THE HALL AND THE WOOD AND UNDER AN ELM TREE. MSS. BY WILLIAM MORRIS
Under an Elm Tree:

Thoughts in the Country side

Midsummer in the Country—here you may walk between
the fields and hedges that are as it were one huge grove
for you, redolent of beam flowers and clover, and hear that
the cottage gardens are bright with flowers; the cottages
themselves most models of architecture in their way;
and nothing better need be desired on so noble a list of
nights. If only the beehives wouldn’t let them haunt
enjoy the daisies above them towers here and there.

The architecture proper of days bygone, where every cottage
was an artist and brought definite intelligence to bear
upon its work. Man in the past, nature in the present
seem to be bent on pleasing you and making all delightful
by your senses; even the burning dusty road has a lost of
luxury as you lie on the strip of roadside green, and listen
to the blackbirds singing, surely for your benefit; and I
was going to say as if they were paid to do it; but I was
wrong for as it is they seem to be doing their best.

And all or let us say most things are brilliantly alive: The
shadows blest in the down folded ignorant of the
love that racing races is preparing for its waters
sapphire blue under that flying wind and cloudless sky,
traced & across here and there with the pearls white flowers
water weeds; every grass and shrub beauty, a treasure of delicate
beauty, and deeply down it steals from the bank in the river to the
starlings leery in the new down fields, or the grey ridge of the downs, all is song
and I think happy. That is not anxious.

What is that thought that has come into one’s head one
hours round in the shadow of the roadside elm? A country
side worth fighting for if there were necessary, worth
taking trouble to defend its peace. Raise my head and
beneath the elm-boughs I see far off a grey buttressed
down rising over the sea of green and blue-green meadows
and fields, and dim on the flank of the hill rise its buttresses
where I can see a figure made by cutting the short
turf away from the chalk of the hill side, a figure
Which was meant to represent a White Horse according to the heraldry of the period. Eleven hundred years ago, on that hillside, the country people met to fight for the peace and security of their country, and coming back from their victory, added the image of the horse as a token of their valour, and, who knows, perhaps as an example for their descendants to follow.

For a little time it makes the blood still in me to think of that, but as I watch the swallows returning past me, I think of the help and helpers who made it happen, and in an easy sweep and haunting over the battlefield beyond, the storks and swallows and starlings and blackbirds are often their times beautiful and peaceful, not one of them is lacking. But yesterday I was passing by a hay field that was once a corn cart horse, looking good, not for the sake of his obvious need, but for the sake of his common beauty and strength. I am sorry to say that in spite of his obvious need, he was not well fed and not well cared for.

Also the same day, while driving near the same field, I saw several other animals male and female, both with whom I made acquaintance. For the male ones at least were healthy. And these animals, both male and female, were beautiful and gracefully as any of the corn cart horse; yet were obviously needed for the hay field. Then I thought, as I had seen the starlings, that I had seen the same race as the Swallows and starlings, so I may have seen some of the wilder, traitless, legless animals of the same as the Thames side starlings, as the wilder, traitless, legless creatures in the hay field. They had been sculptured in many creatures in the hay field. They had been sculptured in many ways, painted on the ceiling of the nave of the Parish Church, in literature as the heroes and heroines of romance: may when people had created in their minds a god of the universe, creator of all that was, it was not only...
They were driven to evacuate Ammon as one of that same race to which the Ninety haymakers belonged, as though supreme intelligence and the greatest measure of gracefulness and beauty and majesty were at their highest in the race of more inferior animals.

Under the elm trees these things puzzle me, and again my thoughts return to those men of that very country side who coming back from Ashdown field swore that White Horse to look down for ever on the Valley of the Thames; and I thought it likely that they, this much in common with the Freeists and the Weald, that there was more equality amongst them than we are used to now, and that there would have been more models available amongst them for Wordsworth one would be likely to find in the Thames-side meadows.

Under the elm trees I don’t ask myself whether that is going to the greater average intelligence of men at the present day and to the progress of humanity made since the time of the only decent official that England ever had, Alfred the Great to wit; for indeed the place and time are not favourable to such questions, which seem queer nonsense amidst all that pinkolourant beauty and pleasure held out to men who cannot take it or use it, unless some chance rich other may happen to stray that way. I try Thoughts turn back to the haymakers and their horses, and I remember that yesterday morning I said to a bystander, “Mr. So-and-so (the farmer) is late in sending his hay into the hayfield.”

“I know he is,” said he, “You see sir, Mr. So-and-so is short-handed.”

“Then what?” said I, pricking up & say Socialist Says.

“Well, sir,” said he, “these men are the old men and women and they’re much more work in the village, and the young men with more work to do. They do think that they ought to have more wages, but then and Mr. So-and-so he won’t pay it. So you see he be short-handed.”

As I turned away thinking over all the endless untellable details of misery that lay within this shabby scenes, stroy.
another one met my ears. A labourer of the village comes to a farmer and says to him that he really can't work for 10s. a week any more, but must have 15s. Says the farmer, go your 10s. somewhere else then. The mean times away to two months' lack of employment, and then comes back

begging for his 15s. Slavery off unsupported strikes.

Commonplace stories you will say. Indeed they are; if not they would be easy, remedied, and the casual tragedy & cut short. The casual wrong done branded as a person out of humanity.

But once they are so commonplace—

What will happen, say my strong thoughts come under the elm tree, in its richness with all this country beauty. So tragically incongruous with the country misery which

cannot tolerate its existence?

Well if it we must still be slaves and slaveholders, it will not last long: The Battle of Ashdown will be forgotten for the last commercial crisis; Alfred's heraldry will yield to the king on to half-crown. The architecture of the crafty gill men will tumble down, and be restored for the benevolence of the hundred of picturesque, where hopesless themselves are incapable of understanding.

The beauty of the landscape will be expected for the Villa-Dweller's pleasure where it is worthy enough to touch their faded appetites; but in quiet places like this it will vanish year by year. (as indeed it is now doing) under the attacks of the most prevailing commercialism.

Yet think I to myself under the elm tree, whatever England may become, it will be good enough for us, if we set no hope before us but the continuance of the population of slaves and slaveholders for the country which we pretend to love, while we use it and our shame live for a standing horse for the robbery of the vulgar.

Poor at home and abroad. The word, luxury, and vulgarity will be good enough for such sneaks and cowards.

Let me turn the leaf and find a new picture, or my holiday is spoiled. I doubt let some of my friends with whom I have wrangles about the horrors of London say: This is all that can come of your country life? For on the rounds of the
Seasons under our system of land rent farming, slavery produces in the Country, reducing prosperity and comfort. So does the excitement of intellectual life in the cities produce the them under the Capitalist system turning out & excising master wares not for use but for waste. Turn the page I say.

The hayfield is a pretty sight. This June seen under the weather, goe. Bragg the other side of the way opposite the barnfield till you look at the harremakers. (Some) Suppose the haymakers were friends working for friends or land which was theirs, as many as were needed, with leisure and hope ahead of them in stead of hopeless toil and anxiety. Their useful labour for themselves and their neighbours need stumble and disfigure them and knock them out of the shape of men fit to represent the God of Abode? And if a new Ashdown had to be fought against Capitalist roisters this time. The New White House would look down upon men wise as the starlings in their equality and so perhaps as happy.

William Morris