles of faith in Mein Kampf at first reading. Even Marx had not fooled him: one of his finest essays is a critique of Das Kapital--though he probably thought of it as an exposition. You see, Morris was a Victorian. How could this combination of the prude, the reactionary, and the thwarted savage ever be a true rebel? It was impossible; for none of his personalities was strong enough to oust the others. And the result was an inexplosive, quietly seething mixture of hot earth and cold

water--a steaming mud puddle; but more than that. This restlessly energetic man did find productive outlets for the power thus generated. However, and this is the point, there was too much cold water and not enough fire in the mixture; consequently, his power was not great and his output was far from earth-shaking. But it is established literature; and what is important right now is not so much its quality or quantity, but the sources of its author's inspiration. One cannot make a valid criticism of any work unless he knows somewhat, at least, of the environment of its author's incubation period.

Once again I must ask Margaret Grennan to speak for me. In her little book she introduces Morris very properly against the background of his century:

The century [the nineteenth, of course] seems to have written its autobiography . . . in terms of its medieval enthusiasm: its foibles revealed in the dilettantism that Carlyle decried; its faith in the earnest search for spiritual truths in traditional forms; its need for beauty in its inner restlessness and uncertainty, never far beneath the seemingly calm surface of national complacency, in the persistent return to the past to recapture the lost responsibility of man to man. Of this last William Morris, medievalist and revolutionary, is the fitting symbol.¹⁸⁷

She goes on to say that "his progress in the Norse studies, of which Sigurd the Volsung is the artistic culmination," illustrates more clearly than perhaps anything else "the gradual development of Morris' social philosophy from his creative experience and the naturalness of its medieval

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

dress." And she adds that he used "northern names in the prose tales, recognizing instinctively perhaps that this device would, in later words, 'be a corrective to the maundering side of the Middle Ages.'"¹⁸⁸

It is perfectly obvious that Morris felt at home in the Icelandic material; and it is equally obvious that the "directness, the passion, the mingling of good and evil, the full rush of the sagaman's art, even the violence itself were welcome to the Victorian tired of the shams and the tame ugliness of his own times."¹⁸⁹ But, and this is just as apparent, Morris was, despite himself and his apologists, a dilettante. Only twice in his life did he depart the comfortable security of his well-to-do existence and engage upon a relatively adventurous project. He made two short and well-guided trips to Iceland, which were about on a par with a present-day fishing or hunting trip in the Canadian Rockies. And this man had an independent income sufficient to support himself and family in more than moderate luxury. Morris never saw a war in progress, nor had the privilege of fighting in one; and he never had to struggle to keep alive, let alone to keep well fed and clothed. Of course he was a dilettante where theoretical paganism and spiritual identification with Scandinavians are concerned. But I must add that to my knowledge he never claimed to be anything else. It is his admirers who build up their hero's vivid interests and considerable intellectual capacity into a halo of hard won authority.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

No, William Morris was, as I have pictured him, a steaming mud puddle of a man, who--had he been born anything but a Victorian--might perhaps have achieved real greatness as an architect of a medieval revival, or as an artist in handicrafts, in the writing of both poetry and prose, and in the perceptive re-creation of history--of the experiences, morals, and modes of thought of a great people who long since ceased to go a-viking to all parts of the earth.

Yet, when all is said, William Morris remains firmly on his pedestal. His poetry, his prose, and even his lectures on art, industry, and the beauty of the earth are still read; and they will be so long as there are literates with an understanding of English, who have as well a capacity to dream of the future and to revel in fantasies of the past. With regard to the field of handicrafts, there are still people who remember sitting in Morris chairs; interior decorators will, or at least should, never forget his contributions to their professional art; admirers and collectors of objets d'art from the great period of manuscript copying and illuminating, when they remember him, will do so with sympathetic understanding; for a long time to come architects and students of the history of civilization as it is written in stone will reflect upon his attempts to preserve the remnants of Gothic; modern socialists certainly should take it upon themselves to examine their own motives and aspirations in the light of his rather pathetic attempts to instill his own pure and gentle idealism into their movement; and finally, his mosaic Utopia, of which I have attempted

to give a description, will guarantee this general interest long after Morris' questionable technical artistry in the field of literature has become a matter solely of academic concern.

And, once again, what is the basic pattern of this Utopia? Is it that "Communal existence" of News from Nowhere which May Morris extols as the object of her father's longing? I, for one, do not think so. If Morris truly favored such a perfect existence, why did he not spend more time writing about it? The story was admittedly dashed off to fill the serial requirements of that periodical--The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine--whose life he struggled almost alone to perpetuate during the few months of its existence; and it is short, as Morris' prose romances go, though very well written. Why did he not speculate upon this subject once more at least, if it was so fascinating to him? Did he shelve the topic because broaching it had left him open to accusations of propagandizing? No, certainly not. Was it because he realized that the socialist movement of his day was not going to bring about the revival he envisioned? Possibly; but is it not much more likely that he dropped the subject of Nowhere because he preferred to be somewhere in his dreams?

The Middle Ages, with all their violent contrasts, were a fact; the future was a possibility. And News from Nowhere contributed but a fraction of that mosaic which is Morris' Utopia. The rest, as I hope I have shown, is made up of contributions from the other prose romances. As for his poetry and his works of translation, they are, by their own nature,

sheer decoration, border illumination. He has called himself an "Idle singer of an empty day," and he was; indeed, he never made any claims to profound scholarship.

William Morris was many things, and always a paradox. He was an energetic dilettante and a gifted failure; he had great powers of imagination and a talent for expressing his imaginings, but in this realm he never left his childhood; and he had great generosity and integrity--a sympathetic nature--but he had only a bare modicum of understanding. In fine, he was a romantic, and one who never felt secure outside of his ivory tower, though he did have the courage to make numerous excursions therefrom. And, of course, his Utopia reflects every facet of his complicated character. The rugged and beautiful Land of the Sundering Flood peopled by a scattered and ununited race of "goodly" beings, by dwarfs, "unmanlike wights," and messengers of the Gods, all either believing in or living as parts of a set of legends which is a valuable compendium of that vast store of Indo-European mythology, this--this is the Utopia of William Morris.

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APPENDIX A

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM MORRIS

- VOLUME I. The Defence of Guenever. The Hollow Land.
- II. The Life and Death of Jason.
- III-VI. The Earthly Paradise.
- VII. The Story of Grettir the Strong. The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs.
- VIII. Journals of Travel in Iceland, 1871, 1873.
- IX. Love is Enough. Poems by the Way.
- X. Three Northern Love Stories. The Tale of Beowulf.
- XI. The Aeneids of Virgil.
- XII. The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs.
- XIII. The Odyssey of Homer done into English Verse.
- XIV. The House of the Wolfings. The Story of the Glittering Plain.
- XV. The Roots of the Mountains.
- XVI. News from Nowhere. A Dream of John Ball. A King's Lesson.
- XVII. The Wood Beyond the World. Child Christopher. Old French Romances.
- XVIII-XIX. The Well at the World's End.
- XX. The Water of the Wondrous Isles.
- XXI. The Sundering Flood. Unfinished Romances.

- VOLUME XXII.** Hopes and Fears for Art. Lectures on Art
and Industry.
- XXIII.** Signs of Change. Lectures on Socialism.
- XXIV.** Scenes from the Fall of Troy and Other Poems
and Fragments.

APPENDIX B

G. G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama. The English Scene from Conquest to Reformation. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

Speaking of shops in the Middle Ages, the author says:

In the early part of our period there would be nothing to distinguish a shop from an ordinary dwelling house, the goods being sold either in the street or in the dwelling room. Later shops, however, were of a type that still survives here and there, built of wood with shutters outside, which could be let down into the street so as to form a table for the exhibition of wares, and a little penthouse roof to shelter this table. By this time the whole lower storey was often occupied by the shop, the upper storey containing the hall and bower, or sometimes several bedrooms. (p. 303.)

He goes on to speak of medieval London and of the scenes that might confront us, were we able to go back there in time:

To see medieval London we must imagine a clear-flowing river; an undulating site; a ring of walls; and, at the very gates, gardens and fields and moors. . . . Epping Forest was continuous almost as far as Bishop's Shortford. (p. 307.)

There were hills of bare heath and wooded slopes and "All this was almost visible from London streets; those streets which William Morris, judging merely as an artist, has celebrated as 'London small and white and clean.'" But this statement must be clarified:

Very clean, at least to the outward eye, was London then in comparison with the modern city. Medieval builders knew very well that one of the best preservatives of stone or timber is lime-wash. . . . A London clean, then, yet in its way almost as busy-looking as at present. Narrow streets, open shops with projecting walls and penthouses, and hanging signs, and noises as

multitudinous to the ear as those picturesque irregularities to the eye--the sawing and scraping of the carpenter, the tick-tack of the weaver's shuttle, the tap of the copper-smith and the blacksmith's ringing anvil. There will be much singing of folk at work. . . . Above all, in the busiest parts, such as the market of Cheapside, we should hear the stentorian, brazen voices of masters, mistresses or apprentices inviting us to buy their wares. (pp. 307-308.)

There would be much color in the streets: gild liveries, trade uniforms, liveries of barons' or knights' retainers, and the costumes of the clergy--which were of any color but red, green, or parti-color. (p. 308.)

On page 90 of his book, Coulton says that rural life "has never lent itself to glaring colours; the true glory of our countryside has always been its meadow-green and its ripening corn and the deep shade of its woods; the thatched roof and the quiet stream; all in harmony with William Morris' picture of the harvesters' meal in the noonday shade; bread and cheese and strong onions, with a jug of corny ale." Later on the author uses Malory's Morte d'Arthur as an aid to his discussion of medieval life:

Here we have a book equally wonderful in its contrasts and in its harmony. It has all the violent antitheses which are so characteristic of medieval life, but, withal the harmony of a single mind which has absorbed a mass of ancient legend and reproduced it not mechanically but organically, making it into flesh and blood of its own. Though medieval society was less simple than is often imagined, yet it was naturally far less complex than ours. The factors were simpler; men's fashions and manners were more elementary and more frankly displayed. We can even illustrate these factors, alike in their simplicity and in their contrasts, by putting the problem into the form of a colour-scheme, dear to the medieval artist and especially to the simple craftsmen. . . .

There, then, is the colour-scheme; green and red, the two most striking contrasts among strong colours that are common in ordinary nature, complemented by white, which stands out in equal contrast from both. We see it in young corn with poppies and marguerites and white campion, or in white houses and heavy trees massed against a crimson sunset. The other natural contrast, between orange and blue, is far less common in England. . . . But to the ordinary country folk, under the blue sky, mother earth at her best and richest was clad in green and white and red. And that was the rustic painter's colour-scheme, still visible in much of its freshness on all the great Norfolk rood-screens such as Ranworth and Barton Turf. (pp. 253-254.)

Green, the colour of spring and summer; standing for the restfulness of earth, the fruitfulness of earth, the quiet content in earthly things. Red, the colour of passion and of conflict; red roses and red blood; the battles of this life, its victories and its defeats. White, in one sense the sum of all possible colours; so complete a blend of all that it has none of its own; the colourlessness of eternity, and of a peace beyond even the quiet green of the meadows, beyond even the blue of the Church and of all visible religion. . . . the delights of the world and the battles of the world in brilliant contrast; and apart from both, the pure white of unworldliness, the charm of deep and simple religion; the unselfish love of friend for friend, of man for woman and of woman for man, with the conviction that this love is, in some most real sense, eternal. All these in startling contrast; yet always, in virtue of the purity and simplicity with which each colour is laid on, and of the just balance between contrast and contrast . . . all these are admirably represented in Malory. Green, by the Queen's Maying . . . Red, by the fights on every page; White, by the Graal. . . . Here is a whole paradise of romance; the idealized picture of an heroic past. (pp. 254-256.)

In the last few pages of his book the author, in concluding his discussion of medieval art, makes a reference to Morris, the Anti-Scrapist:

The real strength of Gothic had been as Morris described it; it was 'the people's art.' Everybody watched the men at work; everybody was interested in them. . . . Everywhere there was a call for straightforward effectiveness,

which inspired natural and simple treatment in general, while it left further room for the play of high imagination where religion required it, and where the artist or his prompter was equal to the task. . . . It is natural that, in our own time, artists and art-lovers should look back regretfully at those simpler days when there was not only greater unity of status among the workmen, but more unity of spirit between them and their public.

Therefore, although Benvenuto and Succheti, together with the evidence of cold-blooded documents, compel us to deduct much from those exaggerations which we owe not so much to Ruskin and Morris as to their over-enthusiastic followers, we may still count the medieval artist as one who came as near to Arcadian happiness as was possible in a turbulent society. (pp. 570-571.)

APPENDIX C

L. F. Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages. London: Oxford University Press, 1926.

The author states that "in London in 1189 a building by-law was issued by which all houses had to be built partly of stone and roofed with tiles, and this was gradually adopted in other towns." (p. 86.) He also tells us that in the twelfth century London had less than 35,000 people, "yet there were within the walls 136 parish churches, besides St. Paul's Cathedral and 13 monasteries. This lavish provision of churches was a feature of ancient towns. . . . All around the city lay gardens, pastures, and fertile cornfields, and beyond them the forest, in which the citizens had . . ." hunting rights. (pp. 79-80.)

Speaking of the castles built by the Norman rulers in England, Salzman says that a typical castle "consisted of two parts; a courtyard, surrounded by a ditch and wall, and a keep, a massive tower, usually standing on an artificial mound at one end of the courtyard. In the earlier and smaller examples the living-rooms were in the keep." In later periods these rooms were in buildings erected in the court.

In any case the chief room would be the great hall, where the lord of the castle and all his household and retainers took their meals and spent their spare time, and where many of the household slept. This hall was often . . . a very large building, divided lengthwise by rows of pillars and much resembling the nave of a church. . . . At one end of the hall would be the kitchen, and elsewhere the chapel and bedrooms, of which the positions would be determined by the military needs of the building. . . .

In the medieval house, even more than in the castle, the main feature was the hall. This was a room, usually from one and a half to twice as long as it was broad, open to the full height of the house. Across one end of the room, often on a raised dais, was the high table, where sat the master of the house, his family and guests; while at right angles to this, running lengthwise down the hall, were the tables for the servants. On a stone hearth in the middle of the floor was the fire, the smoke from which found its way out through a 'louvre' (a hole in the roof covered by a little turret with open sides). . . . Originally the food was cooked as well as eaten in the hall, and it was probably partly to avoid the noise, smell, and heat of the cooking operations that a wooden partition or screen was built across the lower end of the hall. Such a screen, with two doors in it, became a permanent feature in the medieval hall, even when regular kitchen offices were built beyond the lower end of the hall. Into the passage behind the screen opened, in the side wall, the door from outside (often covered by a porch), and, in the end wall, three doors, that in the centre leading to the kitchen, those on either side to the buttery . . . and the pantry. . . . At the upper or high table end of the hall a door led into the 'chamber' or sleeping-room of the family, which also served in the daytime as the 'bower' or special apartment of the ladies. After the twelfth century it became usual to divide this building at the upper end of the hall into two stories, the lower being used as a withdrawing-room or parlour and the upper--the 'solar' ('the sunny room,' from Latin sol)--reached by an outside staircase, as bedroom. These rooms were furnished with fireplaces built into the wall, with chimneys . . . (pp. 91-93.)

And on page 99 of his book Salzman describes the sort of garden that was attached to every great house in the Middle Ages: "In it would be grown roses, lilies, gilliflowers (clove-pinks), marigolds, periwinkle, sweet and aromatic plants used for perfuming the rooms, such as lavender, rosemary and juniper, and an abundance of herbs for use in cookery or medicine."

VITA

Edgar Fitz Randolph Erdman was born on the 13th of August 1929 in Beirut, Lebanon, where his father served the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions and the Syrian people as president of the American Press. During the first ten years of his life he travelled with his parents in Europe, the Near and Far East, and the United States.

His formal schooling commenced at the American Community School in Beirut and was concluded at Blair Academy in Blairstown, New Jersey. Since this preparatory school is organized on the six-grade system, beginning at the seventh grade level, his secondary education began and ended there. He received his diploma in June 1946.

He spent eighteen months of the next two years with the American Eighth Army in the Far East, principally in Japan.

In October 1948 he enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he majored in English for the next three years.

In the spring of 1950, while serving as a delegate from his chapter to the international council of Sigma Chi fraternity in Ohio, he reached Saltillo, Mexico, enrolled in La Escuela Interamericana de Verano for six weeks, and proceeded from there to Mexico City. He returned to the United States at the end of the summer, having learned as much as he could about Mexico, its people, their pastimes, and their language. Upon returning to college he was able to list Spanish as his minor or

secondary degree objective.

In October 1951 he re-enlisted in the U. S. Army, underwent a refresher course in infantry tactics, was shipped overseas, and eventually reached Korea. In October 1953, having added considerably to his store of military experience, he was invalided out of service.

He became a full-time student at the University of Richmond in February 1954, and in June of the following year he was graduated with a B.A. degree from this university. He entered the Graduate School that summer.

In the fall of 1955 he became an employee of the Delta Well Logging Service, Inc. of Thibodaux, Louisiana. And on December 13, 1955, in Gulfport, Mississippi, he married Nancy Lorraine Heiser of Portland, Oregon.

After eight rewarding months in the Gulf Coast oilfields (on shore and off shore) he returned to the Graduate School of his Alma Mater and enrolled as a candidate for the Master of Arts degree.