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F. Eloise Taggart

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF  
F. Eloise Taggart for the Masters  
in English presented on August 1, 1968

Title: William Morris: Esthetic for Community

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This paper analyzes and evaluates William Morris's esthetic for community. He presented this esthetic in lectures, letters, newspaper articles, and the dream novel of a happier future England, News from Nowhere. At the age of forty-three, after becoming an eminent poet and a well-known decorative design artist, he began to devote most of the last twenty years of his life to generating an interest in the better community. First, he worked with people of the upper and middle classes, then he turned his attention to the working men.

I divide the analysis and evaluation of this work of William Morris into five sections. The first section names the man and places him in his period, the Victorian Age. Within the over-all context of the rapid industrial development of this period, I trace the four kinds of change that played significant roles in turning William Morris to a commitment for an esthetic for community--an art-centered society for all Englishmen. These areas are political reform, religious change, scientific development, and a turning to the Middle Ages. I then relate Morris to each area and note his responses.

The second section presents Morris's esthetic philosophy as he outlined it in his first lecture, "The Lesser Arts," and elaborated it in two later lectures, "The Prospects of Architecture" and "How We Live and How We Might Live."

The third section outlines Morris's ever-changing proposals for putting his esthetic into effect. Drawing from his knowledge of history, he first sought simple, much repeated methods that might produce results within the socio-political system as it was. Later, discouraged by lack of whole-hearted response, he moved to a serious

consideration of changing the system and in turn recommended socialism, communism, and finally revolution for a period in the future. Through all this, he held to the basic idea that civilization had developed to the point where change could be consciously planned instead of unconsciously permitted as it had been in the past centuries.

The main part of the thesis, section four, uses some thirty lectures and articles for analyzing his esthetic and uses elements of his novel News from Nowhere, for illustrative purposes. The major elements of his esthetic which carries with it its own politics, religion, education and morality are functionalism, art, beauty, the proper uses of nature, pleasurable work and play, and happiness.

The conclusion suggests how William Morris's esthetic for community which defines a good life in a just and equal society may be relevant to our times. Morris accepted a challenge of his day--motivating the working men, the rising middle class, and the leisure ridden wealthy to the possibilities of a nineteenth-century self-developing esthetic. Our present day faces a similar challenge--motivating the poverty stricken, the well paid middle and

lower classes and the overly affluent to a twentieth century self-developing esthetic.

WILLIAM MORRIS: ESTHETIC FOR COMMUNITY

by

F. ELOISE TAGGART.

A Thesis  
submitted to  
Portland State College

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the

degree of

Master of English

August 1, 1968

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TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

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Aug 5, 1968  
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## WILLIAM MORRIS: ESTHETIC FOR COMMUNITY

### I INTRODUCTION: WILLIAM MORRIS THE VICTORIAN

William Morris was born in 1834 and died in 1896. His life almost coincides with the reign of Queen Victoria. During Morris's sixty-two years, the English pattern moved from faith in "goodness and progress" toward an "aesthetic and Socialist tone" marked by secularism.<sup>1</sup> Probing the complexity of this shift might be one way to write a history of Victorian England, but a brief tracing of four specific areas--political reform, religious change, scientific development, and a turning to the Middle Ages--will go far toward explaining the background of Morris's developing a secularist and eventually socialist esthetic for community.

In 1780, much of England was still rural except for London and a few industrial areas. But, with

<sup>1</sup>G. M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age (New York, 1953), pp.11,166--hereafter cited as Young.

the advent of the railroads around 1800, "new industrial areas were growing up as best they might, undrained, unpoliced, ungoverned, and unschooled."<sup>2</sup> Early in the century, Parliament driven to respond to the needs growing out of the rapid change set a course of liberal reforms. By 1830, this legislative course had become irreversible. The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884 extended the franchise from the self-chosen few to all men. These three legislative acts epitomized the reform movement which extended to many other areas of need. Governmental action was becoming more sophisticated as the English accepted the Benthamite formula for legislative and administrative action--"inquiry, legislation, execution, inspection, and report."<sup>3</sup> This extensive reform moved Victorian England from oligarchy toward democracy but it did not reach down to the burgeoning, miserably oppressed working classes.

As government was adjusting to an age of conscious transition, so was religion. The Evangelicals, whose precursors--the Puritans of the seventeenth century--

<sup>2</sup>Young, p.23.

<sup>3</sup>Young, p.11. Late in the century the Fabian Society would work to permeate all levels of government and society with the determination to use the latest and best methods of empirical and scientific research.

had bolstered duty and renunciation for fear of eternal hell-fire and damnation, could by 1830 feel that "the virtues of a Christian after the Evangelical model were easily exchangeable with the virtues of a successful merchant or a rising manufacturer."<sup>4</sup> They became complacent as they developed assurance that there must be a positive correlation between success and membership in the elect. They could now assume some humanitarian interests.

As the Evangelicals unconsciously adjusted to industrialization, the Anglicans in the early 1830's moved consciously to save themselves from being taken over by James Mill and the Utilitarians.<sup>5</sup> The leaders and advocates of this program (named the Oxford Movement because John Keble initiated it at Oxford with a fiery sermon) became known as Tractarians after its two greatest exponents, John Henry Newman and Edward B. Pusey, wrote a series of essays entitled Tracts for the Times (1833-1841). In these essays, they pleaded for a return to the religious authority and mysticism of the Middle Ages. The Tracts helped the church to brace itself against the onslaught of liberalism by

<sup>4</sup>Young, p.2.

<sup>5</sup>Young, p.67.

instituting some long overdue economic and liturgical reforms. The church sought to create "feelings of beauty, antiquity and mystery" and to replace vulgarity with "new standards of dignity, reverence, and solemnity....The Communion Table ceased to be a depository for hats, the font a receptacle for umbrellas."<sup>6</sup>

To resolve the confusion of transition, the Evangelicals overcame their intense introversion. The Tractarians revitalized their church. A third group the Arnolds--Thomas, William, and Matthew--each in his own way, turned to history and education. Charles Kinglsey recommended a hedonistic renewal of life. These men are among the initiators of the later secularism.

While religion was forging new order, science was generating new doubt. Between 1830 and 1833, Sir Charles Lyell published the three volumes of his Principles of Geology. At small dinner parties he could be led into admitting that the world might be 50,000 years old.<sup>7</sup> Robert Chamber's Vestiges of the

<sup>6</sup>Young, pp.68,73. Newman in 1845 joined the Roman Catholic Church and brought the Oxford Movement into disfavor; however, it quietly continued its work.

<sup>7</sup>Young, p.69.

Natural History of Creation (1844) tended to compose rather than disturb, for it suggested that evolution was synonymous with progress. In 1859, however, Charles Darwin shattered the Mid-Victorian period with his Origin of Species. The business and industrial interests soon "identified the economic struggle for existence with the course of nature" and renewed their battle for laissez faire and against reform.<sup>8</sup>

Alfred Lord Tennyson found "Nature, red in tooth and claw."<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hardy spent some sixty years reconciling religion with science before finding a resolution in "evolutionary meliorism." The English were learning: that truth lies in the process, rather than in the statement; that cosmic indifference was highly probable; that usefulness (functionalism) was a concept demanding conscious application; that man was in new ways closely related to physical nature, animals, birds, and plants.

When political, religious, and scientific changes

<sup>8</sup>Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), p.209.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam A.H.H." Selected Poetry, ed. Herbert Marshall McLuhan (New York, 1956), p.157. "In Memoriam" was written nine years before the Origin but "Tennyson really understood the workings of the new scientific mind" (Young, p. 75, n.l.).

became too oppressive, the Victorians found the appeal of the Middle Ages irresistible. Its uses could be abortive; "conservative, aristocratic circles, where the dread of bourgeois democracy was the strongest" wanted to revive the age in which the military, the feudal, and the church were ascendant and every man knew his place.<sup>10</sup> Its uses could be pleasantly escapist; tired business men, gentle ladies, and college men enjoyed medieval poetry and romances. Its uses could be productive; the Anglican church renewed medieval religious beauty and style; artists and writers incorporated into their work aspects of medieval art and beauty; the serious thinkers--Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin and others--sought in the Middle Ages what would be useful for their new age of transition.

Young described the Victorian Age as having "respect for the past, energy in the present and no great thought for the future."<sup>11</sup> This as an under-

<sup>10</sup>Houghton, The Victorian Frame, p.325. Matthew Arnold in "Democracy" said that some "think that all democracy wants is vigorous putting-down; and that, with a good will and strong hand it is perfectly possible to restore the whole system of the Middle Ages." The Portable Matthew Arnold, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York, 1949), p.456.

<sup>11</sup>Young, p.99.

statement is a very appropriate description of William Morris. Morris had a passionate respect for the past, an unboundless energy for the present and a latent concern for the future until he at forty-three committed himself to this future.

Political and religious reform, scientific discoveries, and medievalism were four bands of the spectrum that was Victorian England, but they go far in explaining Morris's moving through many phases toward his formulating an esthetic for community.

It was not the impressive Parliamentary reforms but the lack of productive solutions for personal and social as well as political problems that always concerned Morris. His first personal problem may well have been always having to be washed and bibbed even for just cheese and crackers. His earliest poem suggests that he could probably survive and flourish without so attentive a nurse.<sup>12</sup> Very early, he began to dream of better ways of doing things, and the better way would always substitute equality and justice for authoritarianism.

<sup>12</sup>Lloyd Wendel Eshleman, A Victorian Rebel: The Life of William Morris (New York, 1940), Ch. II--- hereafter cited as Eshleman.

Born in Walthamstow, a suburb of London, he, as a young boy, was introduced to all of the city.

Having known only the beauty of the countryside, he was shocked with urban dirt, ugliness, and poverty.

In a childhood poem, "The Night Walk," he wrote:

"O! London without pity! / O! ghostly flaring light! /  
 ...It fell on faces, bloated / With many hideous crimes. /  
 ...It fell on hungry faces, / Thin lips, despairing  
 frown, / Truly a dismal place is / That grim, gold-  
 paved town." Before he entered Oxford he wrote, "I  
 will go help you, brother men."<sup>13</sup>

When he went up to Oxford at nineteen, he was ready, in spite of his aristocratic appearance and conservative attitudes to listen intently to the young men from Birmingham who had intimate first-hand knowledge of the conditions of the working classes.<sup>14</sup> "Crom and Dixon spoke of the terrible hardships of the poor, as they had seen them in the slums of Birmingham. Most of them were starving or nearly starving; the only

<sup>13</sup>Eshleman, pp.19,30.

<sup>14</sup>Morris first met Edward Burne-Jones, a young Birmingham man, when they took the entrance examinations together. They immediately became friends, and Morris associated intimately with Burne-Jones' Birmingham group which included William Fulford, Richard R. Dixon, Cornell Price and Charles Joseph Faulkner.



pleasure within their reach being to get drunk on almost poisonous spirits in the gin-palaces of those days."<sup>15</sup>

These young men also read out loud from Shakespeare, Tennyson, Carlyle, and Ruskin among others. Dickens' Hard Times published in 1854 must have received their attention, for Dickens was Morris's favorite author. Thus, as Morris was developing a greater concern for the poor, he was being "nourished by Carlyle's scorn of democratic fetishes and Dickens' ridicule of Parliament," and was forming a "contemptuous indifference" to politics. In 1856, having turned his attention to art, he wrote to Crom, "I can't enter into politico-social subjects with any interest, for on the whole, I see that things are in a muddle, and I have no power or vocation to set them right in ever so little a degree."<sup>16</sup>

With this statement he became a passive but not uninformed Liberal for twenty years. By the 1870's,

<sup>15</sup>Edwin Godwin and Stephanie Godwin, Warrior Bard: The Life of William Morris (London, 1947), p.55.

<sup>16</sup>E. P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (London, 1955), pp.70,71. Thompson notes that Stephen Blackpool in Hard Times described conditions as a muddle.

Morris having become "a public figure, a popular poet and a fashionable decorator"<sup>17</sup> discovered, when he addressed a letter to Atheneum on the inartistic restoration of buildings and another to the Daily News on the Eastern Question, that his prestige gave him political power.

Stimulated with success in political actions, he embarked upon a lecture program. First, he spoke to art groups; then he spoke to the working men with whom he had long identified, for, as an artist, he classified himself as a working man. He soon found that his prestige did not save him from criticism or the loss of friends:

The Saturday Review, with characteristic suavity seized this occasion to point its finger at "This spectacle of the intellectual disaster of the intelligence of a man who could once write 'The Earthly Paradise' and can now formulate these two propositions about the disappearance of all discontented classes and the change involving a life in which every human being finds unrestricted scope for his best powers and faculties." This last phrase, indeed, to judge by the number of times it recurs in the article, was found humorous to an uncommon degree. That such a life should be conceived as possible, that any attempt should be made to realize it, seemed quite preposterous to the critic and to the large body of

<sup>17</sup> Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris (New York, 1967), p.36.--hereafter cited as Paul Thompson.

opinion which he represented. The laws of nature were invoked to sustain the conclusion that a state of things in which the larger number of the human race were permanently poor, ignorant, and brutal was certainly necessary and in all probability desireable.<sup>18</sup>

Such criticism temporarily discouraged Morris, but, in 1882, after he had led his neighbors in a successful campaign opposing a bill to divert their Wardle River, he renewed his political activity to carry on until his death.

His religious beliefs also moved slowly through a process of development. Born into an Evangelical home, he was "not allowed to mix with dissenters with the single exception of Quakers."<sup>19</sup> In 1848, Morris went to Marlborough College where he immediately shed his family's Evangelicalism and responded to the atmosphere which was Tractarian. He left Marlborough intending to become a high church clergyman. At Oxford, he soon discovered that Burne-Jones planned to follow the same calling. Within a few months both were considering turning to Roman Catholicism. During the next two years, however, two crucial

<sup>18</sup>J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris (New York, 1911), II, p.133--hereafter cited as Mackail.

<sup>19</sup>Mackail, I, p.10.

trips to Europe to enjoy medieval churches between which the young men read John Ruskin's "On the Nature of Gothic" in The Stones of Venice turned religious fervor into artistic and literary fervor. Morris soon became an agnostic, but, uncomfortable without a faith, he turned in 1868 to Norse Mythology, learned the Icelandic language, and made two trips to Iceland.<sup>20</sup> After the second trip he wrote, "Surely I have gained a great deal, and it was no idle whim that drew me there, but a true instinct for what I needed."<sup>21</sup> And what he needed was the Norse or Germanic contribution to the Middle Ages--courage, equality, patience, a sense of allegiance, and a comprehension of community.

Morris's accumulating of knowledge of scientific development of his century is difficult to trace; his uses of these materials are not. We know that his childhood in London suburbs introduced him to plants and birds. He knew almost every plant and bird, its name, and its characteristics. He could undoubtedly have become a competent naturalist, but rather, he

<sup>20</sup>Paul Thompson, p.29.

<sup>21</sup>Mackail, I, p.295. Mackail, I, p.39, notes that the Oxford set read Thorpe's Northern Mythology and it "opened to Morris a new world, which in later life became, perhaps, his deepest love."

chose to use this knowledge for living, writing, and art designing.<sup>22</sup> Thus, already in the process of turning away from orthodox religion in 1859 when the Origin was published, he was doubly free to find in it and other contemporary scientific writings what the artist in search of an esthetic for community needed--the concepts of process and functionalism.<sup>23</sup> This latter concept "holds that suitability, efficiency, usefulness and economy should be the prime aims in designing."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Morris, like Gerard Manley Hopkins, carefully scrutinized everything he saw. Any botanist looking at Morris's wallpapers could immediately name the vine, flower, or leaf and would agree that he caught its essence even though the design is stylized. Morris, like Hopkins could also "inscape."

<sup>23</sup>Morris invited by the Pall Mall Gazette to list his favorite books listed only what he considered works of art. He classified all other books as tools for providing information. Morris read with speed and comprehension and probably read every new book of significance. His reading included many current European and American books. William Morris, The Collected Works of William Morris: with Introductions by his Daughter May Morris, 24 vols. (New York, 1966), XXII, pp.xij-xxxij.

<sup>24</sup>Encyclopedia Americana, 1966 ed. Examples of functionalism exist from early time but conscious functionalism was "motivated by the ideals of William Morris and his creed of integrating beauty in the things designed for mass production" as well as in architecture.

Morris probably because of early childhood frailty was caught up in a love for the Middle Ages before Victorian medievalism became a national passion. Learning to read at three or four, he completed Scott's Waverly Novels by eight and many times gave credit to The Heart of Midlothian for his first introduction to the Middle Ages. His father delighted with his precocity took him on trips to see medieval churches. At Marlborough, he found the classes dull but the excellent library books on art, history, and archeology very exciting. At Oxford, where Morris also found classes dull, he and Burne-Jones read Charlotte Yonge's Heir of Redcliffe (which appeared in 1853), Malory's Morte d'Arther and Fouque's Sintram and dreamed of an ascetic brotherhood which would constitute a "Crusade and Holy Warfare against the age."<sup>25</sup> Morris took to drawing and to writing poetry and prose romances all reflecting his enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and other periods in the past. When Burne-Jones and Morris, near the end of Morris's second trip to Europe, visited the Louvre, "where by chance they saw an exhibit of English pre-Raphaelite paintings" their thoughts of turning to

<sup>25</sup>Houghton, The Victorian Frame, p.326.

art became decisive.<sup>26</sup>

Morris first tried architecture then turned to painting to soon meet and marry Jane Burden, a beautiful model. He enlisted all of his friends including Phillip Webb the architect in building his new home. They soon discovered that they could not purchase materials of the quality they desired. Ford Maddox Brown, a new member of the group, suggested casually that they should join together in forming an art decorator's firm. This, in a burst of youthful enthusiasm, is exactly what they did. Their company, known as Morris and Company, was formed in April, 1861. It was not the only decorative arts company but it did incorporate the important innovations of having the artists "take part in the production and sale of their designs." In 1875, Morris became the sole owner, and by 1877 he had become so efficient an administrator he could turn his attention to lecturing and politics.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, he had been writing. In 1858, his "Defence of Guenevere" was so unfavorably received by critics that he turned from literary work for a few years. However, in 1867, The Life and Death of Jason

<sup>26</sup>Paul Thompson, p.6.

<sup>27</sup>Paul Thompson, pp.14,31.

"met with extraordinary success not only with the reviewers but still more with the public."<sup>28</sup> Encouraged, Morris went on rapidly and in 1870 published The Earthly Paradise a poem of 42,000 lines. "Henceforth to the public William Morris was 'the author of The Earthly Paradise'." After this, he turned his interest to Icelandic legends and in 1876 published Sigard the Volsung, his "poetic masterpiece."<sup>29</sup>

By 1877 at the age of 43, he gathered the separate strands of his amazing diversity (all developed within the frame of reference of the Victorian Age) for commitment to the improving of life. He had formulated and imaged his esthetic for community. He had, by first satisfying his own needs for equality and justice, become able to feel empathy for all people and crave a politics that would provide an equality and justice for them. His synthesis of Evangelical, Anglican, and Norse religious concepts had brought him to agnostic humanism. He had trans-

<sup>28</sup>Paul Thompson, pp.19-20.

<sup>29</sup>Paul Thompson pp.20,28. Morris from Oxford days on wrote prose romances as well as translating Greek and Roman epics and Beowulf. His writings not including his lectures fill twenty-two volumes.



formed his knowledge of the new scientific findings into images of processes and usefulness. His early love of Scott's novels had moved him to a love of the church-centered medieval society to the hope for an art-centered society built around a complex of buildings housing discussion halls, museums, the performing arts, and the participating arts.

But despite his writing experience, he found the composing of lectures laborious and painful. In a letter written as he first began to lecture he said, "I know what I want to say, but the cursed words go to water between my fingers."<sup>30</sup> His commitment was so all-encompassing, however, that it generated the concentration to get the words on the page, the energy and ingenuity to assemble audiences, and the strength to read his writing with deep feeling.

In dedicating himself to this strenuous program of action, Morris had an immediate effect upon his own times. He made significant contributions to the labor movement not only in England but also in Europe and in America. He encouraged the improvement of the quality of manufactured goods. The passage of time

<sup>30</sup>Mackail, II, p.67.

has revealed his considerable foresight. His questions, his analyses, his solutions are still relevant to our own times.

The main body of this paper uses Morris's lectures to present his esthetic philosophy and his ideas for implementing it. Then it presents each of the six major elements of his esthetic as he outlined them in the lectures and illustrated them as they appear in his dream novel News from Nowhere (1890).<sup>31</sup> The conclusion suggests the significance of Morris's esthetic for the present day.

<sup>31</sup>Morris for some twelve years of lecturing resists writing News from Nowhere, his picture of his own better society. He was more interested in means than ends; in taking off points than in terminals. He was searching for the way to shift the emphasis, confident that the shift would develop its own momentum. However, he had pictured his new society in his own mind, and Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward did trigger his writing of News from Nowhere. Morris and Bellamy agreed in that they were both tending toward socialism; they disagreed in that Bellamy saw fraternity, equality, and justice as the logical results of industrial success, whereas Morris was convinced they could only develop from making the quality of life the main foundation.

## II MORRIS'S ESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY: "THE LESSER ARTS"

Morris's esthetic philosophy--the foundation for his esthetic for community--is best expressed in his first lecture "The Lesser Arts" delivered before the Trades' Guild of Learning, December 4, 1877. The lesser arts constituted a most logical point of departure for Morris because he himself was a master of some fifteen to twenty crafts. When he said, as he did again and again, that he could only share his own personal experiences, he had a simple but powerful approach--a wealth of direct experiences with the lesser arts.<sup>1</sup>

In the first paragraph of this first lecture, he makes a statement some critics should have analyzed more carefully. They might have understood Raymond Williams' description of certain of Morris's often

<sup>1</sup>Morris in his youth tried painting and architectural design. In his decorative design shop, he became proficient in many of the lesser arts including: dyeing; weaving; designing of furniture, chintzes, wallpapers and embroidery. He is probably best known for his chairs, although furniture designing was one of his less developed skills. He turned to these arts one at a time as he despaired of the finished products that he could purchase. His poetry, which he often composed as he was dyeing or weaving, is now considered a lesser art. After designing books, he established his own Kelmscott Press for which he designed paper and type. His printing set new high standards which influenced printing in England, Europe, and America.

repeated graphic phrases of intense praise and even more intense blame as "generalized swearing."<sup>2</sup> They might have realized that he was not an abortive medievalist or an outdated romantic opposed to the machine. Morris says,

I must ask you...to believe that whatever I may blame or whatever I may praise, I neither, when I think of what history has been, am inclined to lament the past, to despise the present, or despair of the future; that I believe all the change and stir about us is a sign of the world's life, and that it will lead--by ways, indeed, of which we have no guess--to the bettering of all mankind.<sup>3</sup>

He then distinguishes between the greater arts--architecture, sculpture, painting--and the lesser arts--the decorative arts--although he knows well that they should be inextricably interrelated and through most of history they have been:

It is only in latter times, and under the most intricate conditions of life, that they have fallen

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (New York, 1958), p. 151. It is essential for the reader of Morris's lectures to realize that they are socio-political in nature and designed to motivate specially chosen audiences to improve their lives. They are a lesser not a greater literature well and wisely crafted to their exact purpose.

<sup>3</sup>William Morris, The Collected Works of William Morris: with Introductions by his Daughter May Morris, 24 vols. (New York, 1966), XXII, p.3--hereafter cited as Works.

apart from one another; and I hold that, when they are so parted, it is ill for the Arts altogether: the lesser ones become trivial, mechanical, unintelligent, incapable of resisting the changes pressed upon them by fashion or dishonesty; while the greater, however they may be practised for a while by men of great minds and wonder-working hands, unhelped by the lesser, unhelped by each other, are sure to lose their dignity of popular arts, and become nothing but dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men.<sup>4</sup>

Having pictured the greater and lesser arts again being brought together, he points out that "everything made by man's hand has a form which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature and thwarts her; it cannot be indifferent." He can now say, "To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce use, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce make, that is the other use of it." Thus, he expands the greater and lesser arts again interrelated outward or downward to include all useful work well done excepting only the hopelessly dull and back-breaking labor of mining, ditch digging etc. Art thus imaged becomes an

<sup>4</sup>Works, XXII, pp.3-4.

all-pervasive expression of the common life.<sup>5</sup>

It is history and archeology, that tells us of an on-going but varying relationship between decoration and industry. All pre-historical and historical periods are important. We must know them and know them well, for the arts are interwoven with this history. It is in this history that we find that the arts

are part of a great system invented for the expression of a man's delight in beauty: all peoples and times have used them; they have been the joy of free nations, and the solace of oppressed nations; religion has used and elevated them, has abused and degraded them; they are connected with all history, and are clear teachers of it; and, best of all, they are the sweeteners of human labour, both to the handicraftsman, whose life is spent in working in them, and to people in general who are influenced by the sight of them at every turn of the day's work: they make our toil happy, our rest fruitful.<sup>6</sup>

History shows us that the growing complexity of life slowly separated the great men, the lesser

<sup>5</sup>Works, XXII, pp.4,5. Morris will never clearly define "art", "nature", "beauty", "pleasure", etc. Paul Thompson says that "his definitions are never very satisfactory." (p.221). Actually, much of Morris's power lies in this imprecision. By not defining, he turns these concepts into images and esthetic experiences which can become broader and more flexible.

<sup>6</sup>Works, XXII, p. 8.

men, and the little men, and each of the three groups have suffered. The great developed contempt, the little developed carelessness, and the lesser were stranded in between. The ugliness of the cities, the tawdriness of cheap products, and the lack of good taste of expensive products, are some of the results.<sup>7</sup> We should not study history in order to imitate older forms of art. We can never return to the unconscious intelligence revealed in pre-historic cave drawings or to the partially conscious cooperation of the Middle Ages. We can, however, have "a new art of conscious intelligence, the birth of wiser, simpler, freer ways of life than the world leads now, than the world has ever led."<sup>8</sup>

As history should be the first teacher, nature should be the second. For Morris, Nature included not only the earth as yet untouched by man but also man, beast, city, town, village, farmhouse, and cultivated field. He called the untouched earth the "Natural

<sup>7</sup>Morris is invariably generous in his praise of John Ruskin for noting in his "The Nature of Gothic" in The Stones of Venice that cooperation of artists and workmen produced the beauty of the medieval town. Lewis Mumford says in The City in History (New York, 1961), Ch. 15, that undoubtedly nineteenth-century English industrialism bolstered by laissez-faire produced the ugliest cities in all history.

<sup>8</sup>Works, XXII, p.12.

Fairness of the Earth."<sup>9</sup> His rules for its use were simple. Every bit of earth that is changed should be replaced by beauty; every bit that has been marred by ugliness should be returned to its original fairness or be rebuilt. Every city and town should retain or replace much of the Natural Fairness of the Earth so that no one lives without it.<sup>10</sup> This approach would take an inconceivable amount of thought, work, and expense, but if we do not do it, the "terrible swift multiplication of the race" can turn a "hopeful desert" into a "hopeless prison." Fortunately England has not until recently been "impressed by pomp or ingenuity" and at its best has had "an inventiveness, an individuality." Reconsider history and nature. We should then be able to eliminate what is bad in our period and recover what was good from previous times.<sup>11</sup>

The third teacher is the drawing teacher. No one should be taught the art of designing which cannot be

<sup>9</sup>Works, XXII, p.148. Morris speaks of Nature in "The Lesser Arts" but does not develop his ideas about Nature until his lecture "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," delivered at the London Institution, March 10, 1881.

<sup>10</sup>Here, Morris anticipates the Garden City of Ebenezer Howard as well as English and American Urban Renewal programs.

<sup>11</sup>Works, XXII, pp.120,18.



learned. Everyone, however, through learning to draw can gain a "general capability in dealing with the arts." With an understanding of the relation of the arts, a knowledge of history, and some skill in drawing, we can eliminate sham and show and achieve "general cultivation of the powers of the mind, general cultivation of the powers of the eye and hand."<sup>12</sup>

In this manner, we can renew our awareness that "simplicity of life begetting simplicity of taste, that is, a love for sweet and lofty things, is of all matters most necessary for the birth of the new and better art we crave for; simplicity everywhere, in the palace as well as in the cottage." And science can assume a cooperative role. It can teach "Manchester how to consume its own smoke, or Leeds how to get rid of its superfluous black dye without turning it into the river."<sup>13</sup>

Everyone should become involved, for

I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few....

I have a sort of faith...that men will get wiser, as well as more learned; that many of the intricacies of life, on which we now pride ourselves more than enough, partly because they are

<sup>12</sup>Works, XXII, pp.20,21.

<sup>13</sup>Works, XXII, pp.24,25.

new, partly because they have come with the gain of better things, will be cast aside as having played their part, and being useful no longer. I hope that we shall have leisure from war--war commercial, as well as war of the bullet and the bayonet; leisure from the knowledge that darkens counsel; leisure above all from the greed of money, and the craving for that overwhelming distinction that money now brings: I believe that as we have even now partly achieved LIBERTY, so we shall one day achieve EQUALITY, which, and which only, means FRATERNITY, and so have leisure from poverty and all its griping, sordid cares.

Then having leisure from all these things, amidst renewed simplicity of life we shall have leisure to think about our work, that faithful daily companion, which no man any longer will venture to call the Curse of labour: for surely then we shall be happy in it, each in his place, no man grudging at another; no one bidden to be any man's servant, every one scorning to be any man's master: men will then assuredly be happy in their work, and that happiness will assuredly bring forth decorative, noble, popular art.

That art will make our streets as beautiful as the woods, as elevating as the mountain-sides: it will be a pleasure and a rest, and not a weight upon the spirits to come from the open country into a town; every man's house will be fair and decent, soothing to his mind and helpful to his work: all the works of man that we live amongst and handle will be in harmony with nature, will be reasonable and beautiful: yet all will be simple and uninspiring, not childish nor enervating; for as nothing of beauty and splendour that man's mind and hand may compass shall be wanting from our public buildings, so in no private dwelling will there be any signs of waste, pomp, or insolence, and every man will have his share of the best.

It is a dream, you may say, of what has never been and never will be; true it has never been and therefore, since the world is alive and moving yet, my hope is the greater that it one day will be: true, it is a dream; but...it lies at the bottom of all my work in the Decorative Arts, nor will it ever be out of my thoughts: and I am here with you to-night

to ask you to help me in realizing this dream, this hope.<sup>14</sup>

There is real hope because we are now ready for change:

In the early days of the history of man he was the slave of his most immediate necessities; Nature was mighty and he was feeble, and he had to wage constant war with her for his daily food and such shelter as he could get....Now after all these ages he has almost completely conquered Nature, and one would think should now have leisure to turn his thoughts towards higher things than procuring tomorrow's dinner. But, alas! his progress has been broken and halting,...[for] he still has himself to conquer, he still has to think how he will best use those forces which he has mastered. At present he uses them blindly, foolishly, as one driven by mere fate. It would almost seem as if some phantom of the ceaseless pursuit of food which was once the master of the savage was still hunting the civilized man; who toils in a dream, as it were, haunted by mere dim unreal hopes, born of vague recollections of the days gone by. Out of that dream he must wake, and face things as they really are....Now our business is, and has for long been the organization of man, who wields the forces of Nature. Nor till this is attempted at least shall we ever be free of that terrible phantom of fear of starvation which, with its brother devil, desire of domination, drives us into injustice, cruelty, and dastardliness of all kinds: to cease to fear our fellows and learn to depend on them, to do away with competition and build up co-operation, is our one necessity.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Works, XXII, pp.26-27.

<sup>15</sup>"How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, pp.14-15.

We can fail in the making of any attempt. We can say, "We are living under a system that makes conscious effort towards reconstruction almost impossible," or we can say, "There are certain definite obstacles to the real progress of man; we can tell you what these are; take them away, and then you shall see."<sup>16</sup>

The first obstacle to be removed is war of all kinds; the war of rival nations, the war of rival firms; the war of rival men. We know that a war of any kind is "a good occasion for damping down democracy."<sup>17</sup> As we decrease war of all kinds, we can strengthen democracy and set goals for all men: "First, a healthy body; second an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future; thirdly, occupation fit for a healthy body and an active mind; and fourthly, a beautiful world to live in...As the working-classes, the real organic part of society, take in these ideas, hope will arise in them, and they will claim changes in society....[Then] looking backward on what has been, we shall be astonished to think of how long we submitted to live as we live now."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Works, XXIII, p.4.

<sup>17</sup>Works, XXIII, p.6.

<sup>18</sup>Works, XXIII, pp.25-26.

## III IMPLEMENTATION: TECHNIQUES FOR CHANGE

William Morris's lectures immediately attracted attention and comment; his idiom was brisk, his ideas were controversial. Although his first audiences were small, devoted wealthy clients and middle class friends invariably augmented the groups that attended; newspapers reported his talks with editorial comment. Soon, his public was asking him how he would put into effect the changes that he recommended. They wanted to consider a step by step plan for getting there, a map that would lead them to the destination. This questioning challenged Morris and pushed him to the contemplating of all possibilities. From his first lecture "The Lesser Arts" his esthetic for community had burst forth fully developed.<sup>1</sup> He would for the remainder of his life restate and elaborate it, but he would not revise it. Perhaps, quietly stated in this first lecture was his best plan for achieving a worthy goal.

In this, he had said, "I suppose that if some half-dozen men at any time earnestly set their hearts

<sup>1</sup>Morris began developing his esthetic in early childhood. Mackail said that Morris throughout his life often introduced comments with, "When I was a little chap..." Often the episode would be amusing; more often it would deal with whatever had challenged his ideas of justice and equality. The formulating of his esthetic began early and continued through his first forty-three years.

on something coming about which is not discordant with nature, it will come to pass one day or another; because 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."<sup>2</sup>

This basic idea of Morris on how things come to pass probably remained unchanged. It was that the right people promoting the right project at the right moment might set in motion ramifications that would be both unending and affirmative. Thirteen years later in the novel The Dream of John Ball (1888), Morris, frustrated but also matured and mellowed by years of intense political activity, pondered "how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."<sup>3</sup>

In the intervening years (1877-1888), Morris worked

<sup>2</sup>Works, XXII, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Works, XVI, pp.231-232. Both John Ball and News were written as serials in Commonweal, the socialist weekly paper which Morris edited. John Ball, a story of medieval England, includes a powerful social message.

with every available idea to provide more specific suggestions for takeoff points. The first of these came in 1879 when he read his "Making the Best of It" before the Trades' Guild of Learning and the Birmingham Society of Artists. In this lecture, Morris suggests that the right people, the right project, and the right time could well be the middle class making their homes attractive inside and out right now. With a few exceptions, middle class homes at the present time are ugly and inconvenient. "We are heedless if our houses express nothing of us but the very worst side of our character both national and personal."<sup>4</sup>

We can't tear them all down at once, but we can "follow the fashion of our nation, so often, so very often called practical" and encourage each family to apply the basic rules of art to make its dwelling "fit for people free in mind and body." With thought and work, we can give these houses and yards, often without too much expense, a reasonably gratifying beauty, convenience, order, and meaning.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Works, XXII, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup>Works, XXII, p. 86. Morris's firm planned and executed very expensive interior decoration, but he often said that he preferred white-wash for walls and that the first move toward creating beauty in English homes would be to have a bonfire and burn 90% of the stuff in them.

Let the middle-class people seek the "well-tidied space" and comprehend its pleasure and they will come to demand it "in that other kind of building, which I think, under some name or other, whether you call it Church or Hall of Reason, or what not, will always be needed; the building in which people meet to forget their own transient personal and family troubles in aspirations for their fellows and the days to come, and which to a certain extent make up to town-dwellers for their loss of field, and river, and mountain." These two steps toward better living might well attract the rich men who won't have art because they lack good taste and the poor men who can't have it because they can't afford it "to be overtaken with a restless feeling that something is lacking." A move toward artistic living might well spread upward and downward to everyone.<sup>6</sup>

Morris in "Making the Best of It" presents one possible takeoff point--middle class housing--but he concludes this lecture with one of his generalizations that he has learned from history. He says, "Have you not heard how it has gone with many a cause before now?

<sup>6</sup>Works, XXII, p.114.



First, a few men heed it; next, most men condemn it; lastly, all men accept it---and the cause is won."<sup>7</sup> This statement along with others he made constantly implies that Morris had observed how societies function. Change is inevitable; thus far it had been unconscious. Various developments, however, had brought the industrialized society to a point where it could plan consciously. Not the plan but realization that planning was now possible was one of his major theses. In "The Lesser Arts" he had described his own period as one "of plenteous knowledge and meager performance."<sup>8</sup> He doesn't know the answers but he is committed to the search for them. He recognizes the time has come to begin raising the performance up to the knowledge.

These general ideas for accomplishing change remain the constants for Morris while he tried out English socialism and worshipped for some four years at the altar of Karl Marx. Morris first read Karl Marx in French in 1883. Finding that he had difficulty understanding economics, he read extensively in this field. In 1887, he returned to Marx and bringing his

<sup>7</sup>Works, XXII, p.118.

<sup>8</sup>Works, XXII, p.15.

pragmatic and artistic mind to bear refined Marx for his own uses. He became a communist but differed from Marx in that he worked for an art-centered not an economic-centered community.

From 1880 on, the lectures elaborate the esthetic and present ever changing possibilities for implementation. In 1890, Morris images his esthetic in his dream novel News from Nowhere. In News, Morris dreams that he travels in the England of 2050. This new England, having endured a Marxian type revolution which began in 1952 and lasted for two years, found its way slowly to equality, justice, pleasurable work, and an emergent esthetic. "Nowhere", ideal though it seems, is an open-ended society. It is not static; it is not an end. It is only a long step forward. It is not the statement but the process.<sup>9</sup> This paper now presents the major elements of this esthetic as analyzed in the lectures and as pictured in News. These five major elements are: functionalism; art; beauty; the proper uses of nature; hopeful work and fearless play; calm, dignified happiness.

<sup>9</sup> William Morris, as completely devoted in the nineteenth century to non-violent resistance as were Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, in the twentieth, dated his violent revolution in News at least twenty-five years after his own longest possible life span. For his own time, he defined revolution as rapid but peaceful evolution.

#### IV ESTHETIC FOR COMMUNITY

##### 1. Functionalism: Economy of Usefulness

Functionalism, art, and beauty cannot be separated except for purposes of discussion. Moreover, Morris does not use the words "functional" or "functionalism." He was in the process of discovering and defining them as the application of art and beauty to good living in an age confused with new complexities.

Morris's study of history had convinced him that what we call the industrial age and what he called commercialism began about 1500 with the discovery of gunpowder and the invention of the printing press. "With the close of the fifteenth century, The Great Change, [the process of moving from the 'Medieval Society of Status' into the modern 'Society of Contract'], became obvious..... This Great Change, I say, was necessary and inevitable." It brought misery and degradation but "it had a beneficent function to perform; that amidst all the ugliness and confusion which it brought with it, it was a necessary instrument for the development of freedom of thought and the capacities of man; for the subjugation of nature to his material needs."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>May Morris, William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist (New York, 1966), I, pp.280-281--hereafter cited as May Morris.

Over 400 years into this process, the time has come, says Morris, to consciously replace the misery, degradation, ugliness, dirt, squalor, and confusion with cleanliness, orderliness, fitness, usefulness, simplicity, dignity, and unity.<sup>2</sup> We need a logical and organic style which is suitable to our times.

From the towns of the Middle Ages "well be-churched, often walled," we can learn much.<sup>3</sup> These communities had a definite perimeter that created a sense of security. They had a major center--the church--and minor centers--the guild halls. The homes served as shops for crafts and the apprentices lived in the homes. The sense of community prevailed. Within the town walls were open spaces for orchards and grains so that, besieged, the town could survive.

<sup>2</sup>These two lists of words which in reverse order now define functionalism or the lack of it appear throughout the lectures.

<sup>3</sup>Mackail, I, p.12. Lewis Mumford's The City in History, p.316, suggests that the medieval town provided the best life until the advent of the modern garden city. In the Medieval town, human excrement was added to the dung heap which was used for fertilizer; the pigs acted as the sanitation commission. Kenneth Clark in The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste (New York, 1962), p. 202, says "we cannot read it, [Ruskin's "Nature of Gothic"] without a thrill, without a sudden resolution to reform the world."

Morris does not suggest slavishly imitating any period in the past. He suggests that his century apply the best esthetic principles (some of which would be from the Middle Ages) to create an expression of its needs and way of life. He understood each new period was different. He recommended that the rich "return to unaffected simplicity of life---though in a complicated eclectic age, a too deliberate simplicity can also be affectation."<sup>4</sup>

In "Making the Best of It" Morris instructs the middle-class home owners in the making of the gardens and homes clean, orderly, useful, and pleasurable. He begins with the garden, goes to the exterior of the house, and then to the interior. He deals with ceilings, walls, floors. Of furniture, he says, "An excess of [it] destroys the repose of a lazy man, and is in the way of an industrious one."<sup>5</sup>

He comments on the various rooms:

A dining-room ought not to look as if one went into it as one goes into a dentist's parlour--for an operation, and came out of it when the

<sup>4</sup>Phillip Henderson, William Morris: His Life Work and Friends (London, 1967), p.153.

<sup>5</sup>Works, XXII, p.261.

operation was over--the tooth out, or the dinner in. A drawing-room ought to look as if some kind of work could be done in it less toilsome than being bored. A library certainly ought to have books in it, not boots only, as in Thackeray's country snob's house, but so ought each and every room in the house more or less; also, though all rooms should look tidy, and even very tidy, they ought not to look too tidy.<sup>6</sup>

Just as every middle class home could be made functional so could every factory. Soon after Morris joined the Democratic Federation in 1883, he wrote "A Factory As It Might Be" for their weekly paper Justice.<sup>7</sup> In this article divided into three parts, Morris says that a factory surrounded by a garden should serve its purpose and should be generously built. It would include dining hall, library, school, places for study of various kinds. The inside would be "pleasant and agreeable" and provide useful work. The machines would be "of the most ingenious and best approved kinds." The factory would be a gathering place "for increasing the general pleasure of life and raising its standard material and intellectual." It

<sup>6</sup>Works, XXII, p.113.

<sup>7</sup>The Democratic Federation formed in 1881 from various radical clubs became a socialist organization in 1884 and assumed the name of Social Democratic Federation. Late in 1884, Morris led a number of members out of the Social Democratic Federation to set up a new party, the Socialist League.

would offer education for both children and adults and opportunities for developing hobbies.<sup>8</sup>

For the working people, Morris envisioned houses "built in tall blocks." These could provide the comforts of space, privacy, and a "due share of pure air and sunlight." There would be garden space for each block so "every child could be able to play in a garden close to the place where his parents live." These vertical houses could have "common laundries and kitchens...and airy public rooms in addition to their private ones; the top story of each block might well be utilized for such purposes; the great hall for dining in, and for social gathering, being the chief feature of it.... Such public rooms would not interfere with the ordinary private life of each family or individual."<sup>9</sup>

Morris always enjoyed functional simplicity when he found it and always suffered when it was lacking.

<sup>8</sup>May Morris, II, pp.130-140. In The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends, ed. Phillip Henderson (New York, 1950), p.xxiii. "George Campfield the foreman [of Morris's shop] has left it on record that conditions in the works at Merton Abbey were 'as near paradise as anything could be'. A long and hitherto unpublished letter to Georgina Burne-Jones of June 1, 1884 gives a reasoned exposition of his position as an employer." For letter, see p.196-200.

<sup>9</sup>May Morris, II, pp. 127-128. Works, XXIII, p.23.

Throughout his life his letters to friends were a running commentary on this simplicity. Of Westbury, he writes, "Quite a pretty town and as gay as gay; away from the downs in a steep little valley built up the southern-looking slope; all up and down with steps and queer nooks: of stone every house, most of them old....The bridge fifteenth century with a queer little toll-house on it." A few days later he writes, "The harvest being now out of the barn, we saw the corbels that support the wall pieces: they are certainly not later than 1250, so the barn is much earlier than I thought. The building of the walls and buttresses is remarkably good and solid." In another letter, he describes an addition to a rich man's home: "Fancy, in one of the rooms there was not a pane of glass that opened!"<sup>10</sup>

In Morris's dream novel News from Nowhere (1890), which describes the England of 2050 as Morris found it on a boat trip on the Thames, every square inch of it had achieved what we now call functionalism.<sup>11</sup> The

<sup>10</sup>Letters, pp.314,315,323.

<sup>11</sup>News from Nowhere, Works, XVI, pp.3-205--hereafter cited in text by page.



Guest House where he had his first breakfast was "designed with a force and directness" and gave one "that exhilarating sense of space and freedom which satisfactory architecture always gives to an unanxious man who is in the habit of using his eyes"(13-14). Farm houses "were all pretty in design and as solid as might be, but countryfied in appearance"(23). In Hammersmith, where Morris lived for years he came upon "a range of buildings of a splendid and exuberant style of architecture"(24). These were the market place, mote-house, and theatre. Beautiful old buildings had been cleaned up so that there was "elbow room within doors"(33). In Piccadilly, the shops displayed wares "in their finely designed fronts" and "on each side of the street ran an elegant arcade to protect foot passengers"(33).

Holborn, also a part of London as is Piccadilly, had a public group of buildings across from a "wide space of greenery without any wall or fence of any kind"(49). Along the river "a little town of quaint and pretty houses, some new, some old," was dominated by a large old building, "but so blended together by the bright sun and beautiful surroundings...[that] it had a strange charm about it"(144-145). In Pangbourne, there "were five large houses in sight, very carefully

designed so as not to hurt the character of the country" (170). "All the signs of squalor and poverty had disappeared from" Wallingford; "many ugly houses had been taken down and pretty new ones built" (176). The hill of Hinksey had "two or three very pretty stone houses new-grown on it" (186). "Along the Thames, there were abundance of mills used for various purposes; none of which were in any degree unsightly, and many strikingly beautiful; and the gardens about them marvels of loveliness" (195, n.). The bridges were "spendidly solid and as graceful as they were strong; high enough also to let ordinary river traffic through easily" (8). It was a delight to view the landscape through their graceful arches.

All the people whom he saw as he and his companions stopped along the way to eat, sleep, and look about were attractively dressed in clothes comfortable and suitable for the occasion. All the buildings from the smallest house to the largest hall were properly and pleasingly equipped "with all the appliances fit for carrying on a dignified and happy life" (XXII, 241). Morris may not have coined the term "functionalism," but, in his lectures, he analyzes it and in News he demonstrates it.

## 2. Art: An All-Pervasive Factor

To return to the lectures, art in its broadest sense--all useful work well done--is the core of Morris's esthetic.<sup>12</sup> "Art is a very serious thing and cannot by any means be dissociated from the weighty matters that occupy the thoughts of men."<sup>13</sup> "It is not possible to dissociate art from morality, politics, and religion. Truth in these great matters of principle is of one." If we stop to think for a moment we realize that "history (so called) has remembered the kings and warriors, because they destroyed, [and] art has remembered the people, because they created." But, for art to flourish it must be "of the people for the people, and by the people; it must understand all and be understood by all....It will not be an esoteric mystery shared by a little band of superior beings; it will be no more hierarchical than the art of past time was, but like it will be a gift of the people to the people, a thing

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Munro, "Four Hundred Arts and Types of Art: A Classified List," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XVI (Sept., 1957), p.44-65. Munro includes in his list; cooking, make-up, flower arranging, gardening, etiquette, fireworks, etc.

<sup>13</sup>"The Art of the People," Works, XXII, p.29.

which everybody can understand, and everyone surround with love; it will be a part of every life, and a hindrance to none."<sup>14</sup>

In these comments, William Morris quotes and paraphrases Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Morris truly belongs to the democratic tradition. When the Reform Act of 1867 extended the vote to many working men, he assumed these men would move to make their needs known. They did not do this. During the ten years between 1867 and 1877, the year of his first lecture, Morris began to comprehend that men do not become politically effective without training. As he moved to help the newly enfranchised, he discovered that Parliament was reluctant to respond. It was accustomed to reacting to pressure groups with long-standing prestige. This provided one reason for his turning to socialism and communism and condemning national government.

Critics who find Morris's lectures and his dream novel News from Nowhere idealistic or inconsistent with human nature do not seem to realize that art as he understood it becomes a nucleus that carries with it

<sup>14</sup>Works, XXII, pp.47,32,133-134.

or holds in orbit a politics which is democratic and firmly grounded in local government; a morality that is free and unascetic but very responsible; and a religion that allows men and women to be free, happy, and energetic.

Morris wishes people "to understand that the art we are striving for is a good thing which all can share, which will elevate all." We go to museums to see artifacts and call them wonderful. "Well these things are just the common household goods of those past days, and that is one reason why they are few and so carefully treasured. They were common things in their own day, used without fear of breaking or spoiling--no rareties then.... They were made by 'common fellows' as the phrase goes, in the common course of their daily labour. Such were the men we honour in honouring these works."<sup>15</sup>

Now, machines that could free us for leisure have so multipli [ed] "our material wants unnecessarily" that labour has become more "grievous and oppressive" than before and much of the goods are "either wretched makeshifts, or, what is worse, degrading shams of better things" or if expensive not in good taste.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>"The Art of the People," Works, XXII, pp.39,40.

<sup>16</sup>"The Lesser Arts of Life," Works, XXII, pp.238, 239.

Morris in "The Lesser Arts of Life" suggests that we consider some of the lesser arts. He asserts that pottery should "be of a convenient shape for its purpose. ...The lines of contour must flow easily," and the ornament, if any, must fit the piece. For inexpensive pottery, we should settle for workmanlike finish and "not demand excessive neatness." Good pottery costs more, but we "can have less and break less." As for the related art of making glass, "never till our day has an ugly or stupid glass vessel been made." The new glass is clear, without bubbles, thin, and easily breakable. The older glass was more interesting and more durable.<sup>17</sup>

Weaving, another important art, is undeniably mechanical but do only what "weaving can do." Do not "torment" the materials or the machine. Let the design look woven not painted or engraved.<sup>18</sup>

Of dyeing, Morris points out that the "old dyes were much more difficult to use"; therefore the pattern had to be "peculiarly suitable." Now, with the new dyes, we can do anything, and the patterns often "look poor and tame and wiry." Why not have material plain "unless

<sup>17</sup>Works, XXII, pp.243-244,246,247.

<sup>18</sup>Works, XXII, pp.250.

the pattern is really beautiful"? And why have wallpaper that does not give "keen delight"? It would be much better "to choose honest whitewash instead, on which sun and shadow play so pleasantly."<sup>19</sup>

"Simplicity is the one thing needed in furniture" in terms of both quantity and design. We do not need "to imitate the minor vices of the Borgias or the degraded and nightmare whims of the blasé and bankrupt French aristocracy....Our furniture should be good citizen's furniture, solid and well made in workmanship."<sup>20</sup>

With some trepidation, Morris suggests that clothing could be a lesser art if men and women brought basic rules to bear. As of the moment the males are hopeless victims. Morris says, "I find it difficult to admit that a chimney-pot hat or a tail-coat is the embodiment of wisdom in clothes-philosophy; and sometimes in my more skeptical moments I puzzle myself in thinking why, when I am indoors, I should wear two coats, one with a back and no front, the other with a front and no back." But women's clothes can also be an abomination. Women's clothes could be "graceful and sensible." "Ladies....

<sup>19</sup>Works, XXII, pp.259-260.

<sup>20</sup>Works, XXII, p.261.

you should keep your liberty of choice....Garments should veil the human form, and neither caricature it, nor obliterate its lines; the body should be draped, and neither sewn up in a sack, nor stuck in the middle of a box....Do not allow yourselves to be upholstered like armchairs."<sup>21</sup>

In concluding "The Lesser Arts of Life," Morris says, "I believe the day is not far distant when the best of men will set to work trying to simplify life on a new basis....Therefore, I ask you to apply the remedy of refusing to be ignorant and nose-led about the arts."<sup>22</sup>

In "Nowhere"--the England of Morris's dream as yet unrealized--all of the country that he saw had adapted art of, by, and for the people. All ugly buildings had been torn down; all the buildings old and new were useful, simple, and artistic. When he had dinner in Bloomsbury market, "the glass, crockery, and plate were very beautiful....A nineteenth century club-haunter would, I daresay, have found them rough and lacking in finish; the crockery being lead-glazed pot-ware, though beautifully ornamented; the only

<sup>21</sup>Works, XXII, pp.262-263,264-265.

<sup>22</sup>Works, XXII, pp.267-268.



porcelain being here and there a piece of old oriental ware. "The glass, again, though elegant and quaint, and very varied in form, was somewhat bubbled" and horny in texture(101). "The wall pictures...were taken from queer old-world myths and imaginations....They [were] graceful and pleasant subjects, not too tragic for a place where people mostly eat and drink and amuse themselves, and yet full of incident"(100).

Morris and his traveling companions visited an old house in which "there was but little furniture, and that only the most necessary, and of the simplest forms." One room "was still hung with old tapestry, originally of no artistic value, but now faded into pleasant grey tones which harmonized thoroughly well with the quiet of the place, and which would have been ill supplanted by brighter and more striking decoration" (202-203).

All along the way, everyone was artistically dressed. On the drive back to Hammersmith, the travelers saw people who "were clad in colours that were sober enough, though beautiful, and the harmony of the colours was perfect and most delightful....The shape of their raiment, apart from its colour was both beautiful and reasonable--veiling the form, without either muffling or caricaturing it"(138-139).

### 3. Beauty: Places, Things, Persons

For the purpose of examining beauty, we turn again to Morris's lectures. Simplicity and usefulness artistically expressed can create beauty, but the basis of these three must be cleanliness and orderliness. The commercialized world is everywhere growing uglier and more commonplace.<sup>23</sup> We know ugliness follows upon industrialization. One beautiful spot after another has been despoiled. The town of Burslem makes "as much smoke as pottery."<sup>24</sup> The whole country is responsible for "the devouring hideousness and squalor of our great towns, and especially for London."<sup>25</sup> The beauty of Oxford has given "way to the pressure of commercial exigencies;"<sup>26</sup>

Surely there must be few of us to whom this degrading change has not been brought home personally. I think you will most of you understand me but too well when I ask you to remember the pang of dismay that comes on us when we revisit some spot of country which has been specially sympathetic to us in times past; which has

<sup>23</sup>"The Aims of Art," Works, XXII, p.86.

<sup>24</sup>"Art and the Beauty of the Earth," Works, XXII, p.174.

<sup>25</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p.136.

<sup>26</sup>"The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, p.85.

refreshed us after toil, or soothed us after trouble; but where now as we turn the corner of the road or crown the hill's brow we can see first the inevitable blue slate roof, and then the blotched and mud-coloured stucco, or ill-built wall of ill-made bricks of the new buildings; then as we come nearer and see the arid and pretentious little gardens, and cast-iron horrors of railings, and miseries of squalid out-houses breaking through the sweet meadows and abundant hedge-rows of our old quiet hamlet, do not our hearts sink within us, and are we not troubled with a perplexity?<sup>27</sup>

He continues to exert moral indignation to stir his audience to seriously consider the prospects of architecture. "We are here in the richest city [London] of the richest country of the richest age of the world: no luxury of time past can compare with our luxury; and yet if you could clear your eyes from habitual blindness you would have to confess that there is no crime against art, no ugliness, no vulgarity which is not shared with perfect fairness and equality between the modern hovels of Bethnal Green and the modern palaces of the West End."<sup>28</sup>

The cleaning of England is the first thing to do and the most necessary thing to do. Those who are to

<sup>27</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p.125.

<sup>28</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p.124.

make beautiful things must live in a beautiful place. "Until our streets are decent and orderly and our town gardens break the bricks and mortar every here and there and are open to all the people...our museums and art schools will be but amusements of the rich."<sup>29</sup>

Beauty can encompass everyone and everything. There can be nothing more beautiful than clean healthy men, women, and children simply but beautifully clad. All the buildings can be beautiful: the old house in the new town; the new house in the old town; the factory properly planned. Every city, town, and village can retain what is beautiful, eliminate what is not, and demand beauty in anything that is added. As for the interiors of dwellings, there is a "golden rule: Have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."<sup>30</sup>

Morris was being honest when he began his first lecture by saying he would only speak from his own experience. His own home was a classic example of this golden rule. George Bernard Shaw said of one of Morris's Homes:

<sup>29</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p.138.

<sup>30</sup>"The Beauty of Life," Works, XXII, p.77.

Nothing in it was there because it was interesting or quaint or rare or hereditary, like grandmother's or uncle's portrait. Everything that was necessary was clean and handsome; everything else was beautiful and beautifully presented....Throughout it all there had reigned an artistic taste of extraordinary integrity: not once had its owner been seduced by any other interest or association....I, the most irreverent of mankind, felt its magic instantly and deeply.<sup>31</sup>

As Morris came to think of himself as a socialist and communist, he often spoke of communal living for those who would enjoy it. Some of the people in his "Nowhere" of 2050 live in family homes; some live communally in the old castles and the large estates of earlier times. Of his own home, he said that it was where he met people with whom he sympathized, whom he loved. He could not have accepted communal living for himself although he was generous in his hospitality.

In News from Nowhere, Morris was most impressed with the twenty-first century's achievement in combining the useful and the artistic to create the beautiful. The ugly bridges of his day had been replaced with ones of indigenous stone or solid oak. They delighted the eye and gave everyone who passed under or over them a sense of comfort and security. Of one, he said, "We were all standing on the gravelly strand below the bridge, which, as you may imagine, was no longer the

<sup>31</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Morris as I Knew Him, in May Morris, II, pp.xx,xxiii.

old hideous iron abortion, but a handsome piece of very solid oak framing"(145-146). The streets were as he had in the 1880's. wished they might be "as beautiful as the woods, as elevating as the mountain-sides"(xvj).

In Piccadilly, they "came suddenly out of the woodlands into a short street of handsomely built houses"(33). After breakfast on the first morning of their trip, they went out to a carriage which "was light and handy, but had none of that sickening vulgarity which I had known as inseparable from the carriages of our times, especially the 'elegant ones' but was as graceful and pleasant in line as a Wessex waggon"(22-23).<sup>32</sup>

In Morris's imaginary future, all of the slums and all of the ugly buildings had been cleared away and every room he entered was beautiful, pretty, or plain as the occasion required. His party visited a factory and found it was "a nice place inside though as plain as you see outside"(46). There was no smoke

<sup>32</sup>Philip Henderson, William Morris: His Life Work and Friends(London, 1967), p.364, tells of Morris's friends arranging for his coffin to be carried to the graveyard on a farm wagon "festooned with vines, with alder and with bullrushes." They knew from his writing that he loved these simple wagons.

from any factory.

Everywhere the gardens large and small were beautiful. Coming upon an old but well-kept house they found "the garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers, and the roses were rolling over one another with that delicious superabundance of small well-tended gardens which at first sight takes away all thought from the beholder save that of beauty" (201).

Most beautiful of all were the people---healthy, sun-tanned, and well-dressed in simple clothes of good material and good design: "Clara [one of his traveling companions] came to me, the latter looking most fresh and beautiful in a light silk embroidered gown, which to my eyes was extravagantly gay and bright; while Dick [another companion] was also handsomely dressed in white flannel prettily embroidered" (142). The people working in the harvest fields "seemed to be dressed specially for the occasion--lightly, of course, but gaily and with plenty of adornment" (162). And everywhere the young people all of whom did some work outside in the summer were beautifully sun-tanned.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup>William Cobbett, Rural Rides, ed G.D.H. and Margaret Cole (London, 1930), I, p.17 said, "Gloucester is a fine, clean beautiful place....The girls at work in the fields (always my standard) are not in rags, with bits of shoes tied on their feet." Morris knew Cobbett's Rural Rides well.

Hammond, a major character in News, who serves as a vehicle for Morris's ideas and who is an elderly man aware of how the changes came, explained to Morris that, as he continued his trip, it would become clearer

that we live amidst beauty without any fear of becoming effeminate; that we have plenty to do, and on the whole enjoy doing it. What more can we ask of life?...

This is how we stand. England was once a country of clearings amongst the woods and wastes, with a few towns interspersed, which were fortresses for the feudal army, markets for the folk, gathering places for the craftsmen. It then became a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty-stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the workshops. It is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty. For, indeed, we should be too much ashamed of ourselves if we allowed the making of goods, even on a large scale, to carry with it the appearance, even, of desolation and misery. Why, my friend, those housewives we were talking of just now would teach us better than that. (72)

#### 4. Nature: Its Proper Uses

Back in the lectures again, Morris makes most clear that the proper uses of nature are inextricably related to functionalism, art, and beauty: We must love our island, comprehend it, live with it wisely:

The land 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.<sup>34</sup>

To keep it a decent home, "there is only one duty obvious to us all; it is that we should set ourselves, each one of us, to doing our best to guard the natural beauty of the earth: we ought to look upon it as a crime, an injury to our fellows, only excusable because of ignorance, to mar the natural beauty which is the property of all men; and scarce less than a crime to look on and do nothing while others are marring it, if we can no longer plead this ignorance."<sup>35</sup>

We need to remind ourselves constantly that, "wealth is what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his

<sup>34</sup>"The Lesser Arts," Works, XXII, p.17.

<sup>35</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p. 135.

reasonable use. The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth, food, raiment and housing necessary and decent, ...all things which serve the pleasure of people, free, manly, and uncorrupted."<sup>36</sup>

To Morris, nature was one of the arts all of which must be "mutually helpful and harmoniously subordinated one to another." This means "the moulding and altering to human ends of the very face of the earth itself, except in the outermost desert." Each one of us must "do his due share therein, lest we deliver to our sons a lesser treasure than our fathers left to us."<sup>37</sup>

Morris's love of nature was all-encompassing. In nature he found pleasure, relaxation, renewal. It was a major inspiration for the art and beauty that he created. On returning to Kelmscott, one of his homes, he once wrote, "How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it ---as this has done! The earth and the growth of it and the life of it."<sup>38</sup> In his

<sup>36</sup>"Useful Works versus Useless Toil," Works, XXIII, p.103.

<sup>37</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p.119, 120.

<sup>38</sup>Mackail, I, p.227.

Letters, he wrote after visiting Stonehenge, "I was much impressed by it, [and] though the earth and sky nearly met, and the rain poured continuously, nothing could spoil the great stretches of the Plain"(130-131). Of Runnymede, he wrote, "[It] is a most lovely place, on such an afternoon as one can scarcely hope to see again for brightness and clearness"(135). In complaining in a letter to Mrs. Burne-Jones of how difficult it was to stir the people to preserve historical buildings or restore them artistically, he said, "Certainly to take that trouble in any degree it is needful that a man should be touched with a real love of the earth, a worship of it, no less"(150).

In News, the English people of the future had realized William Morris's ideal of using nature properly and were living with it easily. The large cities, especially London were still thickly populated, but the slums had been cleared, and many of the people had been dispersed to towns both old and new. The wise old Hammond in explaining the intervening 150 years to Morris said, "The big murky places which were once, as we know, the centres of manufacture, they have, like the brick and mortar desert of London disappeared.... Of course, the great change in the rise of mechanical force made this an easy matter, [but] some approach to their

break-up as centres would probably have taken place, even if we had not changed our habits so much" (68-69).<sup>39</sup> The factories were scattered throughout the island and were so designed as to be attractive and clean. They did not pour smoke into the air or effluents into the rivers.

This change was not easy but "things soon righted themselves....The town invaded the country; but the invaders like the warlike invaders of early days, yielded to the influence of their surroundings, and became country people; and in their turn, as they became more numerous than the townsmen, influenced them also; so that the difference between town and country grew less and less; and it was indeed this world of the country vivified by the thought and briskness of town-bred folk which has produced that happy and leisurely but eager life of which you have had a first taste" (71,72).

The vacated areas of the largest cities had been returned to nature or made into parks. In Trafalgar

<sup>39</sup>In News, England has turned from machine manufacturing to handicrafting goods. However, the comment of Hammond that the break-up and dispersal would have had to come is most significant. Dispersal of people and the breaking-up of large manufacturing centers is being tried today in industrialized nations.

Square there were "whispering trees and odorous blossoms" (42). Near the British Museum they came upon "a very large paved quadrangle, with a big sycamore tree in each corner and a plashing fountain in the midst... People were sauntering or sitting reading on the benches" (50).

The Thames River had become a continuous park-way with larger areas along the way for picnicking and camping.

"The banks of the forest that we passed through had lost their courtly game-keeperish trimness, and were as wild and beautiful as need be, though the trees were clearly well seen to" (160). At one point was "a beautiful little islet begrown with graceful trees; on the slopes westward of us was a wood of varied growth overhanging the narrow meadow on the south of the river; while to the north was a wide stretch of mead rising very gradually from the rivers edge" (191). The fields of grain had trees in and around them and "there was none of the niggardly begrudging of space to a handsome tree which I remembered too well" (191). Ellen, one of Morris's boat companions, explained that the river and its banks had for a period been seriously damaged with dredging and the cutting down of trees (197), but now there was "carefulness in dealing with the river; [a] nursing of

pretty corners; [an] ingenuity in dealing with difficulties of water engineering, so that the most obviously useful works [including mills] looked beautiful and natural" (195).

All of England had regained its natural beauty because people had learned that 'nature' was not "something outside them" (179). Ellen, a beautiful girl who joined the travelers briefly and did not realize that Morris was from the 1890's, asked if he didn't "find it difficult to imagine the times when this pretty country was treated by its folk as if it had been an ugly characterless waste, with no delicate beauty to be guarded, with no heed taken of the ever fresh pleasure of recurring seasons, and changeful weather, and diverse quality of the soil, and so forth?" (187). As Hammond said, "We pass our lives in reasonable strife with nature" (58).<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Hopeful Work and Fearless Rest

Morris never tires of stressing that hopeful work and fearless rest are the aims of art and should

<sup>40</sup> Morris in these last three quotations certainly anticipates modern ecology.

be the aims of society. To Morris, work is hopeful when the worker for a reasonable number of work hours (four to eight hours per day) can receive adequate pay for producing a useful well-made article; rest is fearless and fruitful when the worker certain of work has both time and energy to use his leisure productively.

Industrialization had lost sight of these worthy goals, but they had existed, perhaps by accident, in the Middle Ages. We cannot, he said, import the conditions of the production and life of the Middle Ages into our present system, nor do we want to. We can, however, apply to our age of machines the idea that the "mediaeval craftsman was free in his work...and lavished treasures of human hope and thought on everything [he] made, from a cathedral to a porridge pot."<sup>41</sup>

That men and women must work and work hard, Morris knew. When he reached the age of majority, he received as an inheritance an annual income sufficient to free him from work. He assumed, however, that it was his responsibility to provide an adequate income. When the income from his inheritance (copper mine) decreased, he was already financially successful in his own right. Therefore, he spoke from experience when he said in 1884

<sup>41</sup>"The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, p.90.

in "Useful Work and Useless Toil," "Let us grant, first, that the race of man must either labour or perish. Nature does not give us our livelihood gratis; we must win it by toil of some sort or degree. Let us see, then, if she does not give us some compensation for this compulsion to labour, since certainly in other matters she takes care to make the acts necessary to the continuance of life in the individual and the race not only endurable, but even pleasurable."<sup>42</sup>

There are two kinds of work: one is good because it has hope in it; the other is bad because it does not:

What is the nature of the hope which, when it is present in work, makes it worth doing?

It is threefold, I think--hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself; and hope of these also in some abundance and of good quality; rest enough and good enough to be worth having; product worth having by one who is neither a fool nor an ascetic; pleasure enough for all for us to be conscious of it while we are at work....

I have put the hope of rest first because it is the simplest and most natural part of our hope. Whatever pleasure there is in some work, there is certainly some pain in all work, the beast-like pain of stirring up our slumbering energies to action, the beast-like dread of change when things are pretty well with us; and the compensation for this animal pain is animal rest. We must feel while we are working that the time will come when we shall not have to work. Also the rest, when it comes, must be long enough to allow us to enjoy it;

<sup>42</sup>Works, XXIII, p.90.



it must be longer than is merely necessary for us to recover the strength we have expended in working, and it must be animal rest also in this, that it must not be disturbed by anxiety, else we shall not be able to enjoy it.<sup>43</sup>

Morris emphasized that the machines we now have-- and better ones are constantly being developed--could now make available to everyone pleasurable work, unanxious rest, and worthy products. The growing acceptance of labor unions will help us toward these goals for these unions will develop the strength to demand them. Morris by 1884 has turned to the working men. He has become convinced the middle class cannot regenerate itself. He still speaks to art groups, but socialist oriented, he feels that the working class provides the most fertile field for producing change. In his lecture "Misery and the Way Out," he says, "I know that we are moving onward: everywhere we see the apathy of the last 25 years breaking into hopeful discontent....Men are preparing to claim a higher standard of life: and we call on them to raise that standard even higher, until they at last claim freedom with no doubtful voice and are determined to be contented with nothing less....You must be either slaves or free."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>"Useful Work and Useless Toil," Works, XXIII, p.99.

<sup>44</sup>May Morris, II, pp.163-164.

In the present, however, it is our allowing machines to be our masters instead of our making them our servants that so injures the beauty of life. We need to ask why a reasonable man uses a machine. Surely the answer is to save labour. They should be used only "for doing work repulsive to an average man, or for doing what could be as well done by a machine as a man."<sup>45</sup> We need to terminate "the manufacture of useless goods, whether harmful luxuries for the rich or disgraceful makeshifts for the poor." Then the work day could be shortened and "the sting be taken out of the factory system."<sup>46</sup>

The time has come to ask what is due the workman and give an answer:

...Money enough to keep him from fear of want or degradation for him and his; leisure enough from bread-earning work (even though it be pleasant to him) to give him time to read and think, and connect his own life with the life of the great world; work enough of the kind aforesaid, and praise of it, and encouragement enough to make him feel good friends with his fellows; and lastly (not least, for 'tis verily part of the bargain), his own due share of art, the chief part of which will be a dwelling that does not lack the beauty which Nature would freely allow it, if our own perversity did not turn Nature out of doors.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> "The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, p.88.

<sup>46</sup> May Morris, II, pp.134,135.

<sup>47</sup> "Useful Work and Useless Toil," Works, XXII, p.116.

Consciously ordering a new society out of what we have will cause trouble but "the life of a man is more troublous than that of a swine and the life of a freeman than the life of a slave."<sup>48</sup> We can do well in asking:

What other blessings are there in life save these two, fearless rest and hopeful work? Troublous as life is, it has surely given to each one of us here some times and seasons when, surrounded by simple and beautiful things, we have really felt at rest; when the earth and all its plenteous growth, and the tokens of the varied life of men, and the very sky and waste of air above us, have seemed all to conspire together to make us calm and happy, not slothful but restful. Still oftener belike it has given us those other times, when at last, after many a struggle with incongruous hindrances, our own chosen work has lain before us disentangled from all encumbrances and unrealities, and we have felt that nothing could withhold us, not even ourselves, from doing the work we are born to do, and that we were men and worthy of life. Such rest, and such work, I earnestly wish for myself and for you, and for all men: to have space and freedom to gain such rest and such work is the end of politics; to learn how best to gain it is the end of education; to learn its inmost meaning is the end of religion.<sup>49</sup>

This, written in 1882, is the synthesis of Morris's religious associations from youth. The blessings of work if not of rest is Evangelical; the beauty and style is Anglican; and the courage to enjoy life troublous though it be is Germanic. And this synthesis is interrelated

<sup>48</sup>"The Lesser Arts of Life," Works, XXII, p.268.

<sup>49</sup>"The Lesser Arts of Life," Works, XXII, p.269.

with politics and education.

The English society of News is thoroughly oriented to fearless rest and hopeful work. Almost everyone has found work that was pleasurable and everything man-made was useful, beautiful, and artistic. Hammond, the commentator of News, told Morris:

The wares which we make are made because they are needed: men make for their neighbours' use as if they were making for themselves.... So that whatever is made is good, and thoroughly fit for its purpose. Nothing can be made except for genuine use; therefore no inferior goods are made... We have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want; and as we are not driven to make a vast quantity of useless things, we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them. All work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without. There is no difficulty in finding work which suits the special turn of mind of everybody; so that no man is sacrificed to the wants of another. From time to time, when we have found out that some piece of work was too disagreeable or troublesome, we have given it up and done altogether without the thing produced by it. Now, surely you can see that under these circumstances all the work that we do is an exercise of the mind and body more or less pleasant to be done: so that instead of avoiding work everybody seeks it: and, since people have got defter in doing the work generation after generation, it has become so easy to do, that it seems as if there were less done, though probably more is produced. (97).

Those who find they are not deft can write or work with mathematics or science. Hammond continued, "If art be inexhaustible, so is science also; and though it is no longer the only innocent occupation

which is thought worth an intelligent man spending his time upon, as it once was, yet there are, and I suppose will be, many people who are excited by its conquest of difficulties and care for it more than for anything else" (98). Writers, scientists and artists all respect each other. One craftsman turned writer and mathematician told Morris that they didn't suffer from the stupidity of the nineteenth century "which despised everybody who could use his hands"(20).

Hammond said that the rewards of labour are life and creation. "It is each man's business to make his own work pleasanter and pleasanter, which of course tends towards raising the standard of excellence"(98).

No one was chained permanently to the essential but oppressively hard labor, for the physically fit took turns at it, and everyone helped with the harvest. One group of young road workers, "looking much like a boating party at Oxford would have looked in the days I remembered," were merry and happy as they made their picks ring out(47). Almost everyone who was able joined in the harvesting which was easy-hard work for it "tries the muscles and hardens them and sends you pleasantly weary to bed, but which isn't trying in other ways: doesn't harrass you in short"(173). A few "Obstinate

Refusers" did not join in the harvesting because they were building a house but no one was too concerned(172).

All along the way people were enjoying leisure hours--boating on the rivers, "sauntering in the town squares" or camping in the parks. Groups of children were often camping together. "As it seemed, this pleasure-loving people were fond of tent-life, with all its inconveniences, which, indeed, they turned into pleasure also" (146). Morris found special pleasure in the food which everywhere was "simple enough, but most delicately cooked, and set on the table with much daintiness"(15). At another dining hall the food "showed that those who prepared it were interested in it; but there was no excess either of quantity or of gourmandise"(101). Morris occasionally experienced a moment of melancholy on this trip, for here was the pleasurable work and play he had dreamed of in his day.

## 6. Calm, Dignified Happiness

Joyful work and joyful play in an environment of art and beauty will create a calm dignified happiness. Morris says this many times. Morris's calm dignified happiness is not philosophical, ideal, or "utopian" although Morris was cognizant of the literature in

these areas.<sup>50</sup> It is practical and pragmatic. It is generally an English pragmatic happiness and specifically a Morris happiness. It is not the happiness of the momentary escape of the workmen into the gin palace; of the middle class to the masque ball or a Podsnap dinner; of the upper class to an exclusive social affair. It is the happiness possible in a community where true equality and justice exist; where everyone except for unavoidable accidents is secure in his work and play; where arrangements permit everyone to easily find companionship or solitary pursuits as he desires. It is a happiness based on faith in self and in others. It is the happiness of a community that has eliminated the "fall." Morris points out that this happiness will open the door to a happiness of greater depth and complexity. People proud of their work and free to enjoy leisure without anxiety will discover "That the true secret of happiness lies in

<sup>50</sup> Morris's list of favorite books included Plato and Aristotle. He complained bitterly of not liking philosophy but that was after the reading of it. He knew intimately Carlyle and Coleridge who followed the European philosophies. His two favorite "utopias" were Sir Thomas More's Utopia (1515) and Campanella's City of the Sun (1623). He printed a new edition of More's Utopia at the Kelmscott Press.

the taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life."<sup>51</sup> Samuel Johnson in Rasselas has Imlac say, "The business of a poet is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip." Morris, both a poet and an artist, scrutinized both the tulip and its streaks.<sup>52</sup>

This makes for "a simple life fit for men"--a life in which a man can feel manly, a woman feel womanly, and a child feel childlike. Then we will be ready for the pleasure of experiencing "Reverence for the life of Man upon the earth."<sup>53</sup> "It is this manly reverence for the life of man past and present and to come.... which gives an interest to the representation of the common landscape which surrounds our life, the corner of a field, a bit of wayside waste, the beasts and birds with whom we have to do, nay even to otherwise trivial things, decoration of houses and so forth with which we strive to bring our lives into harmony with the beauty of the universe."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup>"The Aims of Art," Works, XXIII, p.94.

<sup>52</sup>Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson (New York, 1958), p.527.

<sup>53</sup>"The Prospects of Architecture," Works, XXII, p.151.

<sup>54</sup>May Morris, II, p.165.



Once we learn this calm dignified happiness we can cultivate the will and responsibility to live without damage to ourselves and others "a free and unfettered animal life.... [and engineer] the utter extinction of all asceticism. If we feel the least degradation in being amorous, or merry, or hungry, or sleepy, we are so far bad animals, and therefore miserable men. And you know [our] civilization does bid us to be ashamed of all these moods and deeds, and as far as she can, begs us to conceal them, and where possible to get other people to do them for us."<sup>55</sup>

This was not always true. In the Middle Ages "the holidays of the Church were holidays in the modern sense of the word, downright play-days, and there were ninety-six obligatory ones: nor were the people tame and sheep-like, but as rough-handed and bold a set of good fellows as ever rubbed through life under the sun."<sup>56</sup>

In twenty-first century "Nowhere", the Victorian Morris looking strange in his nineteenth century

<sup>55</sup>May Morris, "The Society of the Future," II, p.457.

<sup>56</sup>"The Hopes of Civilization," Works, XXIII, p.60.

clothes was the recipient of this new happiness. He delighted and fascinated everyone, for they did not fear someone a bit different from themselves. Trained to a genuine interest in everyone and everything they recognized he must be an outsider and welcomed him. Appreciative of any fellow man, they slipped easily into questioning and answering. And everywhere, people were able to express their natural humanity that calm dignified happiness brings forth. Many of the middle aged looked young: of one fellow, he said, "he was a man in the prime of life, but looked happy as a child who has just got a new toy" (21); a woman Morris mistook for twenty said "I am well served out for fishing for compliments, since I have to tell you the truth, to wit, that I am forty two"(19). Genuinely happy people retain their youth longer, it would seem.

When Morris looked at the beautiful Ellen, he said, "I was thinking of what you, with your capacity and intelligence, joined to your love of pleasure, and your impatience of unreasonable restraint--of what you would have been in that past. And even now, when all is won and has been for a long time, my heart is sickened with thinking of all the waste of life that has gone on for so many years" (203). Hammond said, "The

spirit of the new days, of our days, was to be delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves; this, I say, was to be the new spirit of the time"(132).

Thus in the England of News from Nowhere William Morris found that the synthesis of functionalism, art, beauty, nature, joyful work and play, and happiness in a socialized community of equality and justice overcomes the waste of life of previous centuries and generates a new spirit and a vitality which almost everyone can enjoy.

## V CONCLUSION

During Morris's life, his poetry rated first among his many accomplishments; now, new trends have pushed his poetry into the background. His art designing, popular with those who could afford his services, has flourished and languished as fashions have varied. His lectures, however, have continued to serve well the changing scene. Because of them, he is acknowledged by some to be the father of modern architecture,<sup>1</sup> the father of the arts and crafts movement, and the father of industrial design.<sup>2</sup> It seemed reasonable to conclude that Morris's contributions had moved into the mainstream. Recently, however, there has been a revival of interest in Morris, and perhaps, with good reason. As we see it in our own time, he may become the father of more off-

<sup>1</sup>See, Nickolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius (New York, 1949). Gropius founder of the Bauhaus, a school of design in Germany, said that Morris was "The true prophet of the twentieth century, the father of the modern movement" (p.9). Morris formulated the principles of functionalism but rejected the new materials--concrete, steel, glass. Gropius applied the principles to the new materials.

<sup>2</sup>See, Jacques Barzun, "From the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth," Chapters in Western Civilization Vol. II Contemporary Civilization Staff of Columbia University (New York, 1962) p.451. Barzun says that when "Morris initiated the Arts and Crafts Movement as a revolt against the machine" alert manufacturers responded by setting up industrial design as a profession.

spring. He may be the father of the new esthetic: the father of the direct approach to the down-trodden, the father of the integration of organicism and individualism, and the father of an esthetic for community. At the very least, he can scarcely fail to receive credit for recognizable contributions to each of these.

Alfred Neumeyer in explaining that we have three esthetics says, "Today there exists three esthetics side by side. One, which may be called object esthetics, investigates those factors or laws which lend order and expressiveness to the work of art." Aristotle's Poetics is a case in point. It set the laws and order for tragedy. It assumed that every member of the audience responded as every other member. James Joyce analyzes "object esthetics" in some detail in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, (New York, 1962), pp.187-215. "The second type may be called subject esthetics. It is a psychological science and deals with our perception of shaped objects." It accepts the fact that people's reaction to art varies on the basis of their combined heredity and environment. It is as old as artistic expression. It has only been recently clarified by psychological

testing. Almost everyone who sees the Mona Lisa can identify it thereafter, but each person sees it in his own way. In subjective esthetics, the rules and order then must be relative, not absolute. The third approach--cultural esthetics--"searches for common denominators among the various arts or within one art at a given time." In explaining the development of the new or "cultural aesthetic" Neumeyer continues, "The veneration of the supreme value of creativity has been eclipsed by the recognition of the creative urge in every man's life everywhere and at any time."<sup>3</sup>

Morris rejected object esthetics because he felt it produced spectators not participants and because it set the great artists apart from all others. He was in accord with subject esthetics; his letters to his interior design clients are often little classics in negotiating a satisfactory compromise of individual good tastes. He was dynamically in accord with cultural esthetics; he invited all of his fellow countrymen, but especially the working men, to recognize and express their own creative urges. Only thus, could a community become art-centered. In our day,

<sup>3</sup>"Aesthetic Attitudes and the Present Status of Art History and Appreciation," Journal of Esthetics and Art Criticism, XI (Sept. 1952), pp. 61, 65.

John Kenneth Galbraith says, "The need is to subordinate economic to aesthetic goals--to sacrifice efficiency, including the efficiency of organization to beauty."<sup>4</sup>

Most outstanding literary men of the Victorian Age expressed concern for the newly developing society and for the lower classes--the segment of society the politicians call the "unwashed." But Morris was the one writer who went directly to them, to where they would gather--the street corner or the open area. "In the six years before 1890, he had delivered over two hundred and fifty lectures."<sup>5</sup>

Morris was not a rabble-rouser; he was not a presenter of blue prints; rather he was a giver of certain constants in terms of principles and values. He advocated only tentatively the structure, method, and policies to achieve their implementation. He was preeminently successful with the working men because he sincerely identified himself with them. From his

<sup>4</sup>John Kenneth Galbraith, "Capitalism, Socialism, and the Future of the Industrial State," Atlantic 216 (June, 1967), p.67.

<sup>5</sup>Thompson, p.47.

own experience, he believed that "any worthwhile work well done was equal to any other."<sup>6</sup> Morris was certain that his own art, writing and lecturing was worthwhile work. He was equally certain that his work was neither more nor less worthwhile than any other work well done.

Individualism and organicism as viable conflicting concepts and practical ideas came into existence with the American and French Revolutions.<sup>7</sup> The individual-society antithesis, therefore, became the major conflict of the nineteenth century England. Jeremy Bentham in accepting the challenge of the new ways had earlier analyzed individualism; Samuel Taylor Coleridge responded by outlining a new organicism which might be acceptable to the rapidly changing society. John Stuart Mill, describing these men as "the two great seminal minds of England in their age" said, "Whoever could master the premises and combine the methods of both, would

<sup>6</sup>Thompson, p.255.

<sup>7</sup>E. Weekly, Words Ancient and Modern (Dover, 1926), p.34. "It was not until the French Revolution that democracy ceased to be a mere literary word, and became part of the political vocabulary." In Williams, p.xiv.



possess the entire English philosophy of his age."<sup>8</sup> Mill in writing about these two men set in motion the process of the philosophical synthesis so well dramatized in his Autobiography. Alfred Lord Tennyson and Arthur Henry Hallam using poetic terms brooded over "the good and the beautiful."<sup>9</sup> Arnold's essays on social criticism similarly dealt with the antithesis.<sup>10</sup> John Ruskin on occasions approached an application of a philosophical synthesis, but it was Morris who first presented principles which integrated organicism and individualism.<sup>11</sup> Morris's thesis was that the working

<sup>8</sup>John Stuart Mill, On Bentham and Coleridge, ed. F. R. Leavis (New York, 1950), p. 40, 102.

<sup>9</sup>Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry: and On the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson", ed. Walter E. Houghton and G. Robert Stange, Victorian Poetry and Poetics (Boston, 1959), pp. 802-811.

<sup>10</sup>Letters, p. 113. Morris having received Arnold's lecture "Equality" wrote, "I heartily agree: the only thing is that if he has any idea of a remedy he dursn't mention it."

<sup>11</sup>Some critics find Morris a rebel and a revolutionary, and do not think of him as supporting organicism. He is contemptuous of Parliament and the courts in his lectures and disposes of them entirely in News. However, he is convinced that genuine organicism develops only when everyone participates equally in the community. National pride and unity will flow naturally from this.

men were "the real organic part of society" and England would have a satisfactory synthesis of individualism and organicism when the working men claimed "equality of condition."<sup>12</sup>

William Morris can become the father of an esthetic for community only if society does become art-centered. It is interesting to note in News that the rapid change toward such communities began in 1950 and met with some degree of success in 2050. In about 1950, after World War II and the recovery of Europe, we discovered we were living with the "revolution of rising expectations." Few in our day have described this phenomenon better than William Morris did in 1887 when he said "class antagonism is generally more felt when the oppressed class is bettering its condition than when it is at its worst. The consciousness of oppression then takes the form of hope, and leads to action, and is indeed the token of the gradual formation of a new order of things underneath the old decaying order."<sup>13</sup>

Raymond Williams says of Morris's lectures that there is "life in the lectures where one feels that

<sup>12</sup>"How We Live and How We Might Live," Works, XXIII, p.26.

<sup>13</sup>"True and False Society," Works, XXIII, p.230.

the whole man is engaged."<sup>14</sup> Paul Thompson says of Morris, "Although Morris seems in many ways an erratic figure--a romantic Victorian Mediaevalist as often as a modern progressive--few men of any age have more to offer today: for Morris was a man of practical example and rare integrity who made one of the few straight forward attempts to solve the fundamental problems which still face us today--the quality of the environment, satisfaction in work, and the distribution of wealth."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Williams, p.155.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Thompson, p. xvi.

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