

THE GOTHIC REVIVAL [I]¹

By this name I understand all those attempts to break down the slavery imposed on us first by the Italian Renaissance, which at first was but little felt; partly because the traditions of the free art of the Middle Ages were still influencing people's minds, and partly because of the great mass of individual talent and genius which existed in the artists, the painters, and the sculptors, of that exciting period, and which even yet dazzles our eyes so much by its splendour, that we are scarce able to look steadily enough at the condition of art and labour at the time and see what was really going on: I say the slavery which the days of the Renaissance brought on all labour was at first but little felt in the arts; but as time went on, the mediaeval traditions of work died out, and very speedily too, and the genius of the individual artists was buried in their graves, or flickered feebly in

¹ The text of this lecture is taken from B.M. Add. MS. 43331(10), which is entirely in Morris's hand. It was apparently delivered only once, on March 3, 1884 (see Appendix I, 3-3-84), to The Birmingham and Midland Institute in Birmingham. One week later (see Appendix I, 3-10-84) the second part of the two was delivered to the same audience.

Although a small portion of this lecture has been published in *Artist, Writer, Socialist* (II, 629-30), it seems proper for several reasons to include the entire text here (see Appendix II, items 44 and 45).

certain narrow circles, and all that was left us of that wonderful and much-behymned new birth was a *caput mortuum*² of academical pedantry, which, looking down on the world from the serene heights of cultivated stupidity, despised all genuine and sincere attempts at the expression of the thought of man by means of art, and above all despised the people, the true source of all art, as of all wealth, as base mechanical drudges, and brute beasts just good enough to wait upon their fellows for the hire of dog's wages.

It seems to me that any attack however feeble, from whatever side, of however little importance in itself, on such a monstrous and cowardly tyranny is worthy of our attention and sympathy: but I think that before I have done with my subject I shall be able to show that in spite of much ignorance and many fantastic errors, in spite also of being directed on a side of human thought which is somewhat at a discount at present, the intellectual Revolt known as the Gothic Revival was and is really connected with the general progress of the world, with those aspirations towards freedom, from which in truth no sincere art can ever be dissociated.

Now it was the very essence of the academical pedantry to which the Renaissance led, as its natural degradation, that it was ignorant of real history: for it history fell asleep some time about the death of Nero to awake in Italy in the days of Kaiser Maximilian: all that had gone before the days of Pericles was a vague, ill-understood, empty dream; all that took place after the first palmy days of the Roman empire was but a confused jostling of barbarous peoples not worth looking at or considering. But the intellectual revolt which I have to speak to you about was even in its first days founded on an appreciation of the value of history; that feeling grew as the revolt strengthened, until at last a new science grew up, almost a new sense one may say, and real living history became possible to us; not a dry string of annals, not a mere series of brilliant essays or comparisons between the past and the present; but a definite insight into the life of the bygone ages founded on a laborious and patient sifting of truth from

² The *NED* defines *caput mortuum* as ". . . a worthless residue."

hearsay; the story of the past I say became possible for us to read, and we began to see why we [are] placed as we are [at] present, and whitherward we are tending: and from thenceforward we have not ventured to divide history into what is worthy and worthless to know of; men we are, and all that men have done or been is worthy our thought and study; even though we may be the crown of all that has been hitherto, something will come after us as something has gone before us, we are but a link in the ever-moving chain of history that goes from the dusk into the dark.

Well it is this new feeling for history which is almost as it were a religion on which the Gothic Revival has from the first been founded, and which it has itself in its turn done much to foster, stimulating the research, and throwing new light on the discoveries of those who were more historians than artists: I shall perhaps before I finish be able to point out to you more than one way in which it has brought this about; but I must now definitely address myself to the special task of the first of the two lectures I have to deliver to you, which I think will chiefly be the sketching for you some presentment of what the Gothic Art was, and how it was related to the history of the world, before I can lay before you finally the results of the revolt against the academical stupidity of the 18th cent[ury]: and give you my poor opinion of what its chances are in the future, and whether or not we may have to dread for the 20th century a recurrence of that inane tyranny of the 18th which our own time has at least felt uneasy under.

But before I go further I must ask you to understand that in using the word Art, I am thinking of a wide subject and include not only the lesser or architectural arts or those allied to industrialism but also at least all that side of literature which is born of fancy and imagination.

Now I have used the word *Gothic Revival*, and *Gothic Art* without any hesitation; not only because the word has been for long conventionally used to express that side of art and is now generally understood, but also because though it was I suppose originally used in a kind of good-humoured contempt it really expresses something of the history of the art in question, and that too not its least important side: for whatever its origins were of

which I must next speak, certain it is that that branch of the great Germanic family whose isolated descendants have left behind us at once the most romantic and the most dramatic record of its morals, religion, and aspirations did set its seal upon it at least, and that their spirit shows in it always, and makes it what it is. But its origins are far enough removed from those kindred tribes whose laws and manners, developed by their own necessities apart from those of the older civilizations, forced it to take the form which we now all know as Gothic: I will for the present set aside the literary part of its development, the lines of which became confused by pedantry even early in the Middle Ages at the time when our own tongue became confused and to my mind degraded as the result [of] our dealings in various ways with the Latinized countries of the continent leaving these islands nothing that had any unadulterated flavour of the soil save the fragmentary literature of Ireland and Wales, the oral tradition and ballads of Scotland and the northern border, and the fragments of songs of the early Germanic invaders among which towers majestic the noble poem of Beowulf, unsurpassed for simplicity and strength by any poem of our later tongue.

So now, as to the origins of Gothic art in its narrower sense, that is to say of its Architecture with the accompanying arts, it is of course obvious that it was born from that Roman architecture which included in it the remains of Greek art, dealing with it however in no sympathetic spirit; which Greek mask or outward, ill-understood semblance overlaid an internal body of art deduced from the tribes of Italy by some process of which we know nothing clearly; this body which, while Roman architecture still remained classical, was little more than a habit of building was the germ from which one side at least of Gothic architecture sprang: and the birth became visible just about the time when the religion whose real aim was the worship of the great city as the visible embodiment of irresistible authority, when the city-worship of old Rome was fading out: Diocletian's Palace at Spalato gave the first sign that a new epoch of art was dawning on the world far as anybody could have been from suspecting that the last luxurious home of the Imperial tax-gatherer would date the beginning of the freedom of art.

That I say was the first beginning the first glimmer of Gothic Art: but it needed another influence to give it any reproductive force; that influence had been preparing for ages past in Mesopotamia first, and then in Syria and Persia, and seems to have already acted in its earliest times, superficially perhaps, on the ornamental side of Greek Art: this art of Mesopotamian origin changed by various circumstances as I say in Syria, and more still in Persia where it was subjected to the influence of the ancient and long-enduring religion of Zoroastrianism, did at last meet the body of the Roman work set free from the subjection of Greek ornament, and hieratic custom, and so long years after the death of Diocletian, and when whatever there was of real power in the empire had left Rome for Constantinople, and Greek was the official language of the Roman empire—and so at Constantinople produced what is generally called Byzantine Art, but which I will call the first style of Gothic, because, then first was art set free from the fetters of the long centuries of pedantry that followed the crystallization of Greek art into the academical degradation of what was once so vigorous and in most essentials so free. Now you must understand that this Byzantine art as it is called which came to strangely sudden perfection in the days of Justinian, the builder of St. Sophia, had a reflex influence on the art of Italy, which also became Byzantine though with a difference: from the two centres of old and new Rome it is not very difficult to trace the stream of art by means of the architectural monuments still left us, aided by some remains of the lesser arts if so one must call them, pre-eminent among which must be named, the important one of calligraphy and painting in books, which has preserved for us so much of the design and ideas of the Middle Ages which would otherwise have been lost, I mean to say if we had had only to depend upon the remains of the wall-paintings which once covered the interior of nearly every building in Europe. Well, by these means we can note that the Art of Byzantium proper on the one hand much influenced by the kindred development of Persian Art spread all over the Mussulman East, producing everywhere an architecture of nearly complete unity of style which can in fact otherwise only be named from the countries or among the tribes where it is found, as Indian, Arab, and the like; for as to

Indian Art, outside the Brahman architecture which is a survival of early Arian work obviously even amidst its lack of beauty akin to that of Greece, and outside also Buddhist art, which takes the impress in some places of other families of man who fell under the sway of that great religion, there is no art peculiar to the peninsula. While as to Arab art, except that the race has impressed a sense of its turn for number, order, and repetition, a sort of poetry of arithmetic upon the Byzantine-Persian ornament, which shows in its elaborate geometrical interlacements and the like, except for this, there is no trace of any prepossession towards any form of art among the Arab people.

So one may say that the first and most obvious branch of the new Free Art is traceable in the Architecture of the Mussulman East. The next, to make a long stride in place, is the art which was taken, apparently directly from Byzantium, by the Germans of the early Middle Ages, and by them carried all over northern, non-Latin Europe, including England before the Norman Conquest, and the Scandinavian countries to a certain extent; although they were partly influenced by an older form of art, which was probably pre-Arian, and certainly knew nothing of either old or New Rome. This art has until touched by the Byzantine influence no capacity for the representation of natural form, and seemingly no aspirations towards it; it is found unmixed chiefly in Ireland, where in the elaborate pieces of calligraphy which the monks of that country carried out were wrought for us monuments of an art as alien to the general feeling of Gothic as the Arab interlacements: the patience and clearness of execution of them is wonderful, nor do they lack a certain beauty, to a great extent owing to the splendour and care of the actual writing: otherwhere than in Ireland although this ornament has its influence not only in England, Scandinavia, and north Germany but even, as far as book ornamentation is concerned in France and Germany it is never found without a share of distinct Byzantine Art, which in the Scandinavian art mingles with it and changes it into a separate style, but in England and France is simply used side by side with it without blending. There is no doubt in my mind, by the way, that the restless trader-buccaneers of Scandinavia played a great part in spreading over North Europe the art of

Byzantium by direct transmission of wares; up to the time of the Crusades they were always coming and going between their northern home and Constantinople and gold coins have been found in their hoards not only of those struck in that great city but even by Mussulman Potentates: I may mention quite up to the beginning of the 18th century the style clung to Iceland, embroideries are found there of that period which reproduce literally the patterns of the 12th century, themselves little changed from those of Justinian's time. Even Germany was for long very conservative of the forms of Byzantine Art; in the buildings of the North of the country the style exists very little changed, except as it were involuntarily, it has gone clumsier and lost some of its grace and beauty, and gained a little invention and some fantasticism and that is all. Even at Cologne whose Latin name and traditions might seem to account for the prevalence of a round-arched style amidst developed pointed architecture (for some at least of the fine churches of that city are no earlier than its French Cathedral), even there the influence of actual Byzantine art is obvious enough I cannot help thinking in St. Gereon.³ At any rate Germany as a whole shows the direct influence of Byzantium apart from that of old Rome, and it lasted much later there than in other countries, till in fact it was swept away by the flood of Medieval Gothic, whose advent in Germany at least it seems reasonable to connect with the rise and development of the craft guilds, which just about that time were carrying the day, and organizing all labour under them.

But if it fared thus with the stream of art that crept from Byzantium over the northern parts of Europe, [which]⁴ had felt but little the rule of old Rome, it was quite different with that other stream which coming from the Eternal City spread through Italy and thence into south and north France, and so across the Channel with the Latinized Northmen of Duke William and our An-

³ St. Gereon in Cologne was completed in 1191. See Kenneth John Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1959), p. 265.

⁴ The MS here has "who."

gevin kings: this indeed was the true stream of Architectural art (among Latinized peoples): let us look as briefly as possible at its course and the other affluents that swelled it as Mediaeval Europe progressed towards the great change of the Renaissance. In Italy itself it found itself in the South, in Sicily, in direct contact with the Byzantine-Mussulman art, but never mingled with it; in North Italy on the contrary it fell into the midst of an actual Gothic people, and the spirit of the North at once seized on it and gave it life, and working through the old Roman forms produced some of the most beautiful buildings which the world has ever seen: but as with this Lombard architecture Gothic architecture in Italy waned I will just note the fact here; asking you, if you doubt it, to compare the two churches at Verona, St. Zeno and St. Anastasia:⁵ the first is round-arched, the second pointed, and therefore formally Gothic: nevertheless St. Zeno is undoubtedly in all essential respects far more Gothic; St. Anastasia being really a classical building masquerading in Gothic: the fact is that except for this Lombard enthusiasm, the forms at least of the actual classical Roman architecture were always in Italy ready to spring up into life: before I leave the whole subject I hope to be able to show you what the Renaissance of the 16th century was, and I do not mean to say that this love for the old classical forms was a strong motive power in bringing about the change which was much deeper than that, but when the spirit of change was ready and urged people towards taking up the past again the forms already sympathetic to it lay ready to hand.

Well the Roman branch of the Byzantine stream spread as I said through Italy and so into France, in the south of which country was developed a very handsome, dignified style having little in common with the elegance of the architecture which flowed from Justinian's Constantinople: it was in fact almost purely Roman, but Roman set free, you understand from the

⁵ For a discussion and a picture of St. Zenone Maggiore (completed in 1123-35) see Russell Sturgis, *A History of Architecture* (New York, 1909), II, 277-9. For a picture of St. Anastasia (completed in 1261), see Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture in the Comparative Method* (10th ed.; London, 1954), p. 566.

affectation of imitating Greek Art: many most stately buildings are left us of this South-French-Romanesque, but alas most commonly sadly damaged by restoration; in some cases pretty much destroyed by it.

In the north of France the direct Roman influence is still plain enough; but there comes in again I fancy some of the feeling imported by the Northmen whose art, what they had of it, was as I have said directly taken from Byzantium: anyhow there is no doubt that the Gothic style which both there and in this country we not very inaccurately call Norman can by no means be considered a pure development of the Roman architecture; it is certainly influenced by the actual Byzantine feeling as the Lombard work is, but probably adds to that some borrowings from that early pre-Arian art of which I said that in some forms there was direct importation into France from Ireland, but which also, I repeat, is to my mind due at least partially to those Northmen whose name the style bears.

It remains to state definitely of this early Gothic style, what I have already hinted, that this Norman, or Franco-Norse Romanesque architecture did after the Conquest of Duke William entirely supersede the native English Romanesque, which undoubtedly had been developed partly from sheer rude imitation by the English of the mingled Roman-Byzantine and the pure-Byzantine, and partly from art imported from Germany, where as aforesaid the Constantinopolitan style was in use simply.

Thus far therefore we have gone towards the development of Gothic architecture: at the time where we are now making a pause there is a round-arched style in use all over Europe in [some]⁶ countries developed from the Roman Byzantine influenced here and there by the Romanized civilization of the imperial provinces, partly by the barbarous art (I use the word in no derogatory sense) of the pre-Arian time or at least pre-Germanic time: in other countries the style is developed more directly from the actual Byzantine of New Rome, and is altered by nothing more than the rudeness of the imitators and a not very strong strain of the above-said early European art. This is the first stage

⁶ The MS is illegible here.

of actual Gothic Art, the time of the supremacy of unmixed Feudalism.

But now when this Romanesque style was fully developed came another element of change and the Gothic art of Europe was acted on by the brilliant but less intellectual art of the East which like so much of Gothic had its origin chiefly in Justinian's Constantinople. The cause of this new element, the presence of which is undoubted, is generally supposed to be the Crusades: but I doubt that their direct influence has been exaggerated: you see besides the fact that as time went on the art of Constantinople and the Greek Empire generally was falling more and more under the influence of Eastern art; there were all this time two points of Europe where that art existed in its completeness, Spain and Sicily to wit. Now you must remember that grand as the building art was in many parts of Europe before the 12th century, the other industrial arts were in a rude state even as to matters of ornament: the art of figure-weaving in N[orthern] Europe for instance was confined to actual tapestry, and a rude kind of figured cloth which is still woven in the Abruzzi in Italy, and in Iceland: whereas in Greece, Syria, Sicily, Egypt, and Spain, the art of figure-weaving as we now mean the word was thoroughly well understood and skillfully practiced: the woven goods made in these countries especially in Sicily, were widely sold all over Europe, and must have done much to influence the general character of mediaeval ornament; which for the rest was easy to influence at this period; for at the time of which we are now speaking, the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century there was a remarkable unity in the styles of the whole civilized world: you can indeed easily tell where such and such a piece of work was done, in England, France, Italy, or Persia, but the resemblance, or rather the sympathy of ideas will strike you much more.

Thus we have reached the time of the fully developed Gothic art, which indeed seems by this time according to the natural law of growth to have gone so far from its originals as to have become another thing, but in which notwithstanding every germ of the older art is visible to the seeker. Now before we proceed to the somewhat melancholy task of considering its fall and change, I

will ask [you] to consider the nature of this art, which wrapped in its folds all Europe and much of Asia creating such a body of beauty on the earth as has not been seen before or since.

Now the very essence of its beauty was that it was founded on reasons no one can doubt that, whatever was the quality of the civilization of those days, men in their buildings for instance built what they wanted, what that civilization called for: no circumstances were really adverse to this elastic, intelligent, and free art: on the contrary the circumstances were used whatever they were for the advantage of the art: once more consider the buildings of the complete period and note how they used their materials, driven as they were by the want of each communication to make the most of what came readiest to hand: granite, freestone, brick, rubble, wood, plaster, the style creeps round each and fits it like a glove: nor was it only in the building art that this law of reasonable liberty inspired the arts, this knowledge of necessity defined by a philosopher as being the only true liberty:⁷ through all details down to the smallest it passes: take for instance the surface ornament of the Gothic times: no designers ever understood better the necessity of mystery in pattern designing; but this mystery they well understood was not to be attained at the expenses of clear and definite meaning; all growth must be capable of explanation logical and clear: all outlines must be clean and sharp; if you go wrong you will be found out at once; all colour must be bright and clean, it must be absolutely good, no negation of evil qualities will serve your turn.

Now of the causes of all this I will speak later on: at present I will but note that so it is, that the Gothic is above all other intelligent, reasonable, and free. Furthermore it was, as I have already hinted universal: I have said that the industrial arts were in a rude condition in N[orthern] Europe at the beginning of the period; of course comparatively to our times or times earlier than ours that was more or less the case all through the middle ages: nevertheless rude as the technique of some of the arts was (pottery for instance) there was nothing either coarse or careless about their artistic qualities: it is doubtless a fact that the furni-

⁷ The "philosopher" was Friedrich Engels.

ture and appointments of a 14th century house were not up to our standard of luxury, their household goods were few and simple: some people consider this a disadvantage, and call it a state of barbarism; I do not—but—however let all that pass at present; the point to which I wish to draw your attention is this, that scanty as the furniture of a mediaeval house might have been, and rude as some of it may have been every piece of it was properly made and properly ornamented, that is, was beautiful.

I will ask you to consider this fact and contrast it with the present state of things when you have the arts in your mind as a matter of history; everything made by any common artificer was naturally and without effort beautiful, just as the works of nature are beautiful without effort and though you don't notice them, thinking they were made for the convenience of your table or bed or what not. I say just think of that, and what a different world it was then from what it is now.

Now further this Gothic art had another characteristic which I suppose always accompanies great art: it was progressive, confident, intolerant, though there was history in every atom of it, it was not conscious of it, was conscious only of exultation in the present and hope for the future; that was the spirit of it as far as the mere art was concerned; otherwise deep in its soul was the melancholy of the North and its sentiment; but what of regret for past times lay in it regarded [not]⁸ the art of past times, but the life of the former generations gone like the leaves of the autumn trees, and such lives they really figured to themselves as differing no ways from their own. Now as there was in it some melancholy and abundant sentiment, so also there was no stint of humour: that liberty or knowledge of necessity which was the mainspring of it insured that: rough but kindly humour is an essential part of all the Gothic of the N[orth] at least; a wish to scare nobody away by contempt or pride, a feeling as near as may [be] the opposite of that which is the motive feeling of the pedantic art of the Renaissance. Here then we have the characteristics of Gothic Art: It was common to the whole people; it was free, progressive, hopeful, full of human sentiment and humour: such as this it

⁸ The MS here has "nothing."

lasted with some gains perhaps in certain directions, but with more losses, till the end of the 15th century: but with the beginning of the 16th came the change. It was not only that the popular art grew poorer, coarser, and more meagre, though that happened and for very good reasons, I think, but on the top of this coarsened and worsened popular art was thrust another art; produced by men who had gained a little more knowledge than the naif workmen of the 14th century, and with that had gained some feeling for history: which feeling was united to overweening hopes of the speedy progress of the human race which had taken hold on people's minds owing to events, talk about which I must again defer till my sketch-story of the arts is done. The knowledge and the hope together of these men of the Renaissance bred in them an absurd contempt of the just-past pure mediaeval times, and in the arts the result of that contempt was that for the first time since art began, men looked backward for their ideal of beauty and fitness, and culled from past times what they thought could by some means or another be united to the life of the present and palliate more or less the regrettable barbarism of the work which they were still obliged to use in a mechanical way: thus as far as the arts were concerned and especially the architectural arts they were no longer men living an eager and hopeful life producing beauty to show their pleasure in that life; but scholars sitting under the rod of a pedant, whose teaching they but half understood as they wrought anxiously to carry out his lightest precepts. Such I say were the men of the Renaissance, and art which had been free for 800 years fell into slavery again, a slavery far darker and less hopeful than that from which it escaped at the period of the fall of the Roman Empire. It is true indeed that this fall in art was quite hidden from men's eyes at the time, nay they called it a new birth, not a death sickness as they should have done: for at the head of the great impulse towards change and knowledge was a mass of talent and genius composed of some of the most gifted men the world has ever seen, the blossom of all those centuries of free art which had gone before them: the work of their strenuous individual genius was so brilliant and entrancing that it has quite hid from many of us even at the present day

the sickness of all that side of art which depended not on individual genius but on collective genius or tradition; all that great mass of art in short which we now justly call popular, or the art of the people: while those great men of the Renaissance lived this was not obvious partly as I say because the splendour of their talent hid it and partly because the degeneration was but beginning in their time: but when they passed away, they left behind them as far as the individualist arts are concerned a mere *caput mortuum* of academical whims and pretences, a so-called art which prided itself on being exclusive, narrow, and uninteresting: and as to the arts of the people, they had become in countries where art had flourished most, as in Italy, a kind of necessarily tolerated appendage to intellectual art, in short to make my meaning plain in few words the flunky of intellectual, or rather I should say of academical art: they had become upholstery. Meantime in less artistic, and cultivated countries all pretence even of intellectual art had disappeared, but though popular art had fallen very low, it did not altogether fall into upholstery though [in] the last half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th [century] social and economical causes had indeed deprived it of its dignity and thoughtfulness, but tradition still clung to it, and even mere ignorance and clumsiness aided it to shake off to a certain extent the fetters which academical art imported from Italy would have laid upon it: the result of all this was that mass of architecture of which a good deal is still left us in our own country under the name of Elizabethan and Jacobean which brightens and makes historical many a humble landscape in England, and which even behind the quaint affectation of stilted pomp and would-be learning which not seldom oppresses it has a homeliness and love of life which makes it pleasant and human and even in a sense beautiful: it will not bear criticism but it forces us to love it in spite of all defects. But you must always keep in mind that it is not its super-imposed defects that make it lovable but the tradition still lingering in it which has remained from the times of art which produced work at once logical and beautiful: it is not the Renaissance form which we love in it, but the Gothic spirit.

Think of the different way in which we look on a Renaissance building in Italy and in England: compare one of our old Warwickshire houses with an Italian building of the same style: the latter is twenty times more carefully designed, has much more pretension to be considered a work of art, and as to execution of details, of course there is no comparison between the two: yet you hate the Italian building and love the English; and really because the first is academical, pedantic, the second human: the faults of the English building come from mere ignorance and lumpishness, but those of the Italian from malice prepense: and all this difference I say means that some Gothic or human feeling still remains hidden under all its stiff-necked follies in the English building, so that it gives us at least abundant excuse for loving it.

Well, this semi-Gothic feeling lasted in pretty abundant measure with us till the middle of the 17th century, but in out-of-the-way corners of the country [it] lingered much later. For the rest the flood of civilization swept over us and steadily swamped what was left of Gothic feeling even in England, and the 18th century saw the final degradation of the arts as genuine spontaneous expression of men's thoughts and pleasures. Thencefor[war]d throughout the century decade after decade architecture grew more pinched, miserable, and ungenerous till it sunk at last into the box of bricks with the slated lid of the beginning of this cent[ury] which was I fear only too typical a habitation for the mercantile person who lived in it with his poor, limited, groveling life. The lesser arts went the same road, whatever was natural or instinct with pleasure or intelligence faded out from them, and ornament became the mere slave of fashion a foolish, indefensible, inexplicable habit. Meantime England was as to the intellectual arts now going on an equal footing with Italy and the English school of painting must I suppose be considered the glory of the 18th century in that line: well I am bound to admit the cleverness, readiness and confidence of it, but I will admit no further good qualities [in] it: I call upon you for instance to shake off the bondage of sham admiration, and tell me what it is further than these qualities of cleverness, readiness, and confidence that you really like in the acres of canvas covered by Sir Joshua

Reynolds, and on which such floods of adulation have been and I fear will be lavished: I ask you to look at them with your own eyes and not through those of art critics and tell me what you see in them; in that regiment presentation of the dullest men ever born, and the plainest women the world has ever seen whom not even the flattery of the courtly painter could turn into anything else than the simpering, vulgar fine ladies that they were: and all this smoothed down with a commercial conventionality just fit for the period which was bringing to birth the final triumph of commerce and saw nothing beyond it, no glimmer of the change⁹ which I fervently hope is now on the way.

Nor can I pass by quite unnoticed the literature of this period of slavery, all the more as the revolt against it was first felt in literature: of that we must say that it entirely lacks all imaginative qualities, has in it in fact nothing save that cleverness, readiness, and confidence which I have admitted to be possessed by the English 18th century school of painting: not only does poetry seem dead in the 18th century, but if you attempt to wade through the books of verses of the time which insult the name of poetry, you find that even the commonplace English of the time was too romantic to satisfy the writer's hatred of imagination and humanity, and that he has been obliged to invent a new language which can barely be understood without a dictionary by us of the 19th century.

Here we are landed then in that prim and dull country of the 18th century where we no longer dare to call our souls our own: where history is studied only for the purpose of insulting the religion and aspirations of those who went before us and of magnifying our own mean and hypocritical sham virtues: where poetry is come to mean copies of smooth verses with as little meaning as can be got into them and without any glimmer of passion or imagination, where art finally is on the one hand a pastime of dilettanti, and on the other foolish upholstery provided by despised drudges for vulgar luxury. We have gone a

⁹ The word "vengeance" has been rejected in the MS for the word "change."

long and weary way certainly from Ely Cathedral to Gower St.,¹⁰ from Giotto¹¹ to Joshua Reynolds, from Beowulf to the Rape of the Lock. That strange force which for lack of a better word I suppose we hapless mortals call civilization has played us a scurvy trick certainly leading us on with numberless hopes till as I say it has landed us at the end of the 18th century stripped of all art and poetry that is to say of all the pleasure of life: with history a despised desert behind us, with a blank prospect of mere utilitarianism before us.

Nevertheless out of the midst of this dreariness came that intellectual Rebellion, which I have ventured to call the Gothic Revival, and which in spite of all the follies and illogicalities that have clung to it, has it seems to me been founded on reality, and is in fact part of that great change from the mere commercial period to something better and higher, which is verily going on but which in its fulness is but rarely recognized as yet.

I will finish what I have to say tonight by laying before you a very brief sketch of the beginnings of this revolt, leaving for my next lecture an account of the results of it in the art of the present day together with my estimate of its real value as a factor in the hopes of raising the general standard of life which we of these days cannot fail to entertain.

Now I hope that you will not think that my protest against the

¹⁰ Gower Street was often cited at this time by architectural critics as an example of the extreme lack of imagination in the design of contemporary buildings. Part of the present Borough of Holborn-St. Pancras, this street borders one side of the British Museum and separates the University College from the Medical School. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century it was the site of a number of building projects whose most significant characteristics were uniformity and plainness, all the houses being built with "stock brick facings, plain parapet and slate-covered mansard roofs. . . ." See J. R. Howard Roberts and Walter J. Godfrey (eds.), *Survey of London* (London, 1947), pp. 178-87, plates 28-32.

¹¹ Giotto di Bondone (1267?-1337) was, understandably enough, one of Morris's favorite pre-Raphaelite painters, not only because he was a pre-Raphaelite, but also because he combined in his work the mystical aura of his religious subject matter and the precise eye for composition and detail ordinarily associated with architecture. He was himself the official architect of Florence in the last years of his life, designing during that period the campanile and the façade of the Cathedral. See [Margaret O.] Oliphant, *The Makers of Florence* (London, 1876), pp. 103-23.

pride of pedantry which from the first was an essential part of the Renaissance and in the end made it merely contemptible indicates on my part any foolish hostility towards real knowledge, towards real science, all genuine professors of which must surely have a due share of humility if that is true, as I believe it is, which I have seen written that however science may progress, the amount of what is unknown will always be infinitely more than that which is known.

At any rate I am so little swayed by any disregard of science that I must assert as I hinted above that whatever stirring has been among the dry bones of the 18th century began from some inspiration of historical science: and first of all on the side of language: till the time of the great philologists of the end of the 18th century the impression on the minds of scholars was that whereas Greek and Latin were languages possessing definite grammar all other tongues spoken were but such arbitrary accidental jargons as might have been expected from the rude barbarians who spoke them: but the philological scholars I am thinking of found out that this was far from being the case, and discovered the true relations of one tongue to another, and so demonstrated the unity of man: in the course of which study they also discovered the literary merits of the non-classical poems and other literature; nor only so, but also learned from them much as to the history and social conditions of the earlier nations which could have been learned from no other source, so that even the earliest of our ancestors became visible to us no longer as esurient sword-wielding machines but men of like passions to ourselves, bound together by the ties of Society, living under laws which not even the mighty power of Rome could destroy, but which played their part in the formation of the Society of Medieval Europe, now seen to be a far different thing from the jarring of courts and kings, the hubbub of a set of violent men accidentally pitch-forked into positions of rule over their fellows.

All this was the beginning of the modern study of history by whose light we not only saw something of what our own ancestors were like, but also and more easily were able to put ourselves in the places of the great peoples of antiquity, and sympathize with their real feelings instead of ignorantly worshipping them

from without as the Renaissance pedants had been content to do.

It is clear that imaginative literature could not sit quietly by while historical research was providing her with so large a mass of material; and accordingly from this time poetry to use the word in its largest sense, was born again, and the school of what for want of a better word I am compelled to call the Romantic writers arose. I have said it was a long and weary way between the ancient poets of our race and the elaborate trifler Pope; but Coleridge and Keats and Shelley and Byron claim brotherhood not only with Shakespeare and Spenser, nay not only with Chaucer or even William Langland, but yet more perhaps with that forgotten man who sang of the meeting of the fallow blades at Brunnanburg, or who told of the old hero's death in the lair of the gold-guarding dragon; or he who bewailed the ruin of the ancient city, or he who sang so touchingly of the friendless, lonely man the Wanderer.

And now as a last word for tonight, consider the attitude of three men of that time as showing that the revolt against the old pedantry was undoubted at the same time it was with some at least unconscious: consider then Byron, Keats, and Scott as an illustration: the first praising Pope making a god of him almost, and yet writing always in hot revolt among the Romancists; the second so completely cut off from what was left even then of the old pedantic twaddle, so condemned then (even by Byron by the way) so completely accepted now: and the third worth considering yet more as being so closely connected both with history and Gothic art: for he like Byron, still felt himself bound to affect enthusiasm for the false civilization of his own day, or even was really touched by it somewhat; is always excusing Gothic life and architecture for its barbarism though he was clear in his own mind that it was that which he really liked; so strong you see was even the Renaissance pride of pedantry that it fettered Byron's rebellious mind; made the sweetness and passion of Keats seem nought to his contemporaries, and befogged the strong, manly spirit of Scott.

Here then for tonight we will leave it.¹² It was the product at

¹² The following passage is deleted in the MS: ". . . no longer at any rate completely triumphant in its narrowness and primness, but tending towards mere

first of a strenuous and exciting epoch, it was agitated by the rise of commercialism, made eager by the discoveries of past history, and of rising science; but it joined to that life and eagerness a tyranny arising from the beginning of the strongest and completest rule of the weak over the strong that the world has yet seen the plutocracy namely of the middle classes: which tyranny it backed with an hypocrisy which made it ungenueine and unhuman: which in Catholic countries took the form of pure materialistic cynicism masquerading in priests' garments; and in protestant of a religion made for the rich which proclaimed competition for a good position in this world and the next as the real rule of conduct. Such was the Renaissance in its first days, splendid amidst its tyranny, hypocrisy, and lack of hope: but at the time I have now brought you to its splendour was long gone, of its tyranny was left only the narrowness and primness which was the due accompaniment to its ever-increasing hypocrisy, the favourite vice of the bourgeoisie grown moral whom it had now mainly to depend upon for its support: it only existed because there was nothing better to take its place: but surely it seemed as if that better thing was coming; for its dulness now began to be illuminated by flashes of genius as strong and real as that of the time before the first days of that tyrannous Renaissance.

What that better thing turned out to be; what may yet come from it; whether it is the glimmer of real daylight, or the false dawn of a cold moon—all this I will ask you to consider in my next lecture.

anarchy illumined by flashes of genius as genuine as that of the time before the Renaissance. As to what art has striven to rise out of that anarchy, and may yet arise from it, I will ask you to allow me to suggest considerations on that point at my next lecture."