

intense expectation passes through sweet music into the trance in which she finds him.

The charm of the *Earthly Paradise* was that it gave us the picturesqueness of earth with the atmosphere of fairyland; we drifted along a swift current of adventure under a sky heavy with sweet dreams, through which the dew of death fell without dimming the sunshine: we were amused and yet enthralled. (In his new work Mr. Morris demands more of the reader; instead of abandoning himself to a passive fascination, he has to be penetrated with a profound and earnest passion: we have to live in the poem, not to dream of it. Consequently it will not be surprising if *Love is Enough* attracts fewer readers than the *Earthly Paradise*; though those who are attracted will be held longer under a deeper spell. Those outside the charmed circle will perhaps complain that the figures which move within are shadowy, because their own desire does not burn within them.)

32. Sidney Colvin, review, *Fortnightly Review*

I January 1873, xiii, 147-8

That he clothes modern thoughts in modern words, is not the definition of Mr. Morris's work. Rather it has been made an accusation against him that he occupies himself exclusively with old stories, and goes back to old sources of language for words to put them in: 'Remote subjects—archaic manner,' grates every now and then the note of a criticism respectable if only for rustiness; while the mind susceptible to literature, and awake to poetry, is enjoying itself in the sense of a delightful possession, and acknowledging that no subject is too old, and no style too primitive, when the one is made to fit the other with a result so true, so fresh, so living, so full of brightness and colour, so rich in lovely inventions and amplifications of the renovating and realizing fancy, as this is. That, I say, is the feeling towards the *Earthly*

Paradise series of every one who cares for poetry, except (as George Eliot's Tom cared for animals) in the sense of caring to throw stones at it. Modern thoughts are certainly valuable; but every thought can be made to have the value of modernness for the imagination of every age, when it is repeated in this loving, this sincere, this caressing and revivifying spirit. And about the vividness, the limpid simplicity and bright reality of Mr. Morris's versions of ancient stories, there could be no two opinions. Whatever else could be urged against them, it was not obscurity. That is not quite equally the case with the small new volume which is before us. *Love is Enough* is more difficult to follow, it is a little vaguer in its incidents, and more puzzling in its motives, than other poems of Mr. Morris. It consists mainly of the adventures of a prince of romance, Pharamond, in search of his love, Azalais. Pharamond is a victorious king, haunted and troubled by the love of a lady whom he has seen in a dream, and who he knows is to be found in some enchanted foreign land. Presently his love grows so strong upon him that he quits his kingdom, with a faithful foster-father for chief attendant, to wander over the world in search of his dream. At last, almost spent with adventures and disasters, he finds her, and finds her ready to be his. Next, he is back in his kingdom, and discovers a usurper in possession. He decides that it is not worth while to make war for his own re-instatement—that 'love is enough;' and so goes back to unknown days with Azalais in the far country. That is the story; and that is acted by a pair of masquers who have had their own experiences of love, at the marriage festivities of an emperor and empress who have had theirs, and in the presence of a certain Giles and Joan who have had theirs. So that we have three pairs of live lovers, as well as the pair of personated lovers in the play. That of itself is a complication; and the figure of the god Love coming in and playing the part of Chorus under various disguises, does not diminish the complication. Then I think some of the actual adventures of the fable, as they are described or assumed in the representation, are a little too vague and shadowy. Altogether the poem is not limpid at first sight, and requires that you should read yourself into it. Reading yourself into it, you find much loveliness and a singular originality. There is the originality of using a metrical system of anapaests without rhyme, and with an irregular alliterative tendency, roughly resembling the common form of early English verse. That at first is rather uncomfortable, and I do not know that even at last one becomes quite converted to it; but it is certainly proved capable of effects of great metrical charm and dignity. Then

there is the originality of an exquisitely tender, profound, and brooding sentiment—a sentiment which is almost a philosophy—of love and its predominance, and the worthlessness of everything else in the world along side of it. And that is put in, both in the body of the acted fable, in the comments of Love as Chorus, and the lyric interludes of the musicians, with a much greater aim at concentration and fulness of thought than has been common in any other of Mr. Morris's work. And, taken together with the picturesqueness of his imagination, it produces, in some places, a result which, new as it is in form, less clear as it is than one would have fully desired, leaves yet an impression most delicate and enchanting. Some strokes of the lyric interludes, some passages like that where Azalais comes upon Pharamond in his sleep are of an almost perfect poetry.

THREE NORTHERN LOVE STORIES

1875

33. Unsigned review, *Athenaeum*

17 July 1875, no. 2490, 75

Much vexation of spirit arises from seeing work ill done, and as ample cause for it is provided by translators as by any class of literary men. Usually, indeed, translations are either depressing or exasperating. The fatuity of some, the criminality of others, weighs heavily upon the reader's mind or painfully disturbs his liver. Now and then, however, a most agreeable exception to the rule presents itself, and a version from some foreign tongue appears which is in itself a work of art, not only satisfying the just demands of the foreign original, but also gratifying the ear and the taste of the native reader. Of such a nature are the versions from the Icelandic for which we are indebted to Mr. Eiríkr Magnússon and Mr. William Morris, the most recent of which is now before us. Of it, as of its predecessors, too high praise cannot be spoken, both as regards the grace and vigour of its own language and its fidelity to that which it interprets.

These Northern love-stories are deserving of the pains which have been taken with them. Not only do they contain a series of trustworthy pictures of the old times to which they refer, but they are rich in scenes of romantic as well as historic interest, through which move with unaffected dignity the forms of brave men and fair women. He who has read them feels the better for having done so, as one who has been transferred from a relaxing to a bracing air. From the tropical raptures and languors of so many modern love-stories it is good to turn to these simple but vigorous records of ancient warrings and wooings in the North.

The oldest is, perhaps, the best, telling how Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue, so called because he was a great skald 'somewhat bitter in his rhyming,' loved Helga, 'the fairest woman in Iceland, then or since,'