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May Morris and George Bernard Shaw

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William Morris

A tireless champion of her father William, and a gifted designer and craftswoman in her own right, Mary (May) Morris (1862–1938) had a unique insight into his extraordinary career and creativity. It was she who undertook the exacting task of editing the twenty-four volumes of her father's collected works (also reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection). In 1936, towards the end of her life, she published this supplementary two-volume work, which includes further writings and sympathetic commentary, revealing 'the development of a mind which was singularly of one piece, however many-sided'. Volume 2 addresses William Morris' political aims and ideals. Opening with the essay 'Morris as I Knew Him' by George Bernard Shaw, it includes May's substantial assessment of her father's socialism, along with many previously unpublished examples of his output of lectures, articles and letters on the subject. Also included is the index to the entire collected works.

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William Morris

Artist, Writer, Socialist

VOLUME 2:

MORRIS AS A SOCIALIST;
WILLIAM MORRIS AS I KNEW HIM

MAY MORRIS

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



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WILLIAM MORRIS

Artist Writer Socialist

Volume the Second

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E. L. Griggs del 1911

Emery Walker Col. phot

William Morris's Grave in Kelmscott Churchyard

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WILLIAM MORRIS
ARTIST WRITER SOCIALIST
BY MAY MORRIS

VOLUME THE SECOND
MORRIS AS A SOCIALIST

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF
WILLIAM MORRIS AS I KNEW HIM
BY BERNARD SHAW

OXFORD : BASIL BLACKWELL

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MORRIS AS I KNEW HIM

MORRIS, when he had to define himself politically, called himself a Communist. Very often, of course, in discussing Socialism he had to speak of himself as a Socialist; but he jibbed at it internally, and flatly rebelled against such faction labels as Social-democrat and the like. He knew that the essential term, etymologically, historically, and artistically, was Communist; and it was the only word he was comfortable with.

It must not be inferred that he had any prevision of Soviet technique or any other developed method of Communist organization. Nobody had, or could have, in his time. He was on the side of Karl Marx *contra mundum*; but he had none of the intellectual pretentiousness and pride of education that made Lassalle boast of being equipped with all the culture of his age, and Marx elaborate a patent philosophic dialectic and an economic theory of bourgeois exploitation and surplus value. Far from being proud of his university education Morris declared that the only item in his past expenditure he thoroughly grudged was the twenty pounds his Oxford degree of Master of Arts had cost him. Going straight to the root of Communism he held that people who do not do their fair share of social work are 'damned thieves,' and that neither a stable society, a happy life, nor a healthy art can come from honoring such thieving as the mainspring of industrial activity. To him the notion that a British workman cannot arrive at this very simple fundamental conclusion except through the strait gate of the Marxian dialectic, or that the dialectic can be anything to such a one but a most superfluous botheration, was folly. He had read all the Socialist scriptures and economic textbooks: not only Marx's epoch-making exposure of capitalist civilization but John Stuart Mill's examination of Communism; and he had seen at once that Mill's verdict was against the evidence, as Mill himself concluded later on. He had the authority of the eminent professor Cairnes for the condem-

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nation of *rentiers* as ‘drones in the hive’, and disagreed with Cairnes only in seeing no sacredness whatever in contracts made under duress with drones.

As a matter of fact Marx’s theory of value and the explanation of surplus value he founded on it are academic blunders; and the dialectic, though it may have been a convenient instrument of thought a hundred years ago for a German university student soaked in Hegelianism, can now only make Communist thinking difficult and uncongenial. Morris put all that aside instinctively as the intellectual trifling it actually is, and went straight to the real issues on which he was quite simple and quite right. And I venture to prophesy that the Russians will presently do the same.

It was as an agitator in the Socialist movement of the eighteen eighties that I came into personal contact with Morris. He was our one acknowledged Great Man; but we knew very little about him. Of William Morris of the Red House, head centre and organizer of a happy Brotherhood of artists who all called him Topsy and thought of him as a young man, we knew nothing. The small minority of us who had any contacts with the newest fashions in literature and art knew that he had become famous as the author of a long series of poems called *The Earthly Paradise* which few of us had read, though that magic line ‘the idle singer of an empty day’ had caught our ears somehow. We knew that he kept a highly select shop in Oxford Street where he sold furniture of a rum aesthetic sort, and decorated houses with extraordinary wallpapers. I myself had read enough of his work to know that his self-appointed work in poetry was the retelling of all the world’s old stories in a tuneful dialect which went back past the pomposities of Dr Johnson and the rhetoric of Shakespear all the way to Chaucer, and which, though it rescued some good old English from disuse and oblivion, and was agreeable enough to my ear, seemed affected and ridiculous to the Philistines. And that was about all.

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It was a curious situation for Morris (I have heard him discuss it). He had escaped middle age, passing quite suddenly from a circle of artistic revolutionists, mostly university men gone Agnostic or Bohemian or both, who knew all about him and saw him as much younger and less important than he really was, into a proletarian movement in which, so far as he was known at all, he was venerated as an Elder. The atmosphere had changed from one of enthusiastic understanding and intimate good fellowship to an ignorant and uncertain reverence, poisoned at first by a class mistrust which he lived down by the irresistible evidence in himself that he was far above classification.

Morris as a Socialist

Once or twice, some tactless ghost from his past wandered into the Socialist world and spoke of him and even to him as Topsy. It was soon morally booted out in miserable bewilderment for being silly and impudent. Such momentary incidents did not matter. What did matter was that many of the Socialists, especially the middle class ones who presently organized themselves as Fabians, were arrant Philistines, regarding all poets and artists as undesirable cranks. However, there was no love lost on the other side. Morris heartily disliked the Fabians, not because they undervalued him, but as a species.

Anyhow we were a very mixed lot at that time; for the movement was at first one of pure reaction against the unrighteousness and cruelty of Capitalism, which had been tellingly exposed and traced to the institution of private property in land by the American Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* had just achieved a huge circulation. Marx's still more terrific exposure had not been translated into English (like Morris I had read all my Marx in French): and we were all out to *écraser l'infame* without in the least knowing how. We had not sorted ourselves out, and were for the moment far more Anarchists than Marxists. We were to break our chains, make a revolution, and live happily ever after.

I myself had always been a revolutionist in grain; but I

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had been occupied with the conflict between the Churches and Science, republicanism and monarchy, Irish Nationalism (which bored me) and Dublin Castle, and also good art and bad art, though here the art that concerned me most was modern music, especially in its dramatic applications by Mozart and Wagner. To train myself as a public speaker I frequented public meetings; and at one of these I discovered Henry George in person, a wonderful platform artist. His speech sent me to political economy, with which I had never concerned myself, as fundamental in any social criticism. I devoured *Progress and Poverty* and sought out the Socialist meetings of the Democratic Federation founded by Henry Mayers Hyndman, who had made the acquaintance of Karl Marx and been converted by him. At these meetings, on my advocating a rally round Henry George, I was told that I knew nothing because I had not read Karl Marx. I read Karl Marx and then found that none of the rest had. And so I took to the street corner as an evangelist of Socialism. In this way I became known to the leading Socialists of the moment before we had all quarrelled and divided into rival societies; and so it came about that I found myself one evening at a social gathering of the Democratic Federation (later the Social-Democratic Federation or S.D.F.) with Hyndman and Morris present as colleagues in that body. I have elsewhere described how I was the author of five novels which nobody would publish, and how I had dug them up to make padding for a Socialist magazine called *To-Day*, to which we all had to contribute as best we could. It really had not occurred to me that anyone would read this fifty times rejected stuff of mine: it was offered and accepted solely to bulk out the magazine to saleable size when the supply of articles ran short; but Morris, who read everything that came in his way, and held that nobody could pass a shop window with a picture in it without stopping, had read a chapter of *An Unsocial Socialist*, and been sufficiently entertained to wish to meet the author.

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Here, then, was Morris in his blue suit and bluer shirt, his tossing mane which suggested that his objection to looking-glasses extended to brushes and combs, and his habit, when annoyed by some foolish speaker, of pulling single hairs violently from his moustache and growling 'damned fool!' He maintained that his blue suit was aimed at when Andrew Lang wrote of the shock of meeting your favorite poet and finding that he looked like a ship's purser; but Morris did not look like a purser; for pursers always smooth their hair, whereas the disarrangement of Morris's was so effectively leonine that I suspected him of spending at least a quarter of an hour every morning getting it just right.

Morris as a
Socialist

I was soon in triple conversation with him and Hyndman, as our proletarian friends were a little out of it when we three got going. Hyndman could talk about anything with a fluency that left Morris nowhere. He was a most imposing man, and seemed to have been born in a frock coat and top hat. In old age he looked like God in Blake's illustrations to Job. In the prime of life, as he was then, he was more like the deity in Raphael's Vision of Ezekiel. He was a leading figure in any assembly, and took that view of himself with perfect self-confidence. Altogether an assuming man, quite naturally and unconsciously.

Morris was quite unassuming: he impressed by his obvious weight and quality. On this occasion he disclaimed all capacity for leadership, and said he was ready to do anything he was told, presumably by Hyndman as chairman of the Federation, plus the leader who had called him as a disciple. I smiled grimly to myself at this modest offer of allegiance, measuring at sight how much heavier Morris's armament was; but Hyndman accepted it at once as his due. Had Morris been accompanied by Plato, Aristotle, Gregory the Great, Dante, Thomas Aquinas, Milton and Newton, Hyndman would have taken the chair as their natural leader without the slightest misgiving, and before the end of the month have quarrelled with them all and left himself

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with no followers but the devoted handful who could not compete with him, and to whom he was a sort of god. But he was always excellent company as a perfect Victorian freethinking gentleman, like Meredith and Dilke, who had known everyone and was never at a loss for anecdotes about them. His talk was a most entertaining performance; and both Morris and I could listen to it without being bored for a moment. There was, however, an important difference between his talk and Morris's. What Morris said he meant, sometimes very vehemently; and it was always worth saying. Of Hyndman's most brilliant conversational performances it was impossible to believe a single word. The people he described so entertainingly were not authentic human beings. The things he told as having happened to them could not possibly have happened to anybody.

In short, Hyndman was as unlike Morris as one mortal man can be unlike another. Only in one respect they were alike: they had been brought up in rich households where they had never been effectively controlled nor forced by circumstances to control themselves. Consequently they both were petulant and subject to explosions of temper. The chances of their being able to work together were practically nil; and I was not at all surprised when the Hyndman-Morris combination exploded violently. What the immediate quarrel was about does not now matter: the two men were hopelessly incompatible tactically and strategically; and neither of them could keep their tempers. Besides, Hyndman, like Marx, quarrelled with everyone who challenged his leadership. Morris, after that first inevitable quarrel, was always a conciliatory force in the movement, and even went to extremes in making way for every goose who was crazy enough to fancy himself a swan.

In justice to Hyndman, who now goes out of the Morris saga, let it be remembered that though he could not work with anyone on terms which men of equal or greater ability would accept, he stuck to his Socialist guns nearly to the end, when the revolution for which he had been calling all

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his life took place in Russia. Now Hyndman, theoretically an Internationalist, was at heart a trueblue English patriot. When Lenin at Brest Litovsk backed out of the war—England's war—Hyndman turned on him with a fury of invective which the Whitest of Tsarists could not have outdone. It was his only lapse from integrity as a Socialist. In private life he cannot have been an unamiable man; for he and his first wife, who lived long enough to be 'old Matilda,' were a model Darby and Joan. When she died and he was nearly eighty a young woman married him, and, when he too died, actually committed suttee after trying for a year to live without him. Those who can will like to think that she rejoined him in that heaven in which neither of them believed.

Morris as a
Socialist

The importance of the Hyndman episode lies in Morris's action when the split took place. Morris had the majority of the committee on his side, and according to all constitutional precedent should have stood his ground and voted the Hyndman opposition down on issue after issue after endless debate on motion after motion and amendment after amendment. It was as clear to Morris as it has been later to Mussolini and Hitler that no business can be done in this way. He simply took his majority out of the Federation and formed a new body called The Socialist League, leaving the Federation to do what it could in its own way, and setting himself and his friends free to do the same instead of senselessly wasting all their time and energy in obstructing one another.

Morris certainly did not foresee that he had invented a new political technique having as its rule that the Opposition must step down and out instead of remaining to obstruct. That his followers on this point would nowadays include Fascists and autocrats as well as Communists would hardly have pleased him; but I believe he would have maintained, as a very practical man, that the parliamentary party system is, as Dickens had pointed out, the secret of How Not To Do It, and that when once it is de-

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decided that a thing has to be done the people who want to prevent its being done must leave the room.

The Socialist League did its share in that making of Socialists which was, as Morris held, the real business of the movement; but its attempt to extract from its proletarian members a Socialist Constitution was a grotesque failure. He bore with them for years, giving them every means of excogitating some plan that would hold water. Unfortunately they had no experience of the government of anything more complicated than a coster's barrow; and they were romantic anarchists to a man, strong on the negative side, but regarding the State as an enemy, very much as the child regards a policeman. Morris, like all original artists and thinkers, had a good deal of this feeling too, and though he would not countenance Anarchism on any terms, was genuinely anxious to discover how its appetite for freedom could be reconciled with the positive side of Communism. But he was an experienced business manager and knew what business management means and what personal qualities it needs. A very amateurish plan, called Anti-State Communism, was evolved; and its authors, after spending a good deal of Morris's money, suddenly perceived that the logic of their plan involved the repudiation of Morris's directorship, which was keeping the whole affair together. So Morris, who had been holding the League up by the scruff of its neck, opened his hand, whereupon it dropped like a stone into the sea, leaving only a little wreckage to come to the surface occasionally and demand bail at the police court or a small loan.

After the Morris-Hyndman fission there were in the field four Socialist Societies, the Democratic Federation, which presently threw off that ambiguity and became the Social-Democratic Federation, with Hyndman as its Perpetual Grand; the Socialist League, which was really Morris and nothing else; an admirable group of Christian Socialist clergymen called The Guild of St Matthew captained by Stewart Headlam; and the Fabian Society, which

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I had picked out as the place for me, and which rapidly drew away from the others as the only one of them that could work as a purveyor of immediately constructive election programs. The explanation of this was very simple. The League and the Federation held their meetings in public halls and invited the working class to join them at a cost of a penny a week, the idea being that when the entire proletariat had been convinced by the speeches, and had joined in irresistible numbers, a revolution would be achieved by the Federation or the League, as the case might be. Each of them, I may add, denounced the other in terms of unmeasured vituperativeness. Both were incapable of real committee work because their councils were not homogeneous: a combination of one exceptionally brilliant gentleman politician and writer (Hyndman) or one man of genius of unique culture and mental power (Morris) with a handful of poor men coming from a different world seemed very democratic and equalitarian; but it made skilled criticism and genuine intellectual co-operation farcically impossible.

Now the Fabian Society was nominally open to all classes; but as it met in middle class drawingrooms where a laborer would have been out of place and unbearably uncomfortable, the Society was a genuine society of equals, whose minds worked at the same speed, by the same methods, on the same common stock of acquired ideas. The ablest half dozen ran the Society as its executive committee, but always subject to a good deal of useful criticism from the rest in really competent discussions. We alone among the Socialist societies, much derided by them as a group of drawingroom snobs (which we were), enjoyed real equality, real co-operation, real freedom from any sort of arbitrary dictatorship by individuals. We enjoyed as much psychological and educational homogeneity as lay within human limits. When the societies came into collision, which they occasionally did, Morris was hopelessly handicapped by his disunited and academically unarmed following. They were decent fellows enough, some of them, and appealed

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to Morris far more deeply than the Fabians; but in public debate the Leaguers were like untaught novices opposed to skilled boxers: we could beat them at political skittles easily even when they were in the right and we in the wrong. As to Hyndman, he treated the Fabians with contempt and would not join battle.

It may be asked why Morris, as a practical man, did not join the Fabians. I joined them because I knew that I could work with them, and that I could not work with untrained colleagues. Why did not Morris do the same on the same grounds?

The answer is that he would have been more out of place in our drawingrooms than in any gang of manual laborers or craftsmen. The furniture would have driven him mad; and the discussions would have ended in his dashing out of the room in a rage, and damning us all for a parcel of half baked shortsighted suburban snobs, as ugly in our ideas as in our lives. He could be patient with the strivings of ignorance and poverty towards the light if the striver had the reality that comes from hard work on tough materials with dirty hands, and weekly struggles with exploitation and oppression; but the sophistications of middle class minds hurt him physically. He had made his way through much opposition and ridicule; and he was a wise and great man *sub specie eternitatis*; but he was an ungovernable man in a drawingroom. What stimulated me to argument, or at least repartee, made him swear.

In due time, when he concluded that his Socialist League was doing nothing but wasting his money and never could do anything else, he did not fall back on the Social-Democratic Federation, which was just as hopeless, nor on the Fabian Society. The Guild of St Matthew was too clerical for him. He no longer told the working classes that their only hope was in revolution: he even said that no doubt Socialism would come in Sidney Webb's way: the Fabian way. But he did not pretend to take much interest in that process as a process, nor imagine that he could be of any use

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personally in working it out. There was, I feel sure, a prophetic misgiving at the back of his mind whether it would be so smooth a job as it looked on parliamentary assumptions, or indeed whether it was going to be a political job in the parliamentary sense at all. If so, the event has proved that he was quite right. He did not live to see the Irish Question, staved off by thirty years of verbiage in the House of Commons accompanied by an ugly seesaw of moonlighting and murder with police batoning and Coercion Acts, and nominally settled at last by a Home Rule Act, really settled when it came to the point by an orgy of chateau burning and blood and iron such as the Ghengiz Khan himself could hardly have worsened. Had Morris lived to be eighty-five, he would have seen a great Communist State founded in Russia (of all places!) by a revolution of peasants greedy for bits of land of their own, and deserter-soldiers bent on peace at any price, overthrowing a Liberal revolution and presently finding itself manipulated by a little group of Marxists into the last thing they desired or dreamt of: a Union of Communist republics.

Morris as a
Socialist

Morris was right when he contracted his would-be world league into the little Hammersmith Socialist Society, and told it to go on with its job and make Socialists, *advienne que pourra*.

However, this was in the future when I made Morris's acquaintance at that soirée, and smiled to myself as aforesaid when he offered himself as a humble private to Generalissimo Hyndman. We must have got on fairly well together; for I presently found myself not only lecturing at the little meeting hall into which he had converted his Hammersmith coach house, but appearing with him at the neighboring street corners on Sunday mornings conducting what most of the passers-by took to be prayer meetings. He and I complemented one another admirably; for I had a positive taste for abstract economics, and used my knowledge so effectively against the capitalist enemy that Morris said in the course of one of his addresses 'In economics Shaw

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Morris as I knew him is my master.' The shock this gave me, which I still remember vividly, shews how far I placed him above myself. I was positively scandalized.

The lectures in the little hall on Sunday nights were followed by a supper in the house, to which the lecturer was invited. In this way I penetrated to the Morris interior.

Now though nobody gave me credit for it in those days (very few do even now) I had a keen sense of beauty, not at all blunted by the extent to which my poverty had obliged me to starve it as far as my private accommodations were concerned. But I also had a searching analytical faculty which was the secret of my subsequent success as a professional critic. The combination, I am afraid, is rare. Some people, going into Morris's house, and finding it remarkably unlike their own house, would say 'What a queer place!' Others, with a more cultivated sense of beauty, would say 'How very nice!' But neither of them would necessarily have seen what I saw at once, that there was an extraordinary discrimination at work in this magical house. Nothing in it was there because it was interesting or quaint or rare or hereditary, like grandmother's or uncle's portrait. Everything that was necessary was clean and handsome: everything else was beautiful and beautifully presented. There was an oriental carpet so lovely that it would have been a sin to walk on it; consequently it was not on the floor but on the wall and half way across the ceiling. There was no grand piano: such a horror would have been impossible. On the supper table there was no table cloth: a thing common enough now among people who see that a table should be itself an ornament and not a clothes horse, but then an innovation so staggering that it cost years of domestic conflict to introduce it.

I must not inflict an inventory; but throughout it all there had reigned an artistic taste of extraordinary integrity: not once had its owner been seduced by any other interest or association. I know a collector who has a specially prized book, totally uninteresting as a visual object,

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which he cherishes because it is bound in the skin of a celebrated murderer: an excellent reason for throwing it into the dustbin. You never had to fear that from Morris. Later on he collected early printed books and medieval manuscripts; but he never bought a book because it was early or a manuscript because it was medieval. There are plenty of ugly early printed books; and all medieval manuscripts are not beautiful. For the Codex Sinaiticus, recently sold to the British Museum for a hundred thousand pounds, Morris would not have paid a hundred farthings; but when he came on a real beauty he snatched it up, tucked it tight under his arm, and was of course at the mercy of the dealer as to the price. Once, when he was remonstrated with for giving £800 for a manuscript which any experienced Jew could have bought for £300, and was looking thoroughly miserable and ashamed of himself for his weakness, I said, 'If you want a thing you cannot bargain.' He instantly recovered his selfrespect; and his gratitude to me was boundless.

Morris as a Socialist

I was useful to him in that way more than once. Morris was a very great literary artist: his stories and essays and letters no less than his poems are tissues of words as fine as the carpet on the ceiling; but he was quite often at a loss for a critical word in dealing with some uncongenial modern thing. On such occasions I would hand him the appropriate adjective, and he would grab at it with a gasp of relief. It was like giving a penny to a millionaire who had bought a newspaper and found his pockets empty.

An accident enabled me to gain his confidence on the artistic side. Up to then in any discussion of modern art he had pushed the subject away like a petulant veteran who had no tolerance for anything later than the pre-Raphaelite movement and had never had the patience to try to understand a picture by Whistler or Monet. But it happened that a sensation was made by a stupendously pretentious German writer named Max Nordau, who, having made himself famous by a book called *The Conventional Lies of Civilization*, followed it up by a Jeremiad called *Entartung* (De-
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generation), in which he maintained that all modern art is pathological: Wagner's music, Rossetti's poems, Morris's wallpapers and the paintings of the Impressionists being symptoms of mental dissolution and corruption. The book was taken quite seriously by the Press in England and America; and its vogue was at its height when Mr Benjamin Tucker of Boston, U.S.A., intervened.

Mr. Tucker was a philosophic anarchist, an 'unterrified Jeffersonian Democrat,' who ran a magazine called *Liberty*, which appeared to be in verse because the lines of print were not 'justified' (made the same length by the printer) to save useless expense. Suddenly Mr Tucker wrote to me requesting me to ascertain the highest price ever paid for an article in the history of literature. That sum, whatever it might be, he offered me for a review devoted to the destruction of Nordau. He could not do the job himself, because he had not sufficient knowledge of art, and only felt instinctively that Nordau was all wrong; and it was his considered judgment that I was the only writer living who could cover the fine arts with enough knowledge of them to put my finger on all Nordau's weak spots.

The price offered was heroic and the reason given for it irresistibly flattering. I took the job on. As far as Nordau was concerned it was the easiest one since Macaulay slated Robert Montgomery. It would not be fair to call Nordau an impudent impostor; for he was honestly too ignorant of art to know that he knew nothing about it; and his head was full of Lombroso's then fashionable 'psychiatry' with its grotesque lists of stigmas, phobias, lalias, criminal types and what not. It was child's play to slice him into a thousand pieces. But I seized the occasion to state the general case for the sanity of art (under which title, by the way, my essay is still on sale) and its necessity as both an instrument and an object of culture.

This greatly improved my relations with Morris. He had never talked freely to me about art because it was a fixed and very sound rule of his that it was no use arguing

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with a man who didn't know; and it was this that made him sometimes appear, as I have said, a petulant veteran wilfully and invincibly ignorant of the latest developments. But he had read the English translation of *Entartung* (he said he could read Martin Luther's Bible, but no later German) and witnessed its absurdly respectful reception with a disgust that was quite independent of Nordau's insulting and idiotic reference to himself; and when he saw the insult, not to himself, but to fine art generally, fearfully avenged by my hand, the petulant veteran disappeared; the real Morris took me on as one who knew; and I soon discovered that he knew as much about Whistler as he did about Van Eyck. You never knew how much Morris had up his sleeve until he thought you knew enough to understand him.

Morris as a Socialist

Meanwhile I had nearly ruined Benjamin Tucker, the onlie begetter of this episode. As I would not let him pay me for my contribution, which occupied a whole number of *Liberty* plus a considerable embolism, he printed an edition large enough to enable him to send a copy gratuitously to every editor in America and perhaps to several in Europe. It was the biggest thing I have ever heard of an editor doing; and it succeeded completely; for Nordau and his *Entartung* were never mentioned by the Press again, as far as I know. But it must have strained Benjamin's resources; for *Liberty* soon ceased and he retired to Monte Carlo, where I found him quite lately fresh as a daisy in spite of his advanced years.

And so, somehow, I found myself frequenting the Morris household instead of merely earning a supper there by lecturing occasionally on Sunday evenings in the ex-coach house. May Morris's description of the house is by no means exaggerated or beglamored by youthful association. I had no association to bias me; yet I, the most irreverent of mankind, felt its magic instantly and deeply. Mrs Morris made a startling impression on me. It was in the evening; and I had never been upstairs to her drawingroom before

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I had time to take in all the lovely things that were in the room before she came in. Rossetti's pictures, of which I had seen a collection at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, had driven her into my consciousness as an imaginary figure. When she came into the room in her strangely beautiful garments, looking at least eight feet high, the effect was as if she had walked out of an Egyptian tomb at Luxor. Not until she had disposed herself very comfortably on the long couch opposite the settle did I compose myself into an acceptance of her as a real woman, and note that the wonderful curtain of hair was touched with grey, and the Rossetti face ten years older than it was in his pictures.

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 (I knew how my mother felt about the more discordant of them); and as one of this ugly rag-tag-and-bobtail of Socialism I could not expect her to do more than bear my presence as best she might. 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. When I presently found myself dining at Kelmscott House my position was positively painful; for the Morris meals were works of art almost as much as the furniture. To refuse Morris's wine or Mrs Morris's viands was like walking on the great carpet with muddy boots.

Now, as it happened, I practise the occidental form of Yoga: I am a vegetarian and teetotaler. Morris did not demur to the vegetarianism: he maintained that a hunk of bread and an onion was a meal for any man; but he insisted on a bottle of wine to wash it down. Mrs Morris did not care whether I drank wine or water; but abstinence from meat she regarded as a suicidal fad. Between host and hostess I was cornered; and Mrs Morris did not conceal her con-

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tempt 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. Happily she had a certain plain good sense which had preserved her sanity perfectly under treatment that would have spoiled most women.

Morris as a Socialist

There was, however, another member of the family who was also a member of all the families in the old circle of Morris & Co. She was by no means either silent or consecrated to beauty. This was Miss Mary de Morgan, sister to that William de Morgan who began as an artist-tile-maker, and at the end of his life suddenly became a pseudo-Dickens and filled his scanty pockets by writing prodigiously long novels in the style of *Nicholas Nickleby*.

I had heard a good deal of Mary before I met her, and was persuaded by all I had heard that she must be the most odious female then alive, a woman who embroiled and wrecked every household she entered by mischief making gossip and an unflinching instinct for laying down the law in the way most exquisitely calculated to infuriate her hosts. As she was not related to any of the families she frequented I could not understand why they not only tolerated her but seemed to consider her as necessary and inevitable, though they spoke of her as a devil incarnate. The truth of the matter was that Mary had in her a quality of helpfulness and efficiency that made her indispensable wherever there was illness or trouble; and with this she commanded a consideration and even affection that the dearest of women might have envied.

I was at Kelmscott Manor in Gloucestershire when we first collided. Her arrival was anticipated by us as a disaster

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which nothing could avert, and which would probably end in a clash with me and a first-class row with Morris. She bore my presence and the outrage of introduction to her with a stiffness that was barely within the limits of common civility. In revenge, I made up my mind to fascinate Mary. The opportunity came one afternoon when we were having tea in the garden, Morris drinking from an enormous vessel which he had purchased to enable him to keep a promise made to his doctor that he would never exceed a single cup.

And, sure enough, Mary began to lay down the law, on what subject I forget; but she contrived to say everything that could exasperate Morris, and to say it in the most unbearable way. He struggled visibly to control himself; and the apprehensions of the family could not be concealed. At last Mary had to stop for a moment to breathe; and I said, in my best manner, 'Miss de Morgan: how *can* you sit there telling us such a monstrous string of lies?'

Morris's eyes glazed. He looked like a man who had heard the Last Trumpet, and was waiting for the end of the world. The rest sat paralyzed, hardly believing their ears. But a miracle happened. Mary smiled. She understood perfectly that she was being flirted with; and she liked it. She played the game with spirit; and that evening, when she was retiring for the night, she squeezed my hand.

This was the only occasion on which I can claim to have reduced Morris to a condition which can only be described as awestruck.

Years after, the word went round that Mary was in pecuniary straits. A purse was forthcoming instantly from everyone who had ever spoken ill of her: that is, from everyone who had known her. She flung it back in our faces with an independence that recalled Queen Elizabeth telling her council that if they turned her out in her petticoat she could make her living with the best of them. A great little woman Mary in her way.

Now it happened that among the many beautiful things
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