

Morris as a  
Writer

l'éventail, la petite fiole de tabac à priser, et tous les autres nombreux colfichets des majestés tartares.

'Pour garder ces trésors enfouis, on place dans le caveau une espèce d'arc pouvant décocher une multitude de flèches à la file les unes des autres. Cet arc, ou plutôt ces arcs nombreux unis ensemble, sont tous bandés, et les flèches prêtes à partir. On place cette espèce de machine infernale de manière à ce qu'en ouvrant la porte du caveau, le mouvement fasse décocher la première flèche sur l'homme qui entre. Le décochement de la première flèche fait aussitôt partir la seconde et ainsi de suite jusqu'à la dernière; de sorte que le malheureux, que la cupidité ou la curiosité porterait à ouvrir cette porte, tomberait percé de mille traits dans le tombeau même qu'il voudrait profaner.'

I cannot ask for space to point out the numerous points of resemblance between this description and that of the marvels seen in the Roman tomb by the ill-fated 'man of Sicily' in 'The Writing on the Image'; but they are so close and striking that it seems highly probable that before writing the poem Morris may have read the 'Voyages en Tartarie et Thibet.'

I am, Sir,

H. C. Irwin.

Most of the tales of early date, those written directly after the first Prologue, resolve themselves into what I have ventured to call the minstrel and fairy-tale period of *The Earthly Paradise*. It would be inept, however, to attempt any hard and fast grouping, as, for instance, *Cupid and Psyche*, the first tale started on, is not handled in the simple, rather rough 'minstrel-lay' manner. But the changes in this poem were considerable, and the published version is very different in quality from the first drafts, a great part of which were altered, while a great deal of matter was rewritten, at any rate in the early incidents.

In both 'The Proud King' and 'The Watching of the Falcon' we find examples of Morris's earliest method of work in narrative verse. The two poems also show that

while critics often credit authors with a certain system in the actual workmanship of their verse, the writers themselves may be entirely innocent of any such system. Take, for example, the poems mentioned: in comparing the first draft of 'The Proud King' with the published version you can follow Morris's polishing throughout. The method of revision is simplicity itself; the idea is to retain the original rhymed endings, but to alter not only single words, but whole phrases, whole verses, and there is scarcely a passage in the poem that is not so treated. It is really amusing to go through the poem line by line and follow this method of revision (only unconsciously a 'method'). I give two verses of the draft:

Therewith they turned away into the town  
And moaning he went on he knew not where  
Until at last he stumbled and fell down  
And looking round beheld a brook right fair  
Close by his feet with big stones here and there  
And on the other side a little wood  
Nigh which a poor hut built of wattle stood

And so unto the palace being come  
He lighted down thereby and entered  
And in the gate the people all & some  
Stood reverently about with bended head  
And to him came a squire & softly said  
The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the king  
Within the little hall where people sing.

Then here are the verses as printed:

Therewith they turned away into the town,  
And still he wandered on and knew not where,  
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown,  
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,  
That ran in pools and shallows here and there,  
And on the further side of it a wood,  
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

Narrative  
Poetry: The  
Earthly  
Paradise

Withal unto the palace being come,  
He lighted down thereby and entered,  
And once again it seemed his royal home.  
For folk again before him bowed the head;  
And to him came a squire, who softly said,  
'The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,  
Within the little hall where minstrels sing.'

As is not to be wondered at, the finished work occasionally loses a touch here and there of freshness—as in the second of the two stanzas given:

And in the gate the people all and some  
Stood reverently about with bended head

becoming

And once again, *etc.*

whereby we lose perhaps the careless simplicity of the wandering singer.

Then we turn to 'The Watching of the Falcon,' another of the earliest tales, and we naturally look for the same system of revision. Not a bit of it; the poet is in a different working-mood: for a larger part of the tale, the easy rhymed couplets which come next to 'The Proud King' in the little note-book, in pencil and ink, stand unaltered in the published version, revision mostly consisting of insertions of fresh matter, while one or two passages are cut out and written anew. So much for 'system.' For the rest, the sentiment of 'The Proud King' remains for the reader as 'early' as in the rough unimproved verse of the draft, and to keep the full flavour of this, the unregenerate mind could almost have wished that Morris had let pass some of his early carelessness in pronunciation and so forth, as, making two syllables of the vowel in '-ire,' 'squire,' 'desire,' &c. This is piously revised; for instance,

While from the windows maid and squire leant  
becomes

While from the windows maid and varlet leant  
This is one of many such corrections.

The first description of the falcon is so good and racy in its first form that it should not be lost: Narrative  
Poetry: Th

Till by the dais he did see  
A falcon hooded daintily  
That on a perch of silver white  
Was set, with fesses of red silk  
Nearby a scroll as white as milk  
He saw whereon was written this-- Earthly  
Paradise

So with the first two or three lines of the appearance of the lady:

Clothed was she in royal pall  
And round her waist a belt did meet  
Of emerald, and from her feet  
She held the raiment daintily—

But it is due to an author that when he acts as his own faithful critic one should stress the fact: for the craftsmanship, the revisions and additions in this tale show Morris's watchfulness over his work. The love-making, altered, becomes more remote and mysterious and in due keeping with the spirit of the story; the last episode of an invasion by the Soudan and the King's defeat is all cut out. This is in the poet's early manner and coloured by his familiarity with fifteenth-century chronicles: a fight on a bridge, and so forth. It has a certain youthful simplicity, but it is on a smaller scale, and the craftsmanship is below the mark, so it had to go, and be replaced by the dexterous account of the King's ill-hap and gradual downfall. For the sake of St Michael's Bridge by the Green River it may well be preserved by insertion here. I have left the verses as they were written, all innocent of stops.

Then toward his chamber forth he went  
But on the way a squire bent  
Before him saying lief sir & dear  
The Soudan's herald is come here  
And needs must speak to you forthright

So forth there came a heathen knight  
Armed in the fashion of his land  
And by him went on the right hand  
The herald, wherefore said the King  
What song hast thou got now to sing  
Say all your tale and have no fear  
Then said the herald O King hear  
The message of my King and Lord  
Which is indeed but a small word  
Come to [his] footstool & set down  
Thereon thy sceptre and thy crown  
And do him homage for thy land  
Kneeling full humbly on thy knees  
And pay what tribute he may please  
And then shalt thou do well enow  
And if thou wilt not do this know  
Thy people and thy lords & thee  
Enough of wretchedness shall see  
Where shall I see thy master then  
The King said, that [with] my good men  
I may full honour to him do  
Nor let him have with him a few  
Upon that day, because the words  
Our clerks will use will be but swords  
And for our florins will we pay  
Spearheads & arrows that . . .  
And so God judge between us [two]  
But in his heart, The thing doth go  
E'en as she said, he thought but yet  
Not now will I my fame forget  
Then knelt the Herald on his knee  
Nought else my master hoped would be  
He said, and therefore has gone forth  
With many a man and to the North  
Of the green river waiteth thee.  
There too in four days will I be

The King said, and now make good cheer  
Then go, and for thy tidings dear  
Have now of me this golden chain  
That thou mayst wish to come again.  
Therewith the herald went away  
And all about upon that day  
The messengers went hurrying  
To draw the people to the King  
So in short time much folk he had  
Who gathered with light hearts & glad  
About that mighty King's banner  
So went they to the Green river  
And there St. Michael's bridge they found  
Well guarded by their folk, and sound  
Nor had assault thereon been made  
So there the King his army stayed  
And to the Soudan sent therefrom  
To say that thither was he come  
And there upon the southern side  
For ten days would he still abide  
So there unless his words were wind  
Alone the Soudan would him find  
So when the messenger was gone  
Ramparts they raised of earth & stone  
Dug ditches and by every way  
Made it a worthy place to slay  
A mighty army, so three days  
Such walls about them did they raise  
The fourth the herald came again  
And said the Soudan was full fain  
To see him & in 3 hours space  
From thence would be before the place  
So all was set in good array  
And about noontide of that day  
His light-armed horsemen did they see  
And there were driven easily

From off the bridge  
Full many a [                    ]  
[And] shouts & shrill yells they did hear  
And cymbals as their King drew near  
Throned in a golden chariot then  
Came on the mightiest of their men  
But when midmost the bridge they came  
He who therefrom could crawl off lame  
Was called a happy man that day  
So well the cloth-yard shafts did play  
Then at a run they came again  
Then shouting on they came again  
But in the same place were they slain  
Or wounded sore, and though some few  
The Bridge-head reached nought could they do  
Against the bristling hedge of spears  
And there they ended all their years.  
Then high the doomed King's heart arose  
To see such slaughter of his foes  
And that foreboding in the vale  
Seemed but the echo of some tale  
And loud he called Fellows see now  
Which way the wind of war doth blow  
With no stroke stricken are they slain  
And so may all fare who are fain  
Of this my crown and yet per fay  
Gladly would I go join the play  
Our sturdy folk have played with bows  
And shortly come to handy blows  
Then out there spake a wise old knight  
And said the King can do but right.  
Yet will I say a word thereon  
Yea a good journey have we won  
If we be wise & yet per fay  
Unless on this side still we stay  
Ye have not seen the end of this  
And life and crown ye well may miss.

Nay nay the King said follow me  
And a good ending shall ye see  
Unto this fight and in my crown  
The jewels of the Soudan brown  
Then forth a mighty shout they sent  
And so across the bridge they went  
To meet their foes yet many had  
Sore doubts yea and the foe was glad  
To see them leave their vantage ground  
Though thick they gathered all around.  
What more of this fight can I say.  
Before the ending of the day  
Adown the river the King rode  
Full fast in flight with whom abode  
A small and wretched company  
But he escaped as for that day  
And on that evil night he lay  
Within the cottage of a hind.  
And in the morning did he find  
A good sort of his beaten men  
About him, and set forward then  
And in the mountains he abode  
For long, yet oftentimes they rode  
To meet the foe yet little won.  
And meanwhile many a husbandman  
And merchant dwelling in the plain  
Was harried of his goods and slain  
And many a maid was brought to shame.

One of the loveliest of the folk-lore group on which I have already made notes is derived from the swan-maiden legend of the North and of the East, which has since descended into pure fairy-tale: i.e. 'The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon.' It is worth while to pause a moment over the familiar story to consider how Morris dealt with his material here and elsewhere. We see how he has substituted for the early simplicities of thought the modern

complication of love interwoven with doubt and perplexity; for the Three Gifts and the Helpers of nursery legend who make all things smooth for the wandering Prince or hind, he gives us the long-drawn sufferings of the lover, journeying unhelped through an empty world in search of the land

East of the Sun, West of the Moon  
A land that no man findeth soon.

The crudeness of the wooing is turned into a delicate scene in which love grows between John and the swan-maiden and the 'situation' becomes humanly probable; instead of details of adventure with giants and witches we have the long days of waiting and heart-searching self-reproach and bitterness. The craftsman's skill has swept away the childish and material details with which simple minds had dressed the legend, and has brought it into the realm of poetry—into that region whence may be had a glimpse of the far-off pictures of early life in the Lay of Weland. And nothing could be less like nursery legend than the beautiful passage in which the mother of John recognizes him as he sits alone by the hearth of his old home and sings to himself the Nowell song that comes back to him out of his younger days.

It is interesting to note that the dream-motive was used by Morris in this early work, as it was used in the late prose-romances—in *John Ball* and in *News from Nowhere*. The introduction of Gregory the Star-gazer skilfully draws us into the dream-reality, and all through, as the tale breaks off for his reappearance, heightens the feeling of expectancy and mystery.

The story was a good deal worked on, many passages of the draft being unused and many rewritten. The conclusion as first written, with the Lady's appearance and farewell, is retained, also the story-teller's exordium. Though once again I confess to a regret for the last two careless lines of the people's minstrel:

With foolish hate and vain longing  
That many a woe to them will bring.

To pursue my tentative grouping of the tales not altogether chronologically but by subject and style, and, let us add, by the mood of the poet, we may touch next on the classical poems. Here we have the romance of Greece and Rome, not galvanized to a fictitious life with a measured correctness of all detail, but told again for the modern reader in an atmosphere of the poet's own evoking—an atmosphere in which pictures of life all pass before us warm and richly coloured and not without some of the pleasant anachronisms that have endeared to us Flemish tapestry with their medieval representation of classical subjects. It is something of the same spirit which shows in the tapestries Achilles by his tent of cloth of gold and Penthesilea in armour and gleaming velvet, and Troy-town in the background a Gothic city with deep gabled roofs. And, as in this late medieval handling, the old legends re-told have gained a fresh grace of life, with no violence done to the gravity and dignity of ancient lore. Here and there the drafts show that in revision Morris has cut out a phrase that seemed to him too emphatically to lift the picture out of the far-off atmosphere to that of more recent days of romance—somewhat to our regret: though one must allow the artist to know his own business.

The first draft of 'The Story of Rhodope' may stand as an example of Morris's work on some of the classical poems. Like most of the *Earthly Paradise* manuscripts, it is closely written from top to bottom of the blue foolscap, with scarcely any margin. There are no spaces between the verses, but a line drawn right across the page to indicate them. There are few corrections, but through the most part of the manuscript, the bare spaces of the page are filled with bits of decoration: leaves, flowered boughs, ornamental letters—the sure sign of meditation and searching of his invention. The printed poem follows the draft with only a few verbal changes here and there, until the coming of the King's men and the quest for the fellow of the jewelled shoe. Then most of the draft is cast aside and the end of the tale written afresh, partly in pencil, partly in ink, with a

Morris as a few verses from the first draft utilized towards the conclusion. In order that we may compare this draft with the finished work, I am including the stanzas giving the passage that was altered. (It is different in plan and handling, the story being seen through the eyes of the maiden herself.) In it there is more than a trace of the earlier simplicity of diction, and the pictures presented are of homely every-day life. It is, once more, the 'fairy-story' handling with its many charms and imperfections. This portion of the tale as finally revised shows a more fastidious taste, and, in the higher key in which the closing incidents are pitched, the handling is surer and more telling. Yet here, as ever in the choice and rejection of the poet's final revision, we miss a little in what we gain. Though I know that the dramatic situation where Rhodope stands beside the altar with the shoe laid thereon is right and led up to in a workmanlike manner, with emphasis laid in the right place and details swiftly disposed of, though I appreciate this work, I still somewhat regret the poet's earlier touches, familiar as they are—the tent pitched on the down and the banner stuck in the earth beside it, the homely talk, and the old lord at last producing his casket and the shoe. Yet we must admit that in the account of the Eagle bringing the shoe to the King, the published version is all gain. The two versions are so dissimilar that they may have special mention here, as they would be enough in themselves to show how the craftsman kept a watchful eye on his work and how it grew under his hand. Read the two verses describing the coming of the Eagle, the one in the draft (quoted in the following passage) and the other as published, and you will appreciate the quality of Morris's revisions.

The printed verse gives:

But e'en as to its highest shot the flame  
And to the awful Gods our hearts did turn,  
A cry from out the far blue sky there came  
And a bright thing 'twixt flame & sun did burn,

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And some there were who said they could discern  
An eagle like a faint speck, far above  
The altar whereon lay this gift of love.

In the draft we have our childhood's friend, the fairy eagle, doing his duty stolidly and flying away content that he has delivered his message 'truly and well.' It is all right and in keeping with the simple atmosphere of the rest of the draft. But in the rewritten verse we feel what experience the poet has gained and how finely he handles his words. We know that he has seen 'what really happened'; a few lines have brought us straight into the scene and we live in the breathless wonder of it; the flame of the altar shooting up in the hot sun seems as real as though we ourselves were 'the man on the spot' who is not quite sure if he saw the wonder or not, but for whom the terrible Gods have certainly spoken out of the blue.

This is the discarded draft referred to above:

But now before the June was gotten old  
When to the time had come the year again  
When those things happed whereof the tale first told  
Was Rhodope upon a spot of ground  
That the brown sea-sand on one side did bound  
Shepherding sheep and sat within the shade  
That a small clump of wind-worn beeches made.

Morn was it when she sat her down therein  
And turning round beheld across the sea  
Betwixt the lower beech boughs scant and thin  
A speck that seemed some distant argosy;  
But little did she note what it might be  
But ere the sun was high walked here and there  
About the down the long-foot lark to hear.

But when the sun right high began to flame  
And drank up all the coolness that [might hide]

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Narrative  
Poetry:  
Earthly  
Paradise

Morris as a  
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Within the little hollows back she came  
Unto the beech ring and thought there to bide  
Till noon was past, so lying on her side  
Turned landward now she played in aimless wise  
With the blue speedwell underneath her eyes.

Amid strange thoughts she was, but as she lay  
Thinking of this & that, all suddenly  
Did she bethink her of that last years day  
When that strange hap befel, and therewith she  
Sprang up and turned about unto the sea  
And in the bosom of her gown of grey  
Felt for the shoe she yet knew was away.

But far away across the sea she saw  
The bright sunshine upon a swelling sail  
That certes nigher to the land gan draw.  
She stood thereon till gan her eyes to fail  
Thinking the while I know not of what tale,  
And then at last she turned away her face  
And toward the homestead went at a slow pace,

Nor looked to right or left but ever gazed  
Upon the ground and quicker gan to go  
Then lightly with her hand her gown skirts raised  
And ran as one who hath a thing to do  
Needs must be done and little space thereto,  
And so in short space reached the homestead door  
Nor made delay but oer the cool dark floor

Went swiftly till her sleeping place she gained,  
And there she knelt before a little chest  
And raised its lid with bright vermilion stained  
And drew from out its hidden place of rest  
The pirates gift, and set it in her breast  
And then went back as swiftly as she came  
Nor answered though a hind called out her name.

None else she saw and through her woolly sheep  
Panting she past and cast her eyes adown  
As slowly now her feet toiled up the steep  
The ring of beech-trees with its shade did crown,  
But when at last her quivering limbs were thrown  
Down in the grey shade, panting she turned at last  
And o'er the grey sea a quick glance she cast.

There she beheld the ship now drawn so nigh  
She saw upon the sail a sun of gold  
And glittering points about the mast head high  
And flashing oars and soon she might behold  
A long red banner its light length unfold  
And run adown the wind, and that thereon  
A silver moon was wrought a golden sun.

And now at last when it was fully noon  
And she at last the shipman's shout might hear  
She saw the great sails flap and therewith soon  
Could note the cable through the hawse hole tear  
As down the anchor ran, and with some gear  
The shipmen busy, then with sail and oar  
A barge the big ship left and made for shore.

Straight toward the down's top did they make; she stood  
And watched them, till the headland hid them quite  
And many a thought was stirring in her blood  
And now she flushed and now she turned all white  
And at the last with something like a fright  
She started when she saw their company  
At the down's foot come upwards from the sea.

Never she deemed had she yet seen so much  
Of gold or bright things as the sun showed then;  
First went she thought a band of armed men such  
As she had not seen yet, then gold clad men  
White bearded as she deemed, and then again  
Folk clad in steel, and one of them did bear  
A banner with the same device wrought clear

Narrative  
Poetry: I  
Earthly  
Paradise

Morris as a  
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That still from the great ship's mast floated out  
Then came a band of men that burdens bore  
[She] knew not what; and now as if in doubt  
They stayed and looked and up and down the shore  
She gazed, and as they searched the grey down oer  
Set eyes on her belike, and thereon one  
Toward where she stood came glittering in the sun.

Small fear she had of who these folk might be  
For little war that simple people knew  
And these were few, and she withal could see  
How now her own folk from the village drew;  
And so the messenger she went unto  
With steady face yet in her heart she thought  
That some strange thing those men had thither brought.

So when they met (in the Greek tongue he said)  
Damsel come thou unto our company  
And see our lords and be thou not afraid  
For kindly are they een as they are high  
And they would know what town they come anigh  
And on a certain message are they sent  
Here as elsewhere to tell the King's intent.

She smiled and said to him Not overmuch  
We know these names ye tell of King or lord  
Nor may my heart have fear of any such  
Yea, I will go, and with that latest word  
Lightly she stepped on by his rattling sword  
And as she turned upon that folk to gaze  
She saw them speedily a rich tent raise

Upon the sunburnt down; but when she came  
Before the lords, who waited there till all  
Was done therat and told about the name  
Their country had, so grand she was and tall  
With such a grace the words from her did fall  
That the one elder to the other said  
Beholdest thou, is this an earthly maid?

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And as they stood there talking, one by one  
Came up the landsmen, this man driving there  
An ass who bore ripe fruits all warm with sun,  
While that a wineskin on his back did bear  
And this a jar of milk; well knit they were  
And some were gay attired yet did she seem  
To be amidst them as from some strange dream.

Now was the fair tent pitched and there beside  
The banner staff stuck in the earth thereby;  
Nor longer in the sun would there abide  
But sat inside and round them curiously  
Clustered the folk and she thrust up anigh  
The elders twain, by the rough anxious press  
Shone all the more amidst her loveliness.

There stood [she] troubled not nor shrinking aught  
One hand upon her bosom and the shoe  
The other in her kirtle's grey folds caught  
She waited what they yet might chance to do.  
Then spoke an elder, Be it known to you  
Good people that in no haphazard wise  
We come here, neither have we merchandize

That we should chaffer with you. The great King  
Has sent us forth to many lands and great  
To see if any of a certain thing  
Can give true tidings, and some turn of fate  
In this your simple land may us await;  
So here we come at last: how say ye then?  
Here will [we] bide among you countrymen

While [it] is shewn to all the dwellers here  
Either set forth within your market-place  
Or in some temple that ye hold so dear  
That all folk go thereto—to get them grace  
Of the great gods. A smile was on his face  
Of mockery as he laid his hand upon  
A casket wrought oer with a golden sun.

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Narrative  
Poetry: Th  
Earthly  
Paradise



Morris as a  
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He raised the lid and now must Rhodope  
Turn pale at last, for in his wrinkled hand  
The fellow of the fair thing did she see  
That lay upon the wonder of the land  
Her fragrant breast, but half unwittingly  
She drew her hand forth, and e'en like a dream  
To those seafarers all things grew to seem.

Silence there was a while then did outbreak  
A great cry from them, and all eyes grew bright  
And faces joyous for her beauty's sake  
But as a man who needs must do aright  
The elder said Fair maid a wondrous sight  
Thou showest us: how camest thou by this  
Thine hand holds, how the other didst thou miss?

Somewhat askance she looked to see if there  
Her father was, and saw him not and then  
Told the whole tale as it happened to her.  
Then spake the second of those goldclad men:  
Good hap and to the great gods many a ten  
Of perfect beasts here let us sacrifice  
That they have dealt with us in such an wise.

And worthy art thou all good things to gain!  
Now nigh a year it is since our great King  
Did sacrifice upon the sacred plain,  
But as the priests stood round the holy thing  
There came a great erne circling with wide wing  
Above our heads, who at the last made stay  
Above the altar where the victim lay.

Strange all men deemed that omen and kept peace  
And yet awhile the eagle hovered there  
And in a while our wonder did increase:  
For with a cry he dropped this sandal fair  
Then turned and flew off northward through the air  
E'en as a messenger his message done  
Truly and well; then wondered every one.

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Then spake the King who young is and unwed  
Unto the priests apart, and that day he  
Gave out that none but her should share his bed  
Whose feet had pressed that sandal daintily.  
And forth we went thereon through many a sea  
And heard no news thereof till this same day  
Nor seen in all the lands so fair a May.

All hail to [thee] then! when we saw thee first  
In this rough raiment sure to all men here  
Thou seemedst more to be a Goddess cursed  
By some hard fate, then one who death may fear:  
Yea such thou mayst be yet, unmoved and clear  
Thy face is midst the tidings that we tell  
As though thou heldst the Keys of Heaven and hell.

What wilt thou then command us that we stay  
And with thy country-people hold high feast  
For certain days or go on this same day?  
For all are thine thou see'st here most or least  
Before the burning of the sun hath ceased  
And certes thou art worthier of this  
Than any maiden that on earth there is.

A proud light lit her face as now she said,  
Strange things to me O great lords do ye say  
Who in this land am but a labouring maid.  
Yet if ye mock me not I will not stay  
Long in this land but rather go today  
For kind this people is and true of heart  
Rather with you is meted out my part

Yet are there two things here I may not leave,  
My father and my mother: bide ye here  
And they from me these tidings shall receive  
For sight of you perchance might give them fear  
Moreover if your ship holds aught of dear  
Or things far fetched, give gifts unto your might  
Unto the folk that something of delight

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Narrative  
Poetry: Th  
Earthly  
Paradise

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May hang round my departing. Then she turned  
And her own folk now hastened to give place  
For in her eyes so great a glory burned  
And in her limbs was set now such a grace  
That fear fell on them: then she set her face  
Unto the homestead and here found her sire  
Driving the red milch kine unto the byre.

The remaining stanzas are not materially altered in the published version. By the specimens given it may be seen that in the first scheme Rhodope has remained the princess of fairy-tale to the last, but the personage as she is presented to us is a being of more complicated emotions, weighed down by the loneliness of life even in her changed fortunes—or rather perhaps because of her changed fortunes seeing that loneliness more clearly. And the sense of Fate that colours the whole tale, as can be seen in the alterations and additions throughout, is consistently maintained and intensified at the close.

It is to be noted that all through this first manuscript the stress of the verse falls on the maiden's name thus: Rhodope. Morris has changed this to Rhodope,\* altering the line to fit; in one place alone he has overlooked the alteration. I may note that the change of the stress was made throughout after writing the altered passage dealt with above.

In some of these drafts, as elsewhere, where my Father had trouble over a difficult passage, he has made an effort to save a favourite phrase or a whole piece of the verse, bringing it along in a reformed draft, and perhaps only cutting all out at the last, in that disciplined spirit of self-criticism for which I think the reading public do not give him enough credit.

It is thus that all through this manuscript of 'The Story of Rhodope' and in other drafts of the *Earthly Paradise* tales in the more matured manner, we see the poet forming his

\* Rhodope is the courtesan of history.

style. The young diction changes, he is careful that nothing that might strike readers as affectation, even in this romantic atmosphere, should remain. A phrase like

The goods she had been cheapening at her back  
is altered to

The wares she had just dealt for at her back  
And again

By these glittering tamers of the sea  
becomes

And by these glittering folk from oversea;

though I rather wish he could have left the 'tamers of the sea.' The 'erne' of the draft is generally made the latter-day 'eagle,' and so forth. At that time Mr Henley's remark about 'Wardour Street English'\* had not appeared, but we can see that what was of value in it had already occurred to the poet himself. As has been remarked before, a certain nervousness over youthful experiments is one of the pre-occupations of mature artists—one that has doubtless lost us many a strange and interesting glimpse into the workings of poet and painter's mind.

The moods in which such a mass of narrative poems is worked out must of necessity be varied; the pace quicker or slower, the invention surer or less sure—indeed if mood and pace were even throughout we should not thank our poet for it! Here, for example, in two of the shorter stories, in the above-noted Rhodope and in the earlier 'Ring given to Venus,' the difference is marked, and interest in the forming and moulding of *The Earthly Paradise* impels me to give one or two extracts from a manuscript to illustrate this. While in Rhodope the story goes straight on till the last part of it, as quoted above, the lines only touched in a few verbal corrections and mending of sound, 'The Ring

\* Professor Saintsbury's answer to this has already been quoted, p. 387.

given to Venus' keeps the substance nearly all through but the verse is much worked upon and smoothed. Thus the feast in the opening of the tale is developed from this draft:

What need to tell the joyances  
Of that fair feast, from what far seas  
Strange things had come to make them glad  
What cunning pageants there they had—  
Old tales enacted gloriously  
By all the fairest men could see  
Of youths and damsels on that tide  
Within whose ancient words did hide  
Meet meaning for that lovesome day  
What singing of a new made lay  
By some sweet living image clad  
In such guise as the ancients had  
Who made the marble Goddess' feet  
And half bared shoulder seem more sweet  
Mocked by that shame-fast lingering grace,  
And flushing of the timid face,  
That for the unmoved eyes must stand—  
Why make long words of that sweet band  
That brought the rose garland, how tell  
What music on the feasters fell  
So sweet and solemn that from mirth  
Oerstrained must gentle tears have birth?  
Nay let all pass and think indeed  
That every joyance was their meed  
Wherewith men cheat themselves to think  
That they of endless joy may drink,  
That every sense in turn must bear  
Of overburdening mirth its share,  
Till for a little while the best  
That they might have seemed perfect rest  
And their flushed cheeks of air were fain—  
Withal the garden did they gain—  
And wandered there by twos and threes

Amidst the flowers or neath great trees  
Lay keeping troublous thought at bay.

The incident of the voice from the clouds and the mysterious love-passage with the Goddess; the despairing search for the ring and its final recovery, giving point to the story with its phantasms and tests of the weakness of humanity: all this has been developed, where in the draft we have the simple incident of a great bird dropping the ring at Lawrence's feet:

At last when grey dawn striped the sky  
He saw a bird with wide black wings  
Wheel ever round in closer rings  
Until above his head he stopped  
And from his beak a something dropped  
That to his feet fell glistening  
That Lawrence knew his full-loved ring. . . .

Professor Saintsbury says that 'the long passage describing the procession of the dead gods and Lawrence's journey to the site thereof is one of the finest things of the kind in English poetry and that its fineness is very largely due to masterly arrangement—the check and loosening and swing and sway—of the metre. There are twenty pages of it without a break or a falter of craftsmanship, without a weakening or a slackening of spell. And though it may be a mere fancy, I like to think that, in the opening sketch of the minister-close where Palumbus lives, there is a hand pointing to Keats, and, in some touches of the ghostly waiting on the sea-links, a salute of acknowledgment to ancient Gower.'\*

On going through the manuscript of the two portions of the long Bellerophon story for the purposes of these notes, I once more feel regret that the iron rules of the printer's reader should have deprived us of the amusing little Morris touches that meet us at every turn in the many folio volumes of *Earthly Paradise* manuscripts (some thirteen of them).

\* Saintsbury, *op. cit.*



Morris as a Writer In the draft this was more homely:

Yet e'er the middle of the night was past  
There came a tale unto their ears at last  
That made them tremble once more with old fear. . . .;

and I am weak enough somewhat to regret 'the golden Artemis' of the manuscript which is replaced by 'The Goddess wrought in gold.' Is there not 'a golden Artemis' in the verse of a fellow-poet?

You will see in these Bellerophon drafts places where Morris breaks off at times in the very midst of a passage. And here holders of traditional views about poetic inspiration (are there any such unsophisticated persons left?) must modify the imagined picture of their poet in his frenzy of inspiration letting nothing earthly enter into the sacred place at such a moment. For here we have Morris breaking off in the sheer middle of the impassioned Sthenoboea's apostrophe to Love, and drawing the usual line that marks his 'tale of work' at one sitting. Unlike other great poets of his time who might sit in their study and think and write all day long if they so chose, even when he was not obliged to give whole daylight hours to designing patterns, he was liable to be called away to attend to firm-business at many moments of the day—especially when living 'over the shop.' Yet he is unconcerned about it, conscious of being able to take up the thread again without effort or loss of time.

In 'Bellerophon in Lycia' we may note that the memorable passage about the Chimaera is scarcely revised at all, and little added to. My Father seems to have had it all very clearly in his mind before putting pen to paper. Andrew Lang in his interesting article on the Poetry of William Morris, speaks very highly of his handling of the Chimaera story, and I may allow myself to repeat here this passage by the brilliant student and critic:

'The same poem, "Bellerophon in Lycia," contains what

\* See p. 398.

I venture to think Mr Morris's most remarkable and even astonishing feat of imagination. We all know what the Chimaera was, according to the mythologists. Its image, conceived by Greek artists, is familiar enough—a lion with a goat's head rising absurdly out of the back, and a serpent tail. The problem was to make this grotesque creature as horrible in the fancy of the reader as it doubtless appeared to the country folk rescued by Bellerophon. This problem Mr Morris has solved, in various passages in this remarkable poem; the most impressive we quote; it is the report of a peasant, the sole survivor of a happy host of vintagers destroyed by the Chimaera.'

After a full quotation of the passage where the merriment of the vintagers leads up to the devastating horror, I am pleased to find that, in talking of Morris's leisured and detailed method of story-telling, and contrasting it with the more modern method of handling myths by turning them into parables, Lang remarks:

'In modern poetry, too, the temptation to "find a moral everywhere," as the Duchess does in *Alice in Wonderland*, is certainly great. Mr William Morris never makes his legendary figures point a moral, though everyone who chooses may deduce, from tales like "Bellerophon" and "The Man born to be King," the value of courage, probity and good humour.'

Turning a favourite story into a moral lesson was not to my Father's taste. I think you would have to feel very far removed from the personages of your story if you were dealing with them in this lofty fashion; and as we know, Morris on the contrary got very near his imagined people and saw each one of them 'in his habit as he lived'; and indeed would have found it very dull to do otherwise. But people would insist on looking for some meaning below the surface in his works. It was quite an ordinary occurrence that when he published a new volume, some serious-minded friend (people used to go about in those days with a Wordsworth in their pocket) would ask in the course of a Sunday

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written in  
later p.p.

afternoon gathering 'what his poem meant.' 'I told him I meant what I said when writing,' he would tell his home-circle afterwards: 'and you know, my dear, Wordsworth's primrose by the river's brim is quite good enough for me in itself; what on earth more did the man want it to be?'

He was only once goaded into making a public statement on the subject. A reviewer sought to extract an allegory from one of his late romances, and the letter he drew from Morris is printed in the Introduction to Volume xvii (p. 39).

The treatment of the Northern matter in *The Earthly Paradise*, as in 'The Fostering of Aslaug' and the unfinished 'Wooing of Swanhild' and in 'The Lovers of Gudrun,' is curiously varied from tale to tale. In 'Aslaug' we are in a sense back in fairyland, with the minstrel-measure, the poem in its tenderness and delicacy far removed from the reticence and stoicism of the Northern spirit. A glance at the drafts of Aslaug show that it was worked out in a swifter way than, for example, 'The Ring given to Venus,' in the same metre, the verse running on with few additions and hardly any verbal corrections.

The unfinished Swanhild poem is in the writer's full-blown 'classic' manner. It is possible he felt as it progressed that in its suave stanzas and richly invented pictures he was bringing the dim wild story too far down to modern days, and that in such an atmosphere the savage ending could not be successfully carried through. For whatever reason the tale was put aside, one cannot but regret it was not brought to its conclusion, however unsatisfactory the experiment might have proved to the author. But of these tales of the North, 'Gudrun' stands alone. It is characteristic of Morris's dealing with the Laxdale Saga that for all his passion for the Northern matter and for all his power of identifying himself with the thing he loved, he feels bound as a craftsman to present the story to us in a sympathetic form, making the inhuman human and softening the character of Gud-

run so that she may not be quite remote from human experience at the end of the tragedy. The Gudrun that greeted Bodli on his return from the ambush on Kiartan with those often-quoted harsh words of hers: 'Mickle prowess hath been done; I have spun yarn for twelve ells and thou hast slain Kiartan'; the Gudrun who talked and smiled with the brethren who had been slaying her husband while she washed linen in the beck above the hut, this Gudrun is transformed into a figure less remote, less stoic in the expression of grief; the interpretation of her is a queen-like being, human and lonely amid the tangle of her tragic passion.

Morris has woven his story out of the life of the Laxdalers, and it is worth while, for the interest of the thing, to read the Saga side by side with the *Earthly Paradise* poem, noting what the modern poet takes and what he leaves. Indeed, he takes most of the incidents and most of the detail of one-third of the chronicle, that is, of the tragedy built up of the love and hate between the houses of Herdhold and Bathstead. But here is no copying of the abrupt and reticent style of the old writer. Morris has used the material, and the resultant poem fits in to the scheme of *The Earthly Paradise* without clashing with its harmonies. It is full of the subtleties of modern love—passion, hatred, jealousy, doubt of the reality of life itself. In no wise can one imagine the medieval Icelander making Gudrun, in her longing for Kiartan's return, say:

Will he think me strange  
When he beholds this face of mine at last,  
Or shall our love make nought of all days past,  
Burn up the sights that we apart have seen,  
And make them all as though they had not been?

And Kiartan himself, when he is told of the marriage of Gudrun to Bodli: while the Saga says 'he was nought moved thereat' and things go on as before for the moment, Morris tells us what is moving beneath the surface—the lover's

agony and 'the world clean changed for me,' until, we are told, he braces himself to face things in manly fashion.

And whereas, in building up the incidents to the moment of high tragedy when the three lovers must meet, Morris paints picture after picture—the red-kirtled man in glittering armour on the beach; the great folk at the high table in the hall hearing the news of his arrival; Gudrun coming in the night to her husband Bodli with her curses: in the Saga this speeding up of the story is given in all terseness: 'Bodli went to Kiartan and kissed him. Kiartan took his greeting. Thereafter were they led in. Bodli was there-with most joyous. Olaf took it wholly well, but Kiartan somewhat amiss,' &c.

All the same the drama of the North is there: the incidents that unfold the story, all the antics of human perversity that the actors on the scene bow beneath, as though they were the work of Fate herself: Morris has given us these in due order. The Four Dreams, the Sorrowing of Guest, who foresees the future; the Icelanders at King Olaf's court; the philandering of Kiartan; Bodli's treachery by implication; the return of Kiartan and the rest; the growing enmity between the two great houses; the stealing of the King's sword and the revenge; the ambush and Kiartan going to his bane with the cheerful courage of the man who will see the play played out: all these links of the chain are there, and it is by reading together with this part of Laxdaela the modern rendering of it that one realizes the greatness of the Saga, with its masterly unfolding of the tragedy as one significant event follows on another.

And all through, the poet as aforesaid has given the history to us of the modern world in his own way—in truth a poetic version of Laxdaela would be little more than the dry bones had he done otherwise—and the scoldings of Gudrun are softened, and the grief of the lovers is expressed rather than implied; while at the climax, it is all Morris, in Bodli's lament over the slain and his hope of meeting

in that fair heaven  
The new faith tells of.

Morris finishes with the killing, but there is one-third more of the Saga, wherein is told of the subsequent life in Laxdale.

Those matters that relate directly to his story he gathers up shortly: the death of Bodli; Gudrun's revenge after twelve years and her last marriage. The often-quoted words in old age to her son that conclude the poem are straight from the Saga.

Morris's MSS. of Gudrun have been described in Volume V of the *Collected Works*, but these additional notes seem to be needed to complete the account of Morris's dealing with this part of the long Saga.

The metre of Gudrun is not important in itself—just the simple narrative couplet of many of the *Earthly Paradise* tales. I was searching for the right word about this, and found it in Clutton Brock's study of William Morris, where he says: '[It] is a metre which only poetic matter can lift above prose.'

Two of the *Earthly Paradise* tales seem to me to stand somewhat apart from the rest; they are remarkable as an expression of a different phase of the poet's frame of mind. These are 'The Man who never laughed again' and 'The Hill of Venus.' In the case of both these poems a great deal of unused material exists which throws light on the thought and searchings and labour that went to the moulding of them, especially in 'The Hill of Venus.' They are, as we know, both stories of wild, barren passion and are built up in an atmosphere of such an unquenchable melancholy that if my Father had written little else of note, and if they stood for an expression of himself (as a poet's work, however consciously fanciful, must do in some degree) you would say, Here is an inward-looking being with scarcely a hope in his life, cursed with a sense of the futilities of the world while keenly alive to its beauties. In one of the Introductions to

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the *Collected Works*\* I have dealt with the work on 'The Man who never laughed again,' as shown in the various existing drafts: I have given at some length extracts from them and, I think, have quoted all that would be of general interest. But we may return to the subject for a moment to note that, familiar as my Father was with the Eastern matter and much as he enjoyed its richness, its humour and variety, this tale is the only one taken directly from that wealth of ancient lore.

Though all the best stories of the world may have come originally from the East, by the time they have been adopted in the West, their form and spirit have been fundamentally changed in the countries through which they have travelled. The story-tellers of Greece and Rome and Central Europe of the Middle Ages have taken from them what they wanted, leaving aside some of the ancient splendours and adding their own graces. I do not doubt that in searching among the 'best stories' to use for his own scheme he considered subjects definitely of the East and with the full Eastern flavour, but one cannot be surprised at his making so little use of them. The Eastern attitude of mind was not native to him: the sense of Fate hanging over human action is always part of the equipment of a good dramatic story, but the fatalism of the East and the fatalism of the West are pitched in a different key. Though Morris takes up the story of the endurance of suffering in its self-concentration and monotony once again and under another guise in 'The Hill of Venus,' his treatment of human troubles and the way in which they are to be borne did not lead him naturally to the blind submission into which the Eastern mind tends to fall.

The fairy legend element in 'The Hill of Venus' is mostly overshadowed by the expression of this heavier mood. Morris's poem is a wild sombre rendering of the old tale interweaving rich fantasy with the empty silence that confronts the lover's distracted quest when he is again outside

\* Vol. v, p. xxxv.

the magic place. Here fairy-land is no longer, as in most of the other tales, friendly, quaint and of childlike beauty, leading the human who braves its marvels to a happy fortune: the charm is a menace, the beauty a thing of terror, but so desired that the pilgrim turns back to it from the affrighted Pope's acquiescence in his despair. All this brooding, this questioning of the vanity of passion, the self-dooming of the man who returns to the wasting of life upon the Hill: all this is worked out at great length in the various drafts.\* (Morris has spent more time on bringing this strangely arresting tale to its final form than on any other poem in the book, and the fact that he did have to work so much on it, identifying himself with such intensity with the brooding spirit of doom that pervades it, gives it an interest beyond that which must already attach to the modern handling of this group of legends.) And when all is said, the conclusion, with its human tenderness and piety, has cleared away the clouds and terrors of fairy-land, mellowing the sombre outlook of the late medieval mind and bringing back our thoughts to the sweet sanity of God's earth and the promise of the Blossoming Staff. I like to think from the appearance of the drafts that it was written swiftly and happily, a fit ending to the long string of tales, flooding them with sunlight and a sense of deep peace.

I wish to supplement the quotations from 'The Hill of Venus' drafts in Volume vi by the following verses, to preserve the picture of the girls with the forest-beasts that Morris did not use:

Yea, as he looked along the slope he saw  
Not many yards away a damsel stand  
Her dainty feet nigh touching the rough paw  
Of a great lion, and her slim right hand  
Laid on his wrinkled brow, a silken band  
Hung to her left arm, and its end was bound  
About a white fawn laid upon the ground.

\* See the list in the Appendix.

esp. in original  
line 15

Narrative  
Poetry: The  
Earthly  
Paradise



Morris as a Writer      Then he describes the vale

Hemmed by the hills about, now high, now low;  
And wellnigh oer against the place whereby  
He first had gained the vale had he come now,  
And through the cliffs no pass might he espy,  
Nay, rather did they grow more steep and high;  
And somewhat too the vale was changing here  
For it became more garden-like and fair.

Heavier the roses hung and closer bloomed  
And flowers and all fair fruits did more abound;  
And still twixt rose and lily-stem there gloomed  
The lion's grave face. On the flowery ground  
The tiger lay, the bear's tongue found  
The dead-ripe mulberry, as he rolled along  
Beneath the brown bird's ceaseless gurgling song.

#### WORKSHOP NOTES

THERE are traces of a methodical habit in Morris's recording of the 'tale of work' often alluded to in those days, but it was not carried out all through *The Earthly Paradise*—you would not expect it of him. The Bellerophon manuscripts are numbered more regularly than most, and one can get a pretty accurate idea of these verse-spinning evenings; but when one comes to look at another tale, 'The Fostering of Aslaug,' let us say, the 'system' of counting has only the semblance of method. Many of us will sympathize respectfully with the business-like intention and with the way it works out. The poet counts up the lines of the first two pages which represent a sitting and he notes 108; the next two pages are counted and 219 noted, which is the total of these pages plus the two first—the total being out by seven lines; and so for a while. Then in the middle of a passage and of a page he will start a fresh counting of lines adding on it with new sittings, and so it goes on with beautiful irregularity; but one can get at the tale of

work in a way. And now, halfway through the poem he loses interest in this tiresome counting of lines and makes no further notes whatever. So you see that any observations about the amount of work done at a sitting can have no value as an exact record, though the countings of course are of interest. Here is a batch from a portion of the Bellerophon manuscripts: 144, 195, 71, 26, 57, 77, 99, 52, 77, 152, 78, 131, 160, 74, &c. These are taken in order, with two or three gaps of unnumbered sittings. From 'The Ring given to Venus' we have 183, 125, 274, &c. From 'The Hill of Venus,' 563, 287, &c.; and on one folio of it he notes '310 after 10 o'clock.' We remember how he wrote on the end of the Gudrun manuscript 'Sunday June 13, 1869, 1728.' That is assuredly not an adding up of batches of work but the record of spinning done on one summer Sunday.

In all the drafts above referred to as typical of Morris's work on *The Earthly Paradise*, we can follow his progress as a craftsman in the different periods they represent. We see the early mood, where he must put down on paper somehow the series of pictures that are jostling each other in his mind—impatience at the slow medium of speech, one might almost say, showing itself in roughness of diction or incompleteness of the picture. But we observe, too, how early he began to discipline himself, improving verse that did not flow happily from the source.

And so as the work goes on we can see from the drafts and alterations how he is all the time teaching himself to throw off the hesitations of apprentice-work; but for all that the moods are varied and much of the early simplicities in verse and in imagery is preserved as in 'The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon,' where more than a touch of the 'modern' introspective spirit is woven into the wandering minstrel measure. The 'fairy-story' conception of the tales soon gave place to a far more elaborate and crisper realization of life in a world where, though magic counted for so much, it is the human adventure we follow, and the