

for pictorial illustration and for his other great distinguishing faculty of poetical narrative. He is distinctly the story-teller among modern poets, the antitype not of the medieval troubadour, but of the medieval romantic minstrel. Brevity is not a note of his order of singer, and for a sufficient reason: lords and ladies wanted to be amused through winter evenings, and winter evenings were long. Their modern representative loves to expatiate over a story, and has nothing of the tremendous energy of Rossetti's ballads. Flowers spring up in his way and he stops to gather them; he unrolls a panorama as with a wand; Rossetti reveals a landscape as with a flash. Both methods have their advantages; one disadvantage of Mr. Morris's, of which we are at this moment acutely conscious, is (the impediment it imposes to quotation.) No justice is possible within our limits, and we can only declare that the varied contents of this volume comprise admirable specimens of narrative ballad. 'Goldilocks and Goldilocks', in particular, is a lovely picture of the innocence of the young world, when all the iniquity was concentrated among witches and dragons. We do not find 'Winter Weather', which we had hoped to have seen reprinted from the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*.

Typographically, this volume is an apotheosis—the poet's fame certified, and his spirit externalised, in the superb type designed by himself, characters and paper respectively black, red and white as the three perfections of Little Snowflake, and with initial letters intricate as the artificial foliage at Lamia's marriage feast. It is a goodly sight. We only venture to suggest that the lines are somewhat too closely set, especially in the first page of the text. Where there is no printing in red but the ever-present marginal reference to the title of the poem, the massiveness of the type and blackness of the ink—excellent things in themselves—give a heavy aspect to the page. The ancient scribes and printers whom Mr. Morris has followed had sound reasons for economy of space in the dearness of paper and vellum. These have ceased to operate, and Mr. Morris could afford to make us 'windows in heaven'.

65. Oliver Elton, review, *Academy*

February 1892, xli, 197

Oliver Elton (1861-1945) was a private tutor and reviewer, and then lectured at Owens College, Manchester. He was later to become Professor of English at Liverpool.

Those who feared that Mr. William Morris would be made less of a poet by his Socialism have had ample reason to be disappointed; it was a false alarm. If by Socialism he meant, not the articles of a programme, but a passion for equal justice, a sympathy with outcast classes, and a vision of coming redress, then Socialism has done its part towards giving Mr. Morris's work a strength and substance which in the days of the *Earthly Paradise* it could not always claim. The song once too languorous vibrates oftener; the faint voices of those pale shadows, who moved, 'strengthless heads of the dead,' breathing eternal regrets as they vanished into their luminous mist, have begun to speak in more human tones. We are not, indeed, told the dates of the various pieces now given us for the first time; but some of them appear recent, and it is not impertinent to say that they are written under a different inspiration to any with which readers of Mr. Morris's previous verses are familiar.

The songs, nevertheless, which are written expressly in honour of the 'Cause' are not always the happiest or strongest in the book. Lacking in the accent which perpetuates the great popular lyrics on the lips of men, they have something in common, both in spirit and manner, with the hymns like the 'Song in Time of Order' and the 'Pilgrims' (to take two very different instances), which Mr. Swinburne made in his most generous moments; and, like these, they are really rather for the recluse enthusiast and dreamer than for the people, despite their intention.

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere the world grows older,
The Cause spreads over land and sea;
Now the world shaketh, and fear awaketh,
And joy at last for me and thee.

or again

Come hither, lads, and hearken,
For a tale there is to tell
Of the wonderful days a-coming,
When all shall be better than well.

Sincere as these lines are, can anyone say that they are the true, spontaneous, successful utterances of the singer at his best? For that we must look elsewhere.

Another influence strongly colouring this volume is that of the old Norse life and literature, the poet's love for which is well known. Traces of this influence appeared long since in his work, and he has of late been more industrious than ever, not only in writing Sagas of his own, but in translating the Norse prose classics. The union of such an enthusiasm with the Socialistic impulse is not, it is fair to conjecture, a mere coincidence to Mr. Morris. The simple, fighting, and manly life of the Sagas, with its bloodshed and crudity deducted, contains elements which he would like well to see embodied in his new society, destined to supplant our sophisticated and corrupt one. At least, whether this be his feeling or not, the 'Lines to the Muse of the North' express better than any comment the abiding attraction which the Norse life and poetry has had for the student of Homer and Chaucer.

O Muse that swayest the sad Northern song,
Thy right hand full of smiting and of wrong,
Thy left hand holding pity; and thy breast
Heaving with hope of that so certain rest!

Perhaps in the two latter lines the poet may read something into the breast of the Muse of the North that never was there. But, whether he is right or wrong, the effect of the belief upon his work is manifest; and we can well understand why so large a portion of the book is given up to ballads from the Danish and Icelandic, and ballads made more or less on the model of them.

Now, the Norse influence, just like that of Socialism, is certainly one that has given additional vigour and glory to the poet's verse; yet, here again, it is no contradiction to say that the actual ballads he has written expressly on Norse subjects are by no means his best and most characteristic work. There is, after all, something hopeless about the attempt to revive a literary form nearly as it flowered in a set of circumstances now extinct. The experience that gave that form breath and power can-

not really be lived over again by the most searching and tender imagination, or by any process of 'steeping the mind' in books; and the result is something like that which attends the efforts, all meritorious and all failures, to write Greek plays. The failure is due, not to lack, but to misapplication, of poetic gift. Therefore, with whatever zeal and grace these revivals are conducted, we cannot help coming back from them and asking what the poet has to tell us concerning his more personal and direct message. The originality of this volume is that it contains several poems telling us something which Mr. Morris has hardly told us in print before. I do not refer to verse like the following:

Upon an eve I sat me down and wept,
Because the world to me seemed nowise good,
Still autumn was it, and the meadows slept,
The misty hills dreamed, and the silent wood
Seemed listening to the sorrow of my mood;
I knew not if the earth with me did grieve,
Or if it mocked my grief that bitter eve.

Are not the scene and the mood familiar? It would not be hard to find thousands of lines of this melodious, equal-tinted, subdued quality in the *Earthly Paradise*. The writer has the gift of turning out any number of them without sinking or failing, and young Oxford has imitated him to its heart's content. But now different is this, with its concrete images, its touches of music and colour:

There is wind in the twilight, in the white road before us
The straw from the ox-yard is blowing about;
The moon's rim is rising, a star glitters o'er us,
And the vane on the spire-top is swinging in doubt. . . .
Come back to the inn, love, and the lights and the fire.
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
For there in a while shall be rest and desire,
And there shall the morrow's uprising be sweet.

Better still, from the 'Meeting in Winter':

They shall open, and we shall see
The long street litten scantily
By the long stream of light before
The guest-hall's half-open door;
And our horses' bells shall cease
As we reach the place of peace;
Thou shalt tremble, as at last

WILLIAM MORRIS

The worn threshold is o'erpast,
And the firelight blindeth thee:
Trembling shalt thou cling to me
As the sleepy merchants stare
At thy cold hands slim and fair,
Thy soft eyes and happy lips
Worth all lading of their ships.

There is no space to quote from poems like 'Hope Dieth: Love Liveth,' or like 'Love Fulfilled,' or from that lyric of antique grace, 'Spring's Bedfellow,' or from the piece that is perhaps the strongest Mr. Morris has written, 'Mother and Son.' In this last there are strokes with a fearless ring that reminds us strongly of Rossetti's 'Jenny'; and the whole volume, indeed, not only betokens a splendid vitality of gift with surprises yet in store, but recalls at every turn that its author is one of a famous fraternity, of whom one other still survives, and who have been animated, despite all their differences, by a certain common spirit, and endowed with similar cunning in the craft of song.

*SOCIALISM: ITS GROWTH
AND OUTCOME*

1893

66. Unsigned review, *Athenaeum*

18 November 1893, no. 3447, 965

This review contrasts *Socialism*, the joint work of Morris and Belfort Bax, with Dr Schaffle's *Theory and Policy of Labour Relations*. Its bland criticism is very effective.

Another work on similar subjects is *Socialism: its Growth and Outcome*, by Messrs. William Morris and Belfort Bax, also published by Messrs. Sonnenschein & Co. This book is very different in appearance from that which we have just noticed, which is produced in the plain fashion common to the books in the 'Social Sciences Series'. The book of which Mr. William Morris is the principal author is produced in a style as consistent with his poetic and artistic surroundings as is to be expected, and its margins, its paper, its type and binding make it a pleasure to behold. When we come, however, to the contents where, of course, we find a cultivated and a pleasant style, we discover, indeed, a history of what has frequently been described—the growth of Socialistic opinion from the days of the ancients to those of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Karl Marx, and the Paris Commune; but, while there is much therefore about the 'growth', the 'outcome' is dealt with only in the last two or twentieth and twenty-first chapters, and in a somewhat perfunctory fashion. We should hardly like to use language which would not be that of politeness about writers so civilized and so civil; but we fail to find the slightest guidance, and we fail even to discover anything that is new in these two chapters. They might be sermons upon Socialism preached from a pulpit by one of the fashionable clergymen of the day