

CHAPTER VII

THE "ANTI-SCRAPE"

WHILE the Eastern Question agitation was giving William Morris his first education in the workings of the political world, he was gaining insight from another direction into the depth of philistinism of his century. Ever since his early days in Street's office in Oxford, when he had planned to enter the profession of an architect, Morris had fulminated in private against the excesses of "restoration." Like so many other issues during the next twenty years, he let the matter stop at private grumbling. Meanwhile, industrial capitalism pursued its destructive course. Hundreds of old and beautiful buildings were utterly destroyed in the interests of speculative builders, brewers and impoverished squires. Hundreds of others, in the name of restoration, were stripped of their old stone-work, divested of some of their most noble or beautiful features, and transformed by ornate or unimaginative imitation Gothic. It is curious that (in an age which produced so many atrocities and destroyed so many priceless monuments) the Victorian middle class professed great interest in architectural matters. Unfortunately, the interest was more a matter of fashion than of educated sensibility. The history of the architecture of the mid-century is, with a few honourable exceptions, the record of academic revivals of past "styles", which were applied indiscriminately to town halls, public baths, churches, and dwelling-houses. In his first lecture, *The Lesser Arts*, Morris referred to the "restoration" of ancient monuments

"Thus the matter stands: these old buildings have been altered and added to century after century, often beautifully, always historically, their very value, a great part of it, lay in that

"But of late years a great uprising of ecclesiastical zeal, coinciding with a great increase of study, and consequently of knowledge of mediæval architecture, has driven people into spending their money on these buildings, not merely with the purpose of repairing them, of keeping them safe, clean, and wind and water-tight, but also of 'restoring' them to some ideal state of perfection, sweeping away if possible

all signs of what has befallen them at least since the Reformation, and often since dates much earlier this has sometimes been done with much disregard of art and entirely from ecclesiastical zeal, but oftener it has been well enough meant as regards art yet this restoration must be as impossible to bring about, as the attempt at it is destructive I scarcely like to think what a great part of them have been made nearly useless to students of art and history "1

This is a moderate statement of the case—as moderate as ever came from Morris's pen In fact, as Morris well knew, "restoration" was an extremely profitable business for a few fashionable architects Chief among these was Sir Gilbert Scott, the perpetrator of the Albert Memorial, who died in 1878 An enormous amount of work passed through his office, over which he could hardly have exercised even the most superficial supervision It is related of him that once on a journey he noticed a church that was being built, and enquired the name of the architect "Sir Gilbert Scott," was the reply "The cathedral-restoring business was very thoroughly organized by him," relates W R Lethaby, one of Morris's colleagues in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings 2 Describing the work done by Scott and his fellows, Lethaby writes

"It is impossible to give any notion of the violences and stupidities which were done in the name of 'restoration' The crude idea seems to have been born of the root absurdity that art was shape and not substance, our ancient buildings were appearances of what was called 'style' When the architect had learned what his text-books taught of the styles he could then provide thirteenth- or fourteenth-century 'features' at pleasure, and even correct the authentic old ones Professional reports would run 'The Tudor roof is incongruous with the Early English chancel arch, and it should be replaced by a thirteenth-century roof of steep pitch' At Canterbury a wonderful twelfth-century tower was destroyed to put in its place a nineteenth-century 'fifteenth-century' erection At St Albans eleventh-century and fifteenth-century work were both destroyed to satisfy the whims of a lawyer-lord It never struck any one that antiquity is being old . A practice of producing professional office-made versions of the art of any century which passed as the art itself was at full blast when the much-hated, much-revered Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings was founded by Morris, Webb, and Faulkner "3

1 "The Lesser Arts", *Works*, Vol XXII, p 19

2 Lethaby, *op cit*, p 67

3 *Ibid*, pp 145-6

The idea first occurred to Morris in the summer of 1876 "The sight of Burford Church being pulled about set my father to making notes for a letter of appeal for some united action", May Morris relates.¹ It is significant that he did no more about the matter until March of the next year, by which time his experience of the first successful months of the Eastern Question agitation may have given him confidence in the effectiveness of public action. His first blast was provoked by the proposed "destruction" by Sir Gilbert Scott of Tewkesbury Minster, and was printed in March, 1877, in *The Athenaeum*, a periodical which had long been raising the issue in its columns. Although the tone of his letter was scarcely diplomatic—"the architects, are, with a very few exceptions, hopeless, because interest, habit, and ignorance bind them, and the clergy are hopeless, because their order, habit, and an ignorance yet grosser, bind them"—it aroused an immediate response. Morris had appealed for—

"an association to keep a watch on old monuments, to protest against all 'restoration' that means more than keeping out wind and weather, and to awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope."²

The Society, which Morris dubbed "Anti-Scrape", was formed in the next month, and Morris became its Honorary Secretary. Morris's enthusiasm was supplemented by the tact and persistence of Philip Webb. At the first annual meeting in June the adhesion of an imposing list of notabilities was announced, including—after some persuasion—Thomas Carlyle, as well as John Ruskin, James Bryce, Sir John Lubbock, Leslie Stephen, Coventry Patmore, Burne-Jones, Holman Hunt, Lord Houghton, and A. J. Mundella. A Manifesto, drafted by Morris, together with some passages reprinted from Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, were issued by the Society.

From this time until the end of his life, the Anti-Scrape never ceased to occupy a part of Morris's time and a great deal of his attention. For more than a year he acted as Secretary, and afterwards he continued as one of the most active members of the Committee. His work including the undertaking of correspondence in the Press, and from time to time the visiting and making

¹ *Works*, Vol. XII, p. xiii

² *Letters*, p. 86

of reports upon buildings due for destruction or restoration. In the first year alone, some of the major issues which came before the Society included Tewkesbury Minster, the restoration of the choir at Canterbury Cathedral, the destruction of Wren's city churches, and the rebuilding of the roof at St. Albans. In 1879, an even bigger issue came up—the threatened replacement of the mosaics and rebuilding of the west front at St. Mark's, Venice. The campaign to arouse European opinion on this included the presentation of a Memorial which was signed, among others, by Disraeli and Gladstone, to the Italian Ambassador.¹ The niceties of etiquette required in such an international affair were more than enough for Morris's patience, and he wrote about the Memorial in rage to the Burne-Jones's

"We have to hand it to the Ambassador here. I must say it seems to me extremely absurd that we can't send it by post as to an ordinary mortal. In truth what has really worried me in this matter has been all the ridiculous rigmarole and social hypocrisy one has to wade through."²

The work at St. Mark's was stopped, but whether as a result of the pressure of the Committee, or whether as the result of an independent decision of the Italian Government, became a matter of some heated dispute.

Tact was never Morris's strong point, whether in international or parochial affairs. Perhaps that was one of the main reasons for the successes the Society achieved. If his thundering letters sometimes only made his opponents stand on their dignity and refuse to alter their plans, they at least had the effect of making the next lot of restorers a great deal more wary for fear that the same outspoken public wrath would fall upon them. The guardians of old property began to consult the Anti-Scrape rather than the fashionable architects before forming their plans, especially when it became known that a group of highly skilled architects would give their free advice on behalf of the Society. On several occasions, the Anti-Scrape helped to raise funds for essential repairs.

¹ This campaign was actually organized by an independent Committee, with G. E. Street as Vice-Chairman and H. Wallis as Hon. Sec. The correspondence of the Committee is preserved in Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 38831, and Morris's letter soliciting Gladstone's signature is preserved in Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 44461 f. 123.

² *Letters*, p. 132.

to parish churches and other buildings in danger of decay. On other occasions, they gladly issued publicity with the aim of finding some use for buildings in danger of destruction. On the Committee itself Morris was a tower of strength. The Committees met on Thursday afternoons at five o'clock, and worked through a series of cases and reports on visits. After the meetings Morris and Webb together with their friends—in the last years, Emery Walker and Sir Sidney Cockerell—made it a habit to have a simple meal together at Gatti's Restaurant, where the discussion ranged on to wider topics. Thackeray Turner (the Secretary who succeeded Morris), when recalling these Committee meetings, wrote

"The first thing that impresses me is the regularity of Webb's and William Morris's attendance. One thing I noticed was that Webb never questioned anything said by Morris, whereas Morris would question Webb's views. When Morris was present it was always he who first spoke about a case and proposed what we should do, but when he was not there Webb took this position."¹

As a visitor for the Society, Morris was not such a success and perhaps it was the restraining influence of Webb and his other colleagues which accounts for the fact that he did little visiting after the first two or three years. After visiting one church which was being thoroughly "restored", he "rushed to the window of the inn shaking his fist as the parson passed by".² On being shown a piece of nineteenth-century Gothic carving in another cathedral, he burst out "Why, I could carve them better with my teeth." Another anecdote does not concern an official visit for the Society, but a chance moment during the Socialist propaganda in Glasgow in the late 1880s. In the company of Bruce Glasier, Morris was on his way to a meeting when they stopped to look at the Cathedral.

"We were within a few yards of the doorway when he stopped abruptly, as if struck by a rifle ball, his eyes fixed furiously on some object in front of him. As he glared he seemed to crouch like a lion for a leap at its prey, his whiskers bristling out. 'What the hell is that? Who the hell has done that?' he shouted, to the amaze, alarm, and indignation of the people near by.

"I looked and saw at once what was the offending object. There it was a sculptured memorial or sarcophagus in shining white

¹ *Lethaby, op cit*, p. 149

² *Ibid*, p. 150

marble jammed into the old grey stone-work of the aisle completely cutting off a portion of the window above 'What infernal idiot has done *that*' Morris again demanded, and heedless of the consternation around him poured forth a torrent of invective against the unknown perpetrators of the crime For a moment I thought he might actually spring upon the excrescence and tear out the hateful thing with his bare fists The scandalized onlookers resumed their way, remarking compassionately about him to one another

"The banging of the heavy studded doors by the sexton arrested his invective I remarked that we should not now gain admission into the interior 'Damn the interior of the Cathedral!' he shouted 'I've seen enough of the depredations of your Cathedral blockheads Catch me putting my nose into another mess of restoration botchery'"¹

But his visits did not only bring him rage There is a pleasant description by Philip Webb of Morris's love for a certain barn in Berkshire, which illustrates the richness of the pleasure he gained from old buildings—and which, indeed, helps us to understand his rage at their destruction Great Coxwell Barn, "had great hold on William Morris's imagination"

"Before I had seen it", recounts Webb, "I laughingly scorned his determination that it was the most wonderfully beautiful example in England When at last he exultingly carried me to it (almost tremblingly for fear of my judgement) I was obliged to agree with him that it was unapproachable in its dignity I clearly understood in this case as in others that his insight and judgement were unfailingly right One turned up a narrow lane when the ridge of the mighty roof rose foot by foot over the grassy bank till one got over the top of the knoll, when its whole impressiveness was clearly seen, so large in its lines as to make one draw breath sharply with wonder There it was, dominating the farmhouse adjoining, and with nothing but the simple fields of Berkshire about them Its magnitude, nice precision of building and dainty parts of pure architecture, all done in handsome freestone, made it as beautiful as a cathedral, but with no ostentation of building whatever a perfectly suitable barn and nothing else The workmen who set it up did it well once and for all time If I saw what it all meant in the quiet Berkshire landscape and its clear history of the builders and their craft, how much more must he have seen into and round it' This building and all of its like, were infinite delight to him"²

It was not only the great cathedrals, but also such simple buildings as these, which the Anti-Scrape under Morris's leadership fought to preserve

¹ Glasier, *op cit*, pp 103-4

² Lethaby, *op cit*, p 154

All roads lead to Communism. It may seem an unlikely road to Communism by way of Great Coxwell Barn. Nevertheless it is true that Morris's work for the Anti-Scrape contributed as much to bring him on the final stages of his journey as any other influence. In giving leadership to the Anti-Scrape he was forced again and again to examine and set into words his deepest pre-occupation—the relation of the arts to society. In the controversies which sprung up around the work he was continually forced to define (and to revise) the basic assumptions which had guided his life from his Oxford days.

In the first place, Morris was brought directly into conflict with the property sanctions of capitalist society. In the negative sense, he had to fight against both commercial rapacity and views of ecclesiastical propriety. When he remonstrated with the Vicar of Burford, the Vicar replied that it was his own Church and he could stand on his head in it if he wanted to. The Dean of Canterbury, in a controversy in *The Times* in 1877, struck a rather more lofty note.

"Mr. Morris's Society probably looks on our Cathedral as a place for antiquarian research or for budding architects to learn their art in. We need it for the daily worship of God."

It was possible for Morris to avoid the principle involved by simply replying:

"Remembering well the impression that Canterbury Cathedral made on me when I first stood in it as a little boy, I must needs think that a great building which is obviously venerable and weighty with history is fitter for worship than one turned into a scientific demonstration of what the original architects intended to do."¹

At the same time, when Wren's city churches were being threatened with destruction, he was able (in *The Times* of April, 1878) to call upon those same religious sentiments which had been outraged by his earlier interference:

"Surely an opulent city, the capital of the commercial world, can afford some small sacrifice to spare these beautiful buildings the little plots of ground upon which they stand. Is it absolutely necessary that every scrap of space in the City should be devoted to money-making, and are religion, sacred memories, recollections of the great dead, memorials of the past, works of England's greatest architect, to be banished from this wealthy City?"²

¹ *Letters*, p. 92.

² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

But this—strong as it is—is the expression of Morris's more diplomatic self—the loyal servant of his own Society. While he might score valid points in this way, with every case that came forward he was given further and more horrifying insights into the insensibility of commercial philistinism, the absolute lack of any public conscience where questions of individual profit or loss were concerned. "Even now mere cynically brutal destruction, not veiling itself under any artistic pretence, is only too common", he reported to the First Annual General Meeting of the Anti-Scrape in June, 1878. "It is still only too commonly assumed that any considerations of Art must yield if they stand in the way of money interests"¹ The next few years gave him more than enough examples to prove this statement. He was forced to contrast the attitude of feudal society in this respect with that of industrial capitalism. This contrast—while a frequent theme of his lectures and addresses in the late 1870s—found its fullest expression in his address to the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Anti-Scrape in 1889.

"Consider London of the fourteenth century—a smallish town, beautiful from one end to the other, streets of low whitewashed houses with a big Gothic church standing in the middle of it, a town surrounded by walls, with a forest of church towers and spires, besides the cathedral and the abbeys and priories, every one of the houses in it, nay, every shed, bearing in it a certain amount of absolute, definite, distinct, conscientious art. Think of the difference between that and the London of to-day."²

The mind is thrown back directly to the "London, small and white and clean" of the opening of *The Earthly Paradise*. But this time it is evoked, not with a sense of nostalgia, but as an aggressive and fully realized comparison, exposing the indifference of his own time.

"Just consider what England was in the fourteenth century. The population—at about four millions. Think then of the amount of beautiful and dignified buildings which those four millions built. Not only those churches and houses which we see, but also those which have been destroyed. Those buildings . . . contained much art: pictures, metal-work, carvings, tapestry, and the like, altogether forming a prodigious mass of art, produced by a scanty population. Try to

¹ Address to 1st Annual Meeting, S P A B, May Morris, I, pp. 116–17.

² May Morris, I, p. 153.

imagine that Why, if we were asked (supposing we had the capacity) to reproduce the whole of those buildings with their contents, we should have to reply, 'The country is not rich enough, every capitalist in the country would be ruined before it could be done' Is not that strange?"¹

It is strange indeed It was in such ways as this that Morris's early medieval studies enabled him in his maturity to judge the appalling wastage of capitalism and to glimpse the astounding riches of the Socialist future

Thus the work of the Anti-Scrape quickened and deepened his insight into the destructive philistinism of capitalist society His friends, like Edward Burne-Jones, followed him this far, but then were content to leave it at that If clergymen or land-owners wished to destroy old works of art, they were prepared to fight them tooth and nail, to fulminate against the age, to point out that people in earlier times had viewed the matter differently But Morris's mind worked in a different way He was not a systematic thinker, although he forced himself on occasion to discipline his intuitions with very great logic but, whenever he was aware of the existence of a problem, he had a quite remarkable persistence in worrying at it until he was satisfied that he had reached a solution One of the aims of the Society (proposed in his first letter to *The Athenaeum*) was "to awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope" Faced with the jealous property rights of capitalism, he wished to argue, first, that—irrespective of their position at law—"our ancient historical monuments are national property and ought no longer to be left at the mercy of the many and variable ideas of ecclesiastical propriety that may at any time be prevalent among us"² and, second, to convince the public in general that they had both responsibilities and rights in relation to these buildings Since the law denied that this was true, he was forced—this time in a positive way—along a new road to Communism, as he sought, in his reports, letters and addresses, to ground his case upon canons of social morality unacknowledged in capitalist society

This view of men's responsibilities towards the art of past ages was not, in the first place, his own, but had come to him through

¹ May Morris, I, p 154.

² *Letters*, p 92

Carlyle and Ruskin It was suggested in those passages which he re-printed for the Anti-Scrape propaganda from the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*

"It is no question of expediency or feeling whether we shall preserve the buildings of past times or not *We have no right whatever to touch them* They are not ours They belong, partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us The dead have still their right in them, that which they laboured for we have no right to obliterate What we have ourselves built we are at liberty to throw down, but what other men gave their strength and wealth and life to accomplish, their right over does not pass away with their death, still less is the right to the use of what they have left vested in us only It belongs to all their successors"

These words, Morris wrote to Ruskin, "are so good, and so completely settle the whole matter, that I feel ashamed at having to say anything else about it"¹ Nevertheless, he could reaffirm them In his first letter he spoke of "the newly-invented study of living history" as "the chief joy of so many of our lives" In his address to the Second Annual Meeting of the Society in 1879 he returned to the sense of history, which seemed to him to underlie Ruskin's appeal to social morality "One of the characteristics of the present age", he said,

"is its tendency to retrospection, nor can I think it a weak or a foolish one I will be bold to say that many of the best men among us look back much to the past, not with idle regret, but with humility, hope, and courage, not in striving to bring the dead to life again, but to enrich the present and the future"²

It might be enough for his colleagues simply to exclaim at the beauty of the buildings and then to turn their attention to defending them But Morris, in his addresses, sought not to re-convert the convinced, but to convince the unconverted of the existence of beauty, and to explain to them something of its meaning and value

"A Society like ours is nothing if it is not aggressive", he said in 1889, "therefore we have to try to convince even the most ignorant, and to do that properly, we ought to be able to get in the habit of putting ourselves in their position" In doing this, he found himself from the outset forced to rebut the charge that

¹ *Letters*, p 93

² May Morris, I, p 121

he wished only to preserve, in order to feed the sentiments of a handful of artists, the ruinous and the "picturesque". The interest in ancient buildings, he agreed, was "romantic"—"but what romance means is the capacity for a true conception of history, a power of making the past part of the present"¹ The romantic building "recalls to the mind the interest of the life of times past" Each attempt which he made to define in social terms the meaning of this beauty, the value of this interest in the past, brought him closer to Marxist conclusions The beauty of the masterpieces of the past, he declared in an hundred different ways, lay in their embodiment of the aspirations of past generations of men, of their "hopes and fears", the vicissitudes of their affairs and the quality of their lives

This conclusion forced upon him yet another series of questions. Why should men care to preserve the record of history at all? What could be learnt from the monuments of past aspirations beyond the sense of mortality, and the bitterness and degradation of the present? The answer lay in that astonishing rebirth of hope which permeates all Morris's writing and activity in these years The masterpieces of the past were not dead relics, but a living inspiration and warning to the present, a proof of qualities in man which—however suppressed and slumbering—could not be extinguished for ever "I love art, and I love history", he declared in a Lecture delivered in 1882 in support of the Anti-Scrape—

"but it is living art and living history that I love If we have no hope for the future, I do not see how we can look back on the past with pleasure If we are to be less than men in time to come, let us forget that we have ever been men It is in the interest of living art and living history that I oppose so-called restoration What history can there be in a building bedaubed with ornament, which cannot at the best be anything but a hopeless and lifeless imitation of the hope and vigour of the earlier world? Let us leave the dead alone, and, ourselves living, build for the living and those that shall live"²

This theme recurs in all his early addresses to the Society But it was in a most remarkable paper read to the Society in 1884, after he had become an active Socialist, that he achieved his finest expression of his views Our ancient architecture, he commenced—

¹ May Morris, I, p. 148

² "The History of Pattern-Designing", *Works*, Vol. XXII, p. 233

"bears witness to the development of man's ideas, to the continuity of history, and, so doing, affords never-ceasing instruction, nay education, to the passing generations, not only telling us what were the aspirations of men passed away, but also what he may hope for in the time to come"

After discussing the distortions of past historians, presenting history without pattern or development, he referred to the modern understanding of the past, which, now that the "mists of pedantry" were beginning to lift, revealed a different picture—

"inchoate order in the remotest times, varying indeed among different races and countries, but swayed always by the same laws, moving forward ever towards something that seems the very opposite of that which it started from, and yet the earlier order never dead but living in the new, and slowly moulding it to a recreation of its former self. How different a spirit such a view of history must create it is not difficult to see. No longer shallow mockery at the failures and follies of the past, from a standpoint of so-called civilization, but deep sympathy with its half-conscious aims, from amidst the difficulties and shortcomings that we are only too sadly conscious of to-day, that is the new spirit of history, knowledge has brought us humility, and humility hope of perfection."

The two instruments of this new knowledge of history Morris declared to be the study of language and the study of archaeology ("the record of man's creative deeds"), the preservation of this latter record was the special aim of the Society.

Morris then turned to examine the second great argument which had been brought against the Anti-Scrape. The whole case of the restorers rested upon it. Granted the beauty of the medieval buildings, they said, why could not nineteenth-century architects and craftsmen, by patient research and practice, make copies of thirteenth-century work to replace the old stone where it had decayed? Once again, Ruskin had been the first to give an answer.

"Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter, it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture. That which I have insisted upon as the life of the whole, that spirit which is given only by the hand and eye of the workman, can never be recalled. Another spirit may be given by another time, and it is then a new building, but the spirit of the dead workman cannot be summoned up, and commanded to direct other hands and other thoughts."

Morris, starting from the arguments of "The Nature of Gothic", examined in detail the conditions and organization of labour in ancient, feudal, and in capitalist society "Every architectural work is a work of co-operation", he commenced "The very designer, be he never so original [is] under the influence of *tradition*, dead men guide his hand even when he forgets that they ever existed" The closely-reasoned arguments with which Morris followed through the various changes in the skill and organization of the craftsmen cannot be summarized here But this address is one of Morris's most important contributions to the theory of architecture The inspired insights of Ruskin have been embodied within a coherent analysis of the techniques and productive relations of the societies within which the crafts were practised Finally, Morris reached the point of change between the domestic industries and crafts of the eighteenth century, and modern industrial capitalism

"This strange and most momentous revolution was brought about by the machinery which the chances and changes of the world *forced* on our population You must think of this great machine industry as though on the one hand merely the full development of the effects of producing for profit instead of for livelihood, which began in Sir Thomas More's time, yet on the other as a revolutionary change from that of the mere division of labour The exigencies of my own work have driven me to dig pretty deeply into the strata of the eighteenth century workshop system, and I could clearly see how very different it is from the factory system of to-day therefore it was with a ready sympathy that I read the full explanation of the change and its tendencies in the writings of a man, I will say a great man, whom, I suppose, I ought not to name in this company, and who cleared my mind on several points (also unmentionable here) relating to this subject of labour and its products"¹

We can see here a clear example of the converging paths by which Morris was advancing towards Socialism In the years between 1879 and 1884 he had been very active in practical work with tapestry and textiles, setting up his new workshops at Merton Abbey this work had brought him increasing insight into the contrast between the domestic and factory systems At the same time his propaganda for the Anti-Scrape had brought him down a different path towards an understanding of the

¹ May Morris, I, p 139

relations of the artist to his society. A few pages separated the paths, and the reading of *Capital* joined the two. Here is the explanation for the extraordinary clarity of this address.

Thus he had solved the problem, to his own satisfaction, of why restoration was impossible. The solution brought him back once again to his constant pre-occupation of the time—the change and movement of human history.

"Surely it is a curious thing that while we are ready to laugh at the idea of the Greek workman turning out a Gothic building, or a Gothic workman turning out a Greek one, we see nothing preposterous in the Victorian workman producing a Gothic one. I may be told, perhaps, that historical knowledge has enabled us to perform that miracle of raising the dead centuries to life. But to my mind it is a strange view to take of historical knowledge and insight, that it should set us on the adventure of trying to retrace our steps towards the past, rather than give us some glimmer of insight into the future, a strange view of the continuity of history, that it should make us ignore the very changes which are the essence of that continuity.

"Surely such a state of things is a token of change—of change, speedy perhaps, complete certainly of the visible end of one cycle and the beginning of another."

It is important to make these views of Morris clear, since they scatter the charges of nostalgic medievalism or sentimental pedantry still sometimes levelled ignorantly at his name. In fact, it was his work for the Anti-Scrape, his campaign against the would-be restorers, which urged him forward from a passive to an active view of history. Persons with a false idea of the continuity of history, he told the Society in a notable passage of his address of 1889,

"are loth to admit the fatal words, 'it cannot be, it has gone'. They believe that we can do the same sort of work in the same spirit as our forefathers, whereas for good and for evil we are completely changed, and we cannot do the work they did. All continuity of history means is after all perpetual change, and it is not hard to see that we have changed with a vengeance, and thereby established our claim to be the continuers of history."¹

So it was that the campaign to save Canterbury Cathedral and Great Coxwell Barn from destruction had an important part in the making of England's greatest Communist intellectual. At times

¹ May Morris, I, p. 152.

he was despondent enough, saying "It seems as if they will see what we mean just as the last old building is destroyed"¹ He was faced by that general apathy and defeatism which he himself was only shaking off, when he wrote to "Georgie" Burne-Jones in July, 1881

"As to Anti-Scrape, I have little comfort there As to the buildings the destruction is not far from being complete already What people really say to themselves is this I don't like the thing being done, but I can bear it maybe—or certainly, when I come to think of it—and to stir in it is such obvious suffering, so I won't stir 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, and I think that as things go, that is seldom felt except by very simple people, and by them dimly enough You know the most refined and cultured people, both those of the old religions and these of the vague new ones, have a sort of Manichean hatred of the world (I use the word in its proper sense, the home of man) Such people must be both the enemies of beauty and the slaves of necessity, and true it is that they lead the world at present, and I believe will do till all that is old is gone, and history has become a book from which the pictures have been torn "

The foreshadowing of the defeatism within bourgeois culture to-day, which can contemplate the atomic bomb without protest and can deny all human progress in the name of original sin, is prophetic But the conclusion to the letter is equally revealing

"If you ask me why I kick against the pricks in this matter, all I can say is, first because I cannot help it, and secondly because I am encouraged by a sort of faith, that something will come of it, some kind of culture of which we know nothing at present."²

The work of the Anti-Scrape both arose from and contributed to Morris's *rebirth of hope* How can we ever analyse the sources of such a change in a man's outlook? Which contributed most—the contact with Iceland, the practice of his crafts, the study of the process of history, the concrete response to life of the poet (the "real love of the earth"), the public activity and contact with the working class? Certainly all had their part in his rising tide of confidence in the future. From the outset of his work with the Society he pleaded not for a complete halting of restoration, but for a "truce" lasting perhaps for a century, the preservation of the buildings intact until then, for the future to decide

¹ *Lethaby, op cit*, p 159

² *Letters*, p 150

Naturally, when he became a Socialist in 1883, he argued this with ever stronger conviction. In his address of 1884 he said plainly that capitalism was dying, and a new society coming to birth.

"On the genuineness and reality of that hope the existence, the reason for existence of our Society depends. Believe me, it will not be possible for a small knot of cultivated people to keep alive an interest in the art and records of the past amidst the present conditions of a sordid and heart-breaking struggle for existence for the many, and a languid sauntering through life for the few. But when society is so reconstituted that all citizens will have a chance made up of due leisure and reasonable work, then will all society, and not our 'Society' only, resolve to protect ancient buildings—for then at last they will begin to understand that they are part of their present lives, and part of themselves."¹

"Although I am engaged with other societies, who might consider themselves more useful", he said in his address in 1889, "I think the work of this Society is thoroughly worth doing. Let us do what seems to us our duty in this matter, and let those that come after us do theirs, that will suffice, but my belief is that our descendants will thank us for our share of the work."²

Perhaps his most remarkable expression of confidence was in his address of ten years earlier—before he had any acquaintance with Socialism, and before he had even heard of Marx's name. "The workman of to-day is no artist", he said.

"It is the hope of my life that this may one day be changed, that popular art may grow again in our midst, that we may have an architectural style, the growth of its own times, but connected with all history."

After making his appeal for a "truce" which would leave the decision to the future, he continued.

"As for that decision of the future times of perfect and living art, I am not afraid of it. I believe that then the little grey weather-beaten building, built by ignorant men, torn by violent ones, patched by blunderers, that has outlived so many hopes and fears of mankind, and yet looks friendly and familiar to them—I believe that this relic of past times will be no offence to the beauty and majesty of their streets. Rather I believe they will honour it the more for the many minds and hands of men that have dealt with it, and they will

¹ May Morris, I, p. 145

² *Ibid.*, p. 157

religiously guard it as a holy symbol of all the triumphs and tribulations of art of art, the constant companion and expression of the life and aspirations of the world ”¹

If Morris had lived to see the love with which Socialist countries to-day defend and preserve their own ancient monuments, he would have known that his confidence was not misplaced

¹ May Morris, p 124