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COLLECTION
NOT TO BE
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WILLIAM MORRIS

AND

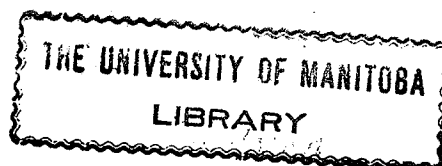
HIS RELATION TO PRE-RAPHAELITISM

-by-

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INTRODUCTION.

"There is no Wealth but Life", life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others". (1)

"It has been written, 'an endless significance lies in Work'; a man perfects himself by working.....Destiny on the whole has no other way of cultivating us....Blessed is he who has found his work, let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose: he has found it and will follow it. How, as a free flowing channel,it runs and flows; making.....a green fruitful meadow, with its clear flowing stream. Labour is Life: from the inmost heart of the Worker rises his god-given Force." (2)

William Morris has been called the heir of Ruskin and Carlyle. Their words were the 'Staff and Scrip' of

(1) Ruskin, John, - "Unto This Last," - Essay II.

(2) Carlyle, Thomas, - "Past and Present," - Book III. 178.

his inspiration. In his own words we sense the kinship -

"Imaginative work is the very blossom of civilization triumphant and hopeful; it would fain lead men to aspire towards perfection; each hope that it fulfils gives birth to yet another hope; it bears in its bosom the worth and the meaning of life and the counsel to strive to understand everything; to fear nothing and to hate nothing; in a word 'tis the symbol and sacrament of the Courage of the World."(1) and again -

"It is not by accident that an idea comes into the heads of a few; rather they are pushed on, and forced to speak or act by something stirring in the heart of the world which would otherwise be left without expression". (2)

Perhaps no one loved life more than he did or used the gift of life more fully. "A gifted poet, a distinguished prose man, a superb craftsman and a vigorous social force. Yet first and foremost, ^{he} was a great personality". (3)

"His love of the beautiful work of the past, material and imaginative stood for him in the place of religious fervor, and his whole strength of purpose was dedicated to the reconstruction of modern life upon conditions similar to those under which such work.....was produced. Read in this

- (1) Morris, William, - "Architecture in Civilization", "Hope and Fears for Art" - p. 210.
- (2) Morris, William, - "The Lesser Arts", "Hope and Fears for Art" - p. 18.
- (3) Morris, William, - "A study in Personality", Preface.

light his writings are no mere pictures of an irrecoverable past.....they are a coherent revelation of his sources of inspiration in his combat with the torpor from which like Ruskin and Carlyle, he, not the least of all the three strove to deliver the life of his day". (1)

(1) "Cambridge History of Literature" - Vol. XIII, p. 128.

Chapter I.

LIFE AND HIS PLACE IN THE VICTORIAN ERA.

"Boyhood"

"The first step, says Ruskin, to the understanding either the mind or position of a great man ought, I think, to be an inquiry into the elements of his early instruction and the mode in which he was affected by the circumstances of surrounding life". (1)

The essence of all that made William Morris may be traced to his uneventful boyhood. The "thoughts of youth are long long thoughts" and what they feed upon prognosticates harvest.

William Morris, the eldest son and third child of William Morris and his wife Emma Shelton was born at Elm House, Clay Hill, Walthamstow, on the twenty-fourth of March 1834.

His family records are meagre and do not go far back.. His father's family was originally of Welsh descent and in later years his critics tried to trace his romantic development to a Celtic strain. His father was a City man and the family lived in comfort and comparative opulence.

(1) Walker, Hugh, - "Literature of the Victorian Era"

Shortly before the birth of William the family moved to Elm House situated within a mile or so of Epping Forest.

When William was six years old the family moved across the Forest to Woodford Hall. The Hall stood in about fifty acres of park, only separated by a fence from the Forest itself. "Behind lay the pathless glades and thickets of hornbeam and beech which still in spite of all encroachments..... remain in all essentials a part of primeval England, little changed in the course of hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. From the Hall the course of the Thames might be traced winding through the marshes". (1)

The Jesuit claim - "Give me the first seven years of a child's life and you may have the rest", was founded on a strong psychological basis much in advance of its time. We cannot find a better example of the shaping influences of environment and early customs than in the boyhood of William Morris.

"If he owed his creativeness to nothing but his own endowment, the colour and atmosphere with which his work came to be suffused were largely influenced by the memory of days spent among the hornbeam thickets of the Essex woodlands and the meadows of Woodford on the edge of Epping Forest".....(2)

Fifty years later the picture which Morris draws

(1) Mackail, J.W., - "The Life of William Morris" - p. 6.

(2) Drinkwater, John, - "William Morris, A Critical Study" p. 24.

of this Essex country in "News from Nowhere", his Utopia of a distant future, gives us a sense of the vividness of his boyhood impressions:

"Eastward and landward," he says "it is all flat pasture, once marsh, except for a few gardens, and there are very few permanent dwellings there, scarcely anything but a few sheds and cots for the men who come to look after the great herds of cattle. What with the beasts and the men, and the scattered red-tiled roofs and the big hayricks, it does not make a bad looking holiday to get a quiet pony and ride about there on a sunny afternoon of autumn, and look over the river and the craft passing up and down, and on to Shorter's Hill and the Kentish uplands, and then turn around to the wide green sea of the Essex marshland, with the great domed line of the sky, and the sun shining down in one flood of peaceful light over the long distance." (1)

With his brothers he roamed park and forest and there was formed "his intense love of nature and his keen eye for all sorts of woodland life." (2)

Epping Forest was to him always "the lady of his delight". A toy suit of armor was one of his most cherished possessions and attired in this he ranged the forest paths on foot or on his Shetland pony and re-peopled it in imagination with the goodly company he was fast making his own in

(1) Morris, William, "News from Nowhere", - p. 79.

(2) Mackail, J. W. "The Life of William Morris", - p. 7.

his reading.

He learned to read unusually young. By the time he was seven he had read all the Waverley Novels and a copy of Gerard's "Herbal" became one of his choicest possessions and a source of inspiration for his own designs in paper and tapestry of later days.

"The love of the Middle Ages was born in him according to his biographer" Mr. J. W. Mackail. The old Essex churches, their monuments and brasses were known by Morris at a very early age. Going "a-brassing" became one of his favorite forms of adventure in his school days. The splendid Essex country houses, which survive from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were equally loved.

From 1843 to 1847 he attended a preparatory school near his home. In 1843 Mr. Morris obtained a grant of arms from the Herald's College and the boy of nine was already of an age and background to be keenly interested in heraldry.

"Marlborough College"

Some time before his death Mr. Morris had bought a nomination to Marlborough College for his son.

The school had been recently founded, "in the centre of one of the most beautiful and romantic parts of England, in a neighborhood full of history and still fuller of pre-historic records.....It is not easy to over-estimate the influence of these surroundings on the development of a sensitive