

CHAPTER IV

"LOVE IS ENOUGH"

IN 1871 Morris was already at work on his next poem, *Love is Enough*. "He makes a poem these days", wrote Edward Burne-Jones—

"in dismal Queen Square in black old filthy London in dull end of October he makes a pretty poem that is to be wondrously happy, and it has four sets of lovers in it and THEY ARE ALL HAPPY, and it ends well and will come out some time next summer and I shall make little ornaments to it—such is Top in these days"¹

The poem—despite Rossetti's praise—has very few virtues. At times it captures a mellow note of melancholy.

"Rather caught up at hazard is the pipe
That mixed with scent of roses over-ripe,
And murmur of the summer afternoon,
May charm you somewhat with its wavering tune
'Twixt joy and sadness . . ."

But even this is submerged in the after-traces of that "maze of re-writing and despondency" in which—in Morris's own words—it was written. The technical intricacies of the poem's structure, which have sometimes been praised, are largely mechanical. The characters (except perhaps the sentimentalized rustics with whom the poem opens and concludes) are mere shadows of the shadows in *The Earthly Paradise*. The long lines with their facile rhythm in which the "dramatic" portions of the poem are written seem to have such a deadly langour of feeling and emptiness of thought that they must pause at each line-ending for breath, and only with an effort of will can either poet or reader gather his energies for the next. The narrative itself is a sort of shadow, reminiscent in parts of "The Land East of the Moon and West of the Sun", and the poetry of mood, divorced from any particularities of events, situations or relationships, and lacking the stiffening fibre of the intellect, relapses again and again into either rhetoric or

¹ *Memorials*, II, p 23

platitude. It is a poem which might as well be forgotten—the lowest ebb of Morris's creative life.

Only in the "music"—the lyrics which intersperse the scenes of the narrative—does any genuine impulse behind the poem find expression

"Love is enough. draw near and behold me

Ye who pass by the way to your rest and your laughter,
And are full of the hope of the dawn coming after,
For the strong of the world have bought me and sold me
And my house is all wasted from threshold to rafter
—Pass by me, and hearken, and think of me not!

"Ye know not how void is your hope and your living:

Depart with your helping lest yet ye undo me!
Ye know not that at nightfall she draweth near to me,
There is soft speech between us and words of forgiving
Till in dead of the midnight her kisses thrill through me
—Pass by me and hearken, and waken me not!

"Wherewith will ye buy it, ye rich who behold me"

Draw out from your coffers your rest and your laughter,
And the fair gilded hope of the dawn coming after!
Nay this I sell not,—though ye bought me and sold me,—
For your house stored with such things from threshold to rafter.
—Pass by me, I hearken, and think of you not!"

This verse is less like music than embroidery, with its repeated decorative motifs, its leisurely movement, its moody imprecise vocabulary. Just for a moment the languorous movement of the rhythm is broken—"Nay this I sell not"—and real feeling struggles to enter. Here is the impulse of the poem. It is a logical continuation of the feeling expressed in the "Apology" to *The Earthly Paradise*. If the world is crooked, if everything is soiled by the ethic of buying and selling, then at least the value of life may be found in those intimate feelings and personal relationships which can be defended from the crooked world. "Love is Enough" because it is a human and not a cash relationship.

This is straightforward enough, although it may be inadequate as a source of feeling for the creation of great art. But in Morris's handling it is found not as a prevailing attitude but as an assertion: and the assertion is never felt to carry any conviction. In fact, "Love" is not presented in the poem as a human relationship,

but as a languorous yearning, a saturation of the senses, a weakening of the will, in short, as the attraction of the unconscious. Indeed, towards the end of the narrative the longing for death and the yearning for “Love” become so confused as to be almost indistinguishable. The muddy movement of the poem suggests that Morris was so possessed by the desire to escape from some important fact in his conscious thoughts that he was incapable of fashioning his experience into convincing art. The superficial subject may be “Love”, but the underlying theme is in the desire for unconsciousness and death.

The poem itself is unworthy of Morris, and may be dismissed. But the bearing which it may have upon Morris's personal life is important. Letters which have recently been published by Mr Philip Henderson, together with studies of Rossetti by Professor Oswald Doughty and Helen Rossetti Angeli, have thrown much light on this question, while the evidence of poems written by Morris during this period enable us to form some tentative conclusions.

Let us take the poems first. J. W. Mackail, the first serious biographer of Morris, was the son-in-law of “Georgie” Burne-Jones, and he had access not only to her memories but also to intimate letters which were later destroyed. He confessed in a private letter of 1899 that his account of “all those stormy years of *The Earthly Paradise* time and the time following it must be excessively flat”, owing to the amount of tact (“a quality unpleasantly near untruthfulness often”) that “had to be exercised right and left”.¹ In his biography he permitted himself only the comment that in the verses for the Months in *The Earthly Paradise* “there is an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must needs be left to speak for itself”. Recurrent in several of these poems is the theme of failure in love—the failure to establish a relationship of true confidence and intimacy, the longing of an intense love not fully reciprocated. It finds its finest expression in the beautiful verses for January:

“From this dull rainy undersky and low,
This murky ending of a leaden day,
That never knew the sun, this half-thawed snow,
These tossing black boughs faint against the grey

¹ Philip Henderson, *William Morris* (British Council, 1952), p. 22

Of gathering night, thou turnest, dear, away
 Silent, but with thy scarce-seen kindly smile
 Sent through the dusk my longing to beguile."

Then the lamps in the house are lit.

"There, the lights gleam, and all is dark without'
 And in the sudden change our eyes meet dazed—
 O look, love, look again' the veil of doubt
 Just for one flash, past counting, then was raised'
 O eyes of heaven, as clear thy sweet soul blazed
 On mine a moment' O come back again
 Strange rest and dear amid the dull long pain'"

It is a simple and moving image—the sudden darkening of the windows suggesting both the fear of mortality and the hostility and emptiness of the outside world, and emphasizing the dependence of the lovers upon each other for comradeship and support. But the flash of confidence is momentary.

"Nay, nay, gone by' though there she sitteth still,
 With wide grey eyes so frank and fathomless—
 Be patient, heart, thy days they yet shall fill
 With utter rest—Yea, now thy pain they bless
 And feed thy last hope of the world's redress—
 O unseen hurrying rack' O wailing wind'
 What rest and where go ye this night to find?"

The struggle to establish the relationship is neither won nor admitted as lost and yet in its outcome Morris rests his "last hope of the world's redress", his touchstone of value. And meanwhile, without, those symbols of hurrying mortality, the dark clouds and the wind, can be sensed. There is no poem or sequence in *Love is Enough* which is so strangely moving, or whose imagery carries the same conviction.

It is often dangerous to search for autobiographical hints in a writer's creative work. And yet, when so much of the poetry which Morris wrote at this time bears the mark of carelessness and shallow feeling, one is justified in taking those poems where a deep and personal feeling is expressed as bearing some direct relation to his personal life. This is confirmed by a group of poems, written during this period which Morris suppressed during his own lifetime, and which were later published by his daughter, May.¹ Since Morris was rarely reluctant to publish his

¹ *Works*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 347–66, and May Morris, I, pp. 538–9

own work, it is clear that these poems were written without publication in mind, in an effort to express and master his own perplexities and despair. One of the most striking of these poems is “The Doomed Ship”

“The doomed ship drives on helpless through the sea,
All that the mariners may do is done
And death is left for men to gaze upon,
While side by side two friends sit silently,
Friends once, foes once, and now by death made free
Of Love and Hate, of all things lost or won,
Yet still the wonder of that strife bygone
Clouds all the hope or horror that may be

“Thus, Sorrow, are we sitting side by side
Amid this welter of the grey despair,
Nor have we images of foul or fair
To vex, save of thy kissed face of a bride,
Thy scornful face of tears when I was tried,
And failed neath pain I was not made to bear”

The astringency of this poem, the unified imagery, and the absence of heroic or romantic posturing, is in marked contrast to the published poetry of this period

Another unfinished poem of this time demands a biographical interpretation. The poem, after the first verse and a half, is put into the mouth of the beloved

“Why doest thou struggle, strive for victory
Over my heart that loveth thine so well?
When Death shall one day have its will of thee
And to deaf ears thy triumph thou must tell

“Unto deaf ears or unto such as know
The hearts of dead and living wilt thou say
A childish heart there loved me once, and lo
I took his love and cast his love away

“A childish greedy heart' yet still he clung
So close to me that much he pleased my pride
And soothed a sorrow that about me hung
With glimpses of his love unsatisfied—

“And soothed my sorrow—but time soothed it too
Though ever did its aching fill my heart
To which the foolish child still closer drew
Thinking in all I was to have a part

"But now my heart grown silent of its grief
Saw more than kindness in his hungry eyes
But I must wear a mask of false belief
And feign that nought I knew his miseries

"I wore a mask, because though certainly
I loved him not, yet there was something soft
And sweet to have him ever loving me
Belike it is I well-nigh loved him oft—

"Nigh loved him oft, and needs must grant to him
Some kindness out of all he asked of me
And hoped his love would still hang vague and dim
About my life like half-heard melody

"He knew my heart and over-well knew this
And strove, poor soul, to pleasure me herein,
But yet what might he do some doubtful kiss
Some word, some look might give him hope to win

"Poor hope, poor soul, for he again would come
Thinking to gain yet one more golden step
Toward Love's shrine, and lo the kind speech dumb
The kind look gone, no love upon my lip—

"Yea gone, yet not my fault, I knew of love
But my love and not his, how could I tell
That such blind passion in him I should move?
Behold I have loved faithfully and well,

"Love of my love so deep and measureless
O lords of the new world this too ye know "

At this point the poem breaks off. It would be of the greatest interest if the date could be established. In its flexibility of psychological insight, in following through the paradoxical logic of human feeling, and in the manner in which the rhythm probes, hesitates, returns and moves forward with renewed confidence, only to hesitate again—in all this it is strongly reminiscent of the Morris who wrote *The Defence of Guenevere* and yet throughout there is a note of disillusion and realism which sets it apart.

These two poems most probably belong to the years between 1867 and 1870, and the lament over unreciprocated love is persistent in other poems of the same period. Quite clearly, Morris felt that his marriage with Jane Burden had failed. and this

failure was the source of profound unhappiness. The Pre-Raphaelite courtship of Jane Burden, leading to their marriage in 1859, has already been discussed. “Calf love, mistaken for a heroism that shall be life-long, yet early waning into disappointment . . .” “the unhappiness that comes of man and woman confusing the relations between natural passion, and sentiment, and the friendship which, when things go well, softens the awakening from passing illusions”—perhaps these two phrases of old Hammond in *News from Nowhere* carry a part of Morris’s judgement upon his own marriage. The earliest years of their marriage, in the days of the Red House and the birth of their two daughters—Jenny (born in 1861) and May (in 1862)—seem to have been happy enough. But it was in the nature of things that Morris, confronted in marriage not with the high romantic ideal of *The Defence of Guenevere*, but with a real human being, should have striven to create a new and truer relationship—one of mutual confidence, companionship and intellectual equality. And it was in this attempt, in the passing from romantic illusion to human intimacy, that he met with failure.

And yet, was it human intimacy he sought, or was there still a restless yearning in his romantic impulses for some intense idealized experience, seeking in Love, as in art, a refuge from life, “midmost the beating of the steely sea”? Certainly, the idealization of Love, the “last hope of the world’s redress”, both in *The Earthly Paradise* and *Love is Enough*, suggests that this was also present in his mood. Whichever impulse was dominant—that towards closer human intimacy, or that towards some idealized “union of souls”—both foundered on the rock of Janey’s passivity. Throughout she remains the enigma in the relationship. Perhaps unresponsive by nature or through the inhibitions of her upbringing, perhaps spoilt by the attention of poets and painters, it seems that she had allowed herself to fall into a character of inaccessible beauty, and to wear not only the Pre-Raphaelite draperies designed by Morris, but also the airs of a Guenevere. All accounts agree upon her strange, moody beauty, her poise and majestic presence—and also on her silence. For many years she was the victim of unexplained ailments, which seem to have had some nervous origin. Her letters (the few which are published, or are open to inspection) reveal no more than an

ordinary concern for the details of life, with an undertone of dissatisfaction, occasionally of self-pity¹ "I fancy that her mystic beauty must sometimes have weighed rather heavily upon her", wrote Graham Robertson in half-serious reminiscence

"Her mind was not formed upon the same tragic lines as her face, she was very simple and could have enjoyed simple pleasures with simple people, but such delights were not for her . . . She was a Ladye in a Bower, an ensorcelled Princess, a Blessed Damozel, while I feel sure she would have preferred to be a 'bright, chatty little woman' in request for small theatre parties and afternoons up the river" ²

And in this banter there may be a truth which more solemn observers overlooked. Certainly, Morris's letters to her, especially in the middle and later years of their marriage, while always affectionate—even dutiful—are in marked contrast to his letters to "Georgie" Burne-Jones or Aglaia Coronio. Largely concerned with domestic affairs, they sheer away from any topic requiring intellectual or imaginative effort and in one of the last letters (at the end of 1870) when he touches on such a topic, he breaks off with a confession of failure

"For me I don't think people really want to die because of mental pain, that is if they are imaginative people, they want to live to see the play played out fairly—they have hopes they are not conscious of—Hillao' here's cheerful talk for you I beg your pardon, dear, with all my heart" ³

In this context, the poem "Why doest thou struggle?" may be seen as a sensitive chart of their relationship

"I wore a mask, because though certainly
I loved him not, yet there was something soft
And sweet to have him loving me
Belike it is I well-nigh loved him oft—"

Every approach (as it seemed to Morris) was met by Janey's passivity, her melancholy self-absorption—perhaps by the conventionality and inhibitions suggested by the "rags of pride and shame" of another poem in this group.⁴ In moments of passion

¹ See Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1949), p. 210. A few noncommittal letters on family matters, with the same mournful undertone, are in Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 45341.

² W. G. Robertson, *Time Was* (1931), p. 94.

³ *Letters*, p. 36.

⁴ See *Works*, Vol. XXIV, p. 360, "Song".

he felt they had attained to an intimacy which eluded him in its aftermath surely this is one of the sources of that constant oscillation between sensuous desire and emptiness or horror to be found throughout *The Earthly Paradise*. On Janey's side he surmised not an unwillingness, but an inability to respond

"I knew of love
But my love and not his, how could I tell
That such blind passion in him I should move?"

Perhaps he felt at times bitterness at her lack of response to his efforts to make their relationship anew.¹ But gradually an acceptance of failure prevailed—the mood of the "Doomed Ship"—and with this (in fact implicit in the recognition of failure rather than the imputation against her of blame) a continued but diminished love. After all, it was he who, in the days of Launcelot and Guenevere, had helped to create the image which could not now respond.

Janey, it seems, was not the kind of person to take much blame upon herself for this failure, although she may well have been wounded by Morris's evident disillusion. As she grew older, her personality seems to have grown less, rather than more, sympathetic, and her air of aloof discontent to have become more marked. At what stage Rossetti became the centre of her interest it is impossible to say, but there seems to be no reason to give much credit to Hall Caine's story that they had loved each other since the days of the painting of the Oxford Union. It is more important to realize that (whatever sympathy existed between the beautiful model and the romantic young painter in earlier days) Janey and Rossetti were drawn together in the late 1860s after an emotional separation had already begun to take place between her and Morris.

From 1867 onwards Janey and Rossetti were often in each other's company. She was the model who dominated Rossetti's artistic imagination, and, as Professor Doughty has established, Rossetti's "regenerate rapture" in his love for Janey inspired much of *The House of Life* and many other poems of this period.² In 1870 and 1871 they were customarily to be seen together at social occasions in Bohemian artistic circles at Ford Madox

¹ E.g. *Works*, Vol. XXIV, p. 359, "As This Thin Thread"

² See Doughty, *op. cit.*, pp. 378 f.

Brown's receptions in Fitzroy Square, where Janey, "in her ripest beauty, and dressed in a long, unfashionable gown of ivory velvet, occupied the painting-throne, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti . . . too stout for elegance, squatted on a hassock at her feet", or (again at Brown's) among "anarchists, poets, musicians, all kinds and sorts", "Rossetti and Mrs Morris sitting side by side in state, being worshipped", or, at the receptions of Marston, the dramatist, Rossetti would be seen "sitting beside Mrs Morris, who looked as if she had stepped out of any one of his pictures, both wrapped in motionless silence as of a world where souls have no need of words", or (more prosaically) he was "seated in a corner feeding Mrs. William Morris with strawberries", and carefully scraping off the cream, which was bad for her, before presenting them to her in a spoon.¹ Even in her Bohemianism, the same impression of Janey's silence and passivity prevails

It was in 1871 that Kelmscott Manor was taken on a joint tenancy by Morris and Rossetti, and there is no doubt that Morris hoped it would provide a home where Janey and the children could share Rossetti's company during his own absence. For similar motives, he paid his first visit to Iceland in this year (see p. 220). The theme of an uncompleted novel of this period (and the theme of several poems, written both now and later) concerned the love of two brothers (or friends) for the same woman. In the 1880s he returned to the theme in *The Pilgrims of Hope*, where both the sorrow and the magnanimity of the husband whose wife has fallen in love with his friend finds expression. Both in *News from Nowhere* and in a letter written in later years (see p. 818) he stated clearly his belief that husband and wife in married life must remain "free people" "artificial bolstering up of natural human relations is what I object to". The enforcement of a property-contract when sentiment no longer went with it was immoral and odious to him, equally, he rejected any jealous sense of property-rights in love. While the withdrawal of Janey's love from him caused him grief and pain, her attachment to Rossetti did not seem to him necessarily to exclude a continuing friendship between all three. Had the situation been reversed, and Janey been, in conventional terms, the "injured

¹ See Doughty, *op cit*, pp. 452 f.

party”, the orthodox Victorian moralists would probably have advised her to “suffer in silence” But for a *man* to do the same ran counter to every clause in the code of Mrs Grundy For Morris was prepared not only to *talk* about equality and respect for the rights of women, he was prepared to recognize this equality in his own actions

Towards Rossetti, Morris’s old feelings of admiration and friendship were changing, it is true “I have been backwards and forwards to Kelmscott a good deal this summer & autumn”, he wrote to Aglaia Coronio in October, 1872, “but shall not go there so often now as Gabriel is come there, and talks of staying permanently”¹ Two weeks later, he wrote to her of a visit to Kelmscott “the *days* went well enough but Lord how dull the evenings were with William Rossetti also to help us Janey was looking and feeling much better”² His acquaintance, C F. Murray, related to A C Benson that Morris “grew almost to hate Rossetti down at Kelmscott he had the natural dislike of the perfectly healthy man for the unhealthy man”³ But it is not necessary to suppose any melodramatic jealousy as a cause of this change in his feelings Rossetti was himself a changed man from the days of the painting fraternity at Oxford and in the early ’seventies he could be seen to be degenerating year by year His short-lived marriage with Lizzie Siddal had ended in tragedy He was becoming now the victim of laudanum, obsessed by morbid fears and a sense of persecution, arrogant to the neighbours at Kelmscott, increasingly losing his old ebullience in self-absorption There are reasons enough to explain the estrangement between the two friends, even without this greater complication

Moreover, it must have become clear to Morris that his friend’s attachment to Janey was becoming obsessional Perhaps Morris had hoped that the summer of 1871, when Janey and Rossetti were at Kelmscott and he was in Iceland, would be only a passing interlude and that the two would outgrow their attachment Perhaps Rossetti also, on the eve of his departure from Kelmscott that summer, intended to break free from Janey.

¹ *Letters*, p 47

² *Ibid*, p 49

³ A C Benson, *Memories and Friends*, p 214

"And now the mustering rooks innumerable
 Together sail and soar,
 While for the day's death, like a tolling knell,
 Unto the heart they seem to cry, Farewell,
 No more, Farewell, no more!"

But no decision was taken. At the end of August, shortly before Morris's return, Rossetti was speaking of "keeping the house on".¹ Next year, separated from Janey and suffering from Buchanan's attack on the "Fleshly School of Poetry", he attempted suicide. On his recovery, he returned to Janey at Kelmscott, writing to Madox Brown: "Had I not renewed correspondence and resolved to come here, I should never have got a bit better or been able to take up work."² For the next two or three years Rossetti and Janey were much in each other's company, and thereafter Janey visited him (although less frequently) until his last years.³

The clearest insight into Morris's own feelings comes only at this period, in letters recently published by Mr Philip Henderson, and addressed to his friend, Aglaia Coronio. On November 25th, 1872, he was writing

"When I said there was no cause for my feeling low, I meant that my friends had not changed at all towards me in any way and that there had been no quarrelling and indeed I am afraid it comes from some cowardice and unmanliness in me. One thing wanting ought not to go for so much nor indeed does it spoil my enjoyment of life always, as I have often told you to have real friends and some sort of an aim in life is so much, that I ought still to think myself lucky and often in my better moods I wonder what it is in me that throws me into such rage and despair at other times. I suspect, do you know, that some such moods would have come upon me at times even without this failure of mine."

"One thing wanting", "this failure of mine"—these phrases remind us directly of the poems, and suggest that Morris was far from any mood of recrimination. The letter continues.

¹ W. M. Rossetti, *Letters and Memoir of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Vol. II, p. 244.

² *Angeli*, op. cit., p. 215.

³ Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti* (1928), p. 141, speaks of the "rare and valued visits" from Janey in Rossetti's last years, when Caine was living with him. "As often as she came he would write a little note and send it out to me, saying 'The lady I spoke about has arrived and will stay with me to dinner. In these circumstances I will ask you to be good enough to dine in your own room to-night.'"

“I am so glad to have Janey back again her company is always pleasant and she is very kind & good to me—furthermore, my intercourse with G [Georgie Burne-Jones] has been a good deal interrupted, not from any coldness of hers, or violence of mine, but from so many untoward nothings then you have been away so that I have had nobody to talk to about things that bothered me. Another quite selfish business is that Rossetti has set himself down at Kelmscott as if he never meant to go away, and not only does that keep me from that harbour of refuge (because it is really a farce our meeting when we can help it) but also he has all sorts of ways so unsympathetic with the sweet simple old place, that I feel his presence there as a kind of slur on it this is very unreasonable when one thinks why one took the place, and how this year it has really answered that purpose nor do I think I should feel this about it if he had not been so unromantically discontented with it & the whole thing which made me very angry and disappointed. O how I long to keep the world from narrowing on me, and to look at things bigly and kindly!”

“I am going to try to get to Iceland next year, hard as it will be to drag myself away from two or three people in England but I know there will be a kind of rest in it, let alone the help it will bring me from physical reasons I know clearer now perhaps than then what a blessing & help last year’s journey was to me, what horrors it saved me from”¹

On January 23rd, 1873, he wrote to the same friend.

“Don’t be alarmed for any domestic tragedy, nothing has happened to tell of and my dullness comes all out of my own heart, and—in short I am ashamed of it and don’t like talking of it”

The letter continues with details of domestic changes. They have moved into a small house in Hammersmith, keeping the house in Queen Square for the work of the Firm “I keep my study and little bedroom here, and I dare say as time goes on shall live here a good deal” The new house “will suit Janey and the children”.

“It is some $\frac{1}{2}$ hour’s walk from the Grange [the Burne-Jones’s new house in Fulham] which makes it quite a little way for me, on the other hand I can always see anyone I want at Queen Sq quite safe from interruption so in all ways it seems an advantage—does it not?”

The letter concludes with a further reference to Iceland. the voyage “will be a necessity to me this year sometimes I like the idea of it, and sometimes it fills me with dismay”²

¹ *Letters*, pp 50-1

² *Ibid*, p 52

Throughout these years Morris was the victim of successive waves of the deepest depression. The sympathy which he had lost in his relations with Janey, he sought increasingly in his friendship with "Georgie" Burne-Jones. At about this time, it became one of the only constant habits of his life to visit the "Grange" every Sunday morning for breakfast, and spend the morning with Burne-Jones and his wife. His letters to her carry a warmth that is quite lacking from his later letters to Janey. When "Georgie" Burne-Jones allowed J. W. Mackail to publish extracts from them after Morris's death, it is quite clear that she held back many more intimate passages but whether these related to Janey or to Morris's feelings towards herself it is useless to speculate. Certainly their friendship was close and without reserve.

As it was, Morris's friendship with "Georgie" never replaced that feeling of loss, that sense of "one thing wanting", that accompanied him to the end of his life. For the moment he took refuge in work, applying himself to his translations from the Icelandic and his work with the Firm. Occasionally he referred in his letters to his moods of depression.

"I am ashamed of myself for these strange waves of unreasonable passion. it seems so unmanly yet indeed I have a good deal to bear considering how hopeful my earlier youth was, & what overweening ideas I had of the joys of life,"

he wrote to Aglaia Coronio in March, 1875. And, a few days later:

"I am in the second half of my life now, which is like to be a busy time with me, I hope till the very end. a time not lacking content too, I fancy, I must needs call myself a happy man on the whole and I do verily think I have gone over every possible misfortune that may happen to me in my own mind, and concluded that I can bear it if it should come."¹

Occasionally he expressed the fear that he might be losing creative inspiration:

"My translations go on apace, but I am doing nothing original. it can't be helped, though sometimes I begin to fear that I am losing my invention. You know I very much wish not to fall off in imagination and enthusiasm as I grow older."²

¹ Morris to Mrs Alfred Baldwin, *Letters*, p. 67

² *Ibid*, p. 53

Once or twice he cast a regretful glance back to the days of his youthful ideals, those “well-remembered days when all adventure was ahead!”

“Manly”, “unmanly”—these are words as important in Morris’s vocabulary as “hope”. They reveal a quality in him which was absent in the characteristic make-up of the Victorian romantic. Man ought to be the master of his emotions, not their victim. If there was sorrow and disappointment in his life, he must not indulge in the luxuries of self-pity, but master them and fit himself to set his hand to the work of the world in its despite. As the influence of Iceland and of the old sagas grew upon him, so this mood in him drew nourishment.

“Ah! shall Winter mend your case?
Set your teeth the wind to face
Beat the snow, tread down the frost!
All is gained when all is lost”¹

Moreover, as he became in later years more possessed by new and wider “hope”, so all references to his private despondency and failure cease. The matter, perhaps, was never mentioned in his last years, except with his closest friend, “Georgie” Burne-Jones. Wilfred Scawen Blunt, a friend of his later years (although not a close friend) with that intuitive sense which seems always a shade too clever for the genuine insight of sympathy, detected something of it. “One thing only, I think, he did not know, much as he had written about it, the love of women, and that he never cared to discuss”². In general there was a surprising absence of comment among his contemporaries. If there were secrets, they were well kept. Morris’s family and friends long outlived him, and no doubt it was delicacy towards their feelings which prevented comment.³

Perhaps (since the matter went for many years undiscussed) it were better passed over in silence now. And yet, without this knowledge, much would remain unexplained in Morris’s life and

¹ *The Academy*, March, 1871

² Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries* (1919), Part One, pp. 30-1

³ Jane Morris lived until 1914, Lady Burne-Jones until 1920, while May Morris, who kept a careful supervision over all manuscripts in her possession, died in 1938. Certain letters between Rossetti and Jane Morris in the British Museum may not be unsealed until 1989.

in his writings. A relationship can rarely stand without alteration throughout changing years: the relations between Morris and Janey may well have degenerated in the last years of his life. Jane Morris, in her spoiled and indifferent way, was hostile to Morris's Socialist views, activities and friends. At the suppers on Sunday evenings in Kelmscott House, when the comrades gathered, she was usually absent. "Will you come over to-morrow?" we find him writing at the end of his life to Andreas Scheu, one of his closest friends among the Socialists. "There will be no one to object to you as I am alone with the girls at present."¹ When Morris died, many of the comrades—in deference to Janey's known feelings—were absent from the funeral. Even Shaw, the irrepressible, felt embarrassment in her company.

"I always felt apologetic with Mrs. Morris. I knew that the sudden eruption into her temple of beauty, with its pre-Raphaelite priests, of the proletarian comrades who began to infest the premises as Morris's fellow-Socialists, must be horribly disagreeable to her. Fortunately she did not take much notice of me. She was not a talker: in fact she was the silentest woman I have ever met. She did not take much notice of anybody, and none whatever of Morris, who talked all the time."

The times when she broke silence were therefore memorable. Shaw, as a vegetarian, was forced—when dining with them—to reject the main dish.

"Mrs. Morris did not conceal her contempt for my folly. At last pudding time came, and as the pudding was a particularly nice one, my abstinence vanished and I showed signs of a healthy appetite. Mrs. Morris pressed a second helping on me, which I consumed to her entire satisfaction. Then she said, 'That will do you good: there is suet in it.' And that is the only remark, as far as I can remember, that was ever addressed to me by this beautiful stately and silent woman, whom the Brotherhood and Rossetti had succeeded in consecrating."²

But where Shaw could find humour, Morris may have found wasteful conflict and misery. In the manuscript of an unfinished prose romance of his last years, *The Story of Desiderius*, there is a character who seems closely modelled upon Rossetti in his decline, and a woman is drawn who is the very image of the woman

¹ Morris to Scheu, March 11th, 1895, *Socialist Review*, May, 1928.

² May Morris, II, pp. xxiv-xxv.

who recurs so often in his earlier writing This time she is above forty years of age

“Her face was like the marble image of a good imaginer, so right and true were all the lines therein, and so shapely was the compass of it Dark smooth and fine was her hair, her lips full and red, her skin smooth and clear of hue, her limbs and all her body excellently fashioned, her eyes great and grey and seeming as if they were the very windows of a true and simple soul ”

One is reminded at once of a poem of *The Earthly Paradise* period, “Near But Far Away”

“She wavered, stopped and turned, methought her eyes,
The deep grey windows of her heart, were wet,
Methought they softened with a new regret ”¹

But in this later picture there is a significant and terrible change. All this was “only seeming” In truth, she was “a friend in the morning, a stranger at mid-day, a foe in the evening” Beneath her beautiful presence she was indifferent and cruel. “she cared for no soul of man or beast what grief might happen to them” “Lovers had she had in her time, and yet had yet had their love lasted but a little while for presently they found that there was nought to be loved in her save her fair body ”² Can this be the last portrait which the most famous of the Pre-Raphaelite models sat to—and would it be only charity to suppose it to be as unfairly distorted as the previous ones were idealized?

However this may be—and however Morris may have felt in his moods of depression—he maintained some affection and loyalty towards her to the last But it is in *News from Nowhere* that the depths of his sense of loss, of “one thing wanting”, are made plain Into his portrait of Ellen, the girl who guided him up the Thames to Kelmscott Manor, are projected all those qualities he desired to find and in the suggestion of the emergent relationship between Ellen and the narrator there will be found that tenderness, frank intimacy, comradeship and equal intellectual exchange, which he could envisage between the lovers of the future and yet which he knew he could never achieve in his own life.

Ellen is far different from the remote and languorous type of

¹ May Morris, I, p 538

² Brit Mus Add MSS 45328

the Pre-Raphaelite ideal Even in repose "She was far from languid; her idleness being the idleness of a person, strong and well-knit both in body and mind, deliberately resting" She is suffused with an "indefinable interest and pleasure of life", her beauty "interfused with energy". She is without affectation or false reserve, sincere in both feeling and thought Their love grows until the moment when they sit down to the feast in Kelmscott Manor, and the narrator suddenly realizes that he has become unnoticed by all the company

"I turned to Ellen but her bright face turned sad directly, and she shook her head with a mournful look, and the next moment all consciousness of my presence had faded from her face

"I felt lonely and sick at heart past the power of words to describe "

The loss is final and without retrieve

"Ellen's last mournful look seemed to say, 'No, it will not do, you cannot be of us, you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you ' "

But the loss does not bring the emptiness of his middle years Now there is hope within it—not for himself, it is true—but still the compensation of having seen his aspirations fulfilled in the lives of others in a future time

"She had arisen and was standing on the edge of the bent, the light wind stirring her dainty raiment, one hand laid on her bosom, the other arm stretched downward and clenched in her earnestness

" 'It is true,' she said, 'it is true! We have proved it true' "