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978-1-108-05119-4 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 5: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 3

William Morris

Excerpt

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## SEPTEMBER

COME at last, to whom the springtide's hope  
Looked for through blossoms, what hast thou for me?  
Green grows the grass upon the dewy slope  
Beneath thy gold-hung, grey-leaved apple-tree  
Moveless, e'en as the autumn fain would be  
That shades its sad eyes from the rising sun  
And weeps at eve because the day is done.

What vision wilt thou give me, autumn morn,  
To make thy pensive sweetness more complete?  
What tale, ne'er to be told, of folk unborn?  
What images of grey-clad damsels sweet  
Shall cross thy sward with dainty noiseless feet?  
What nameless shamefast longings made alive,  
Soft-eyed September, will thy sad heart give?

Look long, O longing eyes, and look in vain!  
Strain idly, aching heart, and yet be wise,  
And hope no more for things to come again  
That thou beheldest once with careless eyes!  
Like a new-wakened man thou art, who tries  
To dream again the dream that made him glad  
When in his arms his loving love he had.

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**M**ID young September's fruit-trees next they met,  
 With calm hearts, willing such things to forget  
 As men had best forget; and certainly  
 E'en such a day it was when this might be  
 If e'er it might be; fair, without a cloud,  
 Yet windless, so that a grey haze did shroud  
 The bright blue; neither burning overmuch,  
 Nor chill, the blood of those old folk to touch  
 With fretful, restless memory of despair.  
 Withal no promise of the fruitful year  
 Seemed unfulfilled in that fair autumn-tide;  
 The level ground along the river-side  
 Was merry through the day with sounds of those  
 Who gathered apples; o'er the stream arose  
 The northward-looking slopes where the swine ranged  
 Over the fields that hook and scythe had changed  
 Since the last month; but twixt the tree-boles grey  
 Above them did they see the terraced way,  
 And over that the vine-stocks, row on row,  
 Whose dusty leaves, well thinned and yellowing now,  
 But little hid the bright-bloomed vine-bunches.

There day-long 'neath the shadows of the trees  
 Those elders sat; chary of speech they were,  
 For good it seemed to watch the young folk there,  
 Not so much busied with their harvesting,  
 But o'er their baskets they might stop to sing;  
 Nor for the end of labour all so fain  
 But eyes of men from eyes of maids might gain  
 Some look desired.

So at the midday those  
 Who played with labour in the deep green close  
 Stinted their gathering for a while to eat;  
 Then to the elders did it seem most meet  
 Amidst of these to set forth what they might  
 Of lore remembered, and to let the night  
 Bury its own dead thoughts with wine and sleep;

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So while the loitering autumn sun did creep  
O'er flower-crowned heads, and past sweet eyes of grey  
And eager lips, and fresh round limbs that lay  
Amid the golden fruit—fruit sweet and fair  
Themselves, that happy days and love did bear  
And life unburdened—while the failing sun  
Drew up the light clouds, was this tale begun,  
Sad, but not sad enow to load the yoke,  
E'en by a feather's weight, of those old folk;  
Sad, and believed but for its sweetness' sake  
By the young folk, desiring not to break  
The spell that sorrow's image cast on them,  
As dreamlike she went past with fluttering hem.

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## THE DEATH OF PARIS

### THE ARGUMENT

PARIS THE SON OF PRIAM WAS WOUNDED BY ONE OF THE POISONED ARROWS OF HERCULES THAT PHILOCTETES BORE TO THE SIEGE OF TROY; WHEREFORE HE HAD HIMSELF BORNE UP INTO IDA THAT HE MIGHT SEE THE NYMPH CENONE, WHOM HE ONCE HAD LOVED, BECAUSE SHE, WHO KNEW MANY SECRET THINGS, ALONE COULD HEAL HIM: BUT WHEN HE HAD SEEN HER AND SPOKEN WITH HER, SHE WOULD DEAL WITH THE MATTER IN NO WISE, WHEREFORE PARIS DIED OF THAT HURT.

**I**N the last month of Troy's beleaguerment,  
 When both sides, waiting for some God's great hand,  
 But seldom o'er the meads the war-shout sent,  
 Yet idle rage would sometimes drive a band  
 From town or tent about Troy-gate to stand  
 All armed, and there to bicker aimlessly;  
 And so at least the weary time wore by.

In such a fight, when wide the arrows flew,  
 And little glory fell to any there,  
 And nought there seemed for a stout man to do,  
 Rose Philoctetes from the ill-roofed lair  
 That hid his rage, and crept out into air  
 And strung his bow, and slunk down to the fight,  
 'Twixt rusty helms, and shields that once were bright.

And even as he reached the foremost rank,  
 A glimmer as of polished steel and gold  
 Amid the war-worn Trojan folk, that shrank  
 To right and left, his fierce eyes could behold;  
 He heard a shout, as if one man were bold  
 About the streams of Simoeis that day—  
 One heart still ready to play out the play.

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Therewith he heard a mighty bowstring twang,  
 A shaft screamed out 'twixt hostile band and band,  
 And close beside him fell, with clash and clang,  
 A well-tried warrior from the Cretan land,  
 And rolled in dust, clutching with desperate hand  
 At the gay feathers of the shaft that lay  
 Deep in his heart, well silenced from that day.

The Death  
 of Paris

Then of the Greeks did man look upon man,  
 While Philoctetes from his quiver drew  
 A dreadful shaft, and through his fingers ran  
 The dull-red feathers; of strange steel and blue  
 The barbs were, such as archer never knew,  
 But black as death the thin-forged bitter point,  
 That with the worm's blood Fate did erst anoint.

He shook the shaft, and notched it, and therewith  
 Forth from the Trojans rang that shout again,  
 Whistled the arrow, and a Greek did writhe  
 Once more upon the earth in his last pain;  
 While the grey clouds, big with the threat of rain,  
 Parted a space, and on the Trojans shone,  
 And struck a glory from that shining one.

Then Philoctetes scowled, and cried: "O Fate,  
 I give thee this, thy strong man gave to me.  
 Do with it as thou wilt!—let small or great  
 E'en as thou wilt before its black point be!  
 Late grows the year, and stormy is the sea,  
 The oars lie rotten by the gunwales now  
 That nevermore a Grecian surf shall know."

He spake and drew the string with careless eyes,  
 And, as the shaft flew forth, he turned about  
 And tramped back slowly, noting in no wise  
 How from the Greeks uprose a joyous shout,  
 And from the Trojan host therewith brake out  
 Confused clamour, and folk cried the name  
 Of him wherethrough the weary struggle came,

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The Death  
of Paris

Paris the son of Priam! then once more  
O'erhead of leaguer and beleaguered town  
Grey grew the sky, a cold sea-wind swept o'er  
The ruined plain, and the small rain drove down,  
While slowly underneath that chilling frown  
Parted the hosts; sad Troy into its gates,  
Greece to its tents, and waiting on the Fates.

**N**EXT day the seaward-looking gates none swung  
Back on their hinges, whatso Greek might fare,  
With seeming-careless mien, and bow unstrung,  
Anigh them; whatso rough-voiced horn might dare  
With well-known notes, the war-worn warders there;  
Troy slept amid its nightmares through the day,  
And dull with waking dreams the leaguer lay.

Yet in the streets did man say unto man:  
"Hector is dead, and Troilus is dead;  
Æneas turneth toward the waters wan;  
In his fair house Antenor hides his head;  
Fast from the tree of Troy the boughs are shred;  
And now this Paris, now this joyous one,  
Is the cry cried that biddeth him begone?"

But on the morrow's dawn, ere yet the sun  
Had shone athwart the mists of last night's rain,  
And shown the image of the Spotless One  
Unto the tents and hovels of the plain  
Whose girth of war she long had made all vain,  
From out a postern looking towards the north  
A little band of silent men went forth.

And in their midst a litter did they bear  
Whereon lay one with linen wrapped around,  
Whose wan face turned unto the fresher air  
As though a little pleasure he had found  
Amidst of pain; some dreadful, torturing wound  
The man endured belike, and as a balm  
Was the fresh morn, with all its rest and calm,

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After the weary tossing of the night  
 And close dim-litten chamber, whose dusk seemed  
 Labouring with whispers fearful of the light,  
 Confused with images of dreams long dreamed,  
 Come back again, now that the lone torch gleamed  
 Dim before eyes that saw nought real as true  
 To vex the heart that nought of purpose knew.

The Death  
 of Paris

Upon the late-passed night in e'en such wise  
 Had Paris lain. What time, like years of life,  
 Had passed before his weary heart and eyes!  
 What hopeless, nameless longings! what wild strife  
 'Gainst nought for nought, with wearying changes rife,  
 Had he gone through, till in the twilight grey  
 They bore him through the cold deserted way.

Mocking and strange the streets looked now, most meet  
 For a dream's ending, for a vain life's end;  
 While sounded his strong litter-bearers' feet,  
 Like feet of men who through Death's country wend  
 Silent, for fear lest they should yet offend  
 The grim King satisfied to let them go;  
 Hope bids them hurry, fear's chain makes them slow.

In feverish doze he thought of bygone days,  
 When love was soft, life strong, and a sweet name,  
 The first sweet name that led him down love's ways,  
 Unbidden ever to his fresh lips came;  
 Half witting would he speak it, and for shame  
 Flush red, and think what folk would deem thereof  
 If they might know Ænone was his love.

And now, Ænone no more love of his,  
 He worn with war and passion—must he pray:  
 “O thou, I loved and love not, life and bliss  
 Lie in thine hands to give or take away;  
 O heal me, hate me not! think of the day  
 When as thou thinkest still, e'en so I thought,  
 That all the world without thy love was nought.”

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of Paris

Yea, he was borne forth such a prayer to make,  
For she alone of all the world, they said,  
The thirst of that dread poison now might slake,  
For midst the ancient wise ones nurtured  
On peaceful Ida, in the lore long dead,  
Lost to the hurrying world, right wise she was,  
Mighty to bring most wondrous things to pass.

Was the world worth the minute of that prayer  
If yet her love, despised and cast aside,  
Should so shine forth that she should heal him there?  
He knew not and he recked not; fear and pride  
'Neath Helen's kiss and Helen's tears had died,  
And life was love, and love too strong that he  
Should catch at Death to save him misery.

So, with soul drifting down the stream of love,  
He let them bear him through the fresh fair morn,  
From out Troy-gates; and no more now he strove  
To battle with the wild dreams, newly born  
From that past night of toil and pain forlorn;  
No farewell did he mutter 'neath his breath  
To failing Troy, no eyes he turned toward death.

Troy dwindled now behind them, and the way  
That round about the feet of Ida wound,  
They left; and up a narrow vale, that lay  
Grassy and soft betwixt the pine-woods bound,  
Went they, and ever gained the higher ground,  
For as a trench the little valley was  
To catch the runnels that made green its grass.

Now ere that green vale narrowed to an end,  
Blocked by a shaly slip thrust bleak and bare  
From the dark pine-wood's edge, as men who wend  
Upon a well-known way, they turned from there;  
And through the pine-wood's dusk began to fare  
By blind ways, till all noise of bird and wind  
Amid that odorous night was left behind.



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And in meanwhile deepened the languid doze  
 That lay on Paris into slumber deep;  
 O'er his unconscious heart, and eyes shut close,  
 The image of that very place 'gan creep,  
 And twelve years younger in his dreamful sleep,  
 Light-footed, through the awful wood he went,  
 With beating heart, on lovesome thoughts intent.

The Death  
 of Paris

Dreaming, he went, till thinner and more thin,  
 And bright with growing day, the pine-wood grew,  
 Then to an open, rugged space did win;  
 Whence a close beech-wood was he passing through,  
 Whose every tall white stem full well he knew;  
 Then seemed to stay awhile for loving shame,  
 When to the brow of the steep bank he came,

Where still the beech-trunks o'er the mast-strewn ground  
 Stood close, and slim and tall, but hid not quite  
 A level grassy space they did surround  
 On every side save one, that to the light  
 Of the clear western sky, cold now, but bright,  
 Was open, and the thought of the far sea,  
 Toward which a small brook tinkled merrily.

Him seemed he lingered there, then stepped adown  
 With troubled heart into the soft green place,  
 And up the eastmost of the beech-slopes brown  
 He turned about a lovesome, anxious face,  
 And stood to listen for a little space  
 If any came, but nought he seemed to hear  
 Save the brook's babble, and the beech-leaves' stir.

And then he dreamed great longing o'er him came;  
 Too great, too bitter of those days to be  
 Long past, when love was born amidst of shame;  
 He dreamed that, as he gazed full eagerly  
 Into the green dusk between tree and tree,  
 His trembling hand slid down the horn to take  
 Wherewith he erst was wont his herd to wake.

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of Paris

Trembling, he set it to his lips, and first  
Breathed gently through it; then strained hard to blow,  
For dumb, dumb was it grown, and no note burst  
From its smooth throat; and ill thoughts poisoned now  
The sweetness of his dream; he murmured low:  
“Ah! dead and gone, and ne’er to come again;  
Ah, passed away! ah, longed for long in vain!

“Lost love, sweet Helen, come again to me!”  
Therewith he dreamed he fell upon the ground  
And hid his face, and wept out bitterly,  
But woke with fall and torturing tears, and found  
He lay upon his litter, and the sound  
Of feet departing from him did he hear,  
And rustling of the last year’s leaves anear.

But in the selfsame place he lay indeed,  
Weeping and sobbing, and scarce knowing why;  
His hand clutched hard the horn that erst did lead  
The dewlapped neat round Ida merrily;  
He strove to raise himself, he strove to cry  
That name of Helen once, but then withal  
Upon him did the load of memory fall.

Quiet he lay a space, while o’er him drew  
The dull, chill cloud of doubt and sordid fear,  
As now he thought of what he came to do,  
And what a dreadful minute drew anear;  
He shut his eyes, and now no more could hear  
His litter-bearers’ feet; as lone he felt  
As though amid the outer wastes he dwelt.

Amid that fear, most feeble, nought, and vain  
His life and love seemed; with a dreadful sigh  
He raised his arm, and soul’s and body’s pain  
Tore at his heart with new-born agony  
As a thin quavering note, a ghost-like cry  
Rang from the long unused lips of the horn,  
Spoiling the sweetness of the happy morn.