

LOVE IS ENOUGH

1872

31. G. A. Simcox, review, *Academy*

December 1872, iii, 461-2

The conception and arrangement of Mr. Morris's last poem are singularly refined and perfect; and it is written throughout with an intensity and seriousness which many readers will be inclined to contrast favourably with the half querulous half indolent *insouciance* which runs through much of the *Earthly Paradise*, and finds a definite expression in the *Apology* and *L'Envoi*. The poem begins with a conversation between Giles and Joan, who are two married peasants, in a crowd at the pageant of an emperor's marriage. They speak in octosyllabic couplets, and the imagery of their speeches is homely, and Joan mistakes the marshal's sergeant for a knight: otherwise it may be doubted whether any peasants out of Arcadia ever expressed themselves with such elegant simplicity and propriety. Then after a short song, which, like all in the poem, begins with the words, 'Love is Enough,' the emperor and empress appear and exchange lofty courtesies about their love (in heroic triplets, each of which is followed by a burden.) Then we have the mayor in alliterative lines begging leave to present a play. He feels called to apologize for the subject, which seems to depreciate rank and prosperity; as equally of course he regards the rank of the emperor and empress with loyal complacency; equally of course they give a gracious dispensation for the play to proceed.

The story of the play deals with familiar elements; but they are treated in an abstract passionate way that is anything but familiar. Pharamond succeeds his father, who is killed in battle, and for five years works wonders in defence of his kingdom. Through all these years he has been haunted by the vision of a maiden in a valley shut in by mountains, over which the only pass lies through a yew wood. At last he breaks down under his longing; and, after passing nine days in

lethargy, sets off with his foster-father to find the reality of the vision. It seems they met with many adventures in their search; but these are only used for a scene of dreamy reminiscences; it is hardly worth while to enquire which come from Calprenède, which were invented for a story which upon reflection the poet did not care to tell. It is not till the search has lasted for years, and hope has failed, that Love reveals himself, and then withdraws to make way for the beloved in the very valley of the vision where Pharamond has lain down in a mist to die. While Pharamond has been longing for her, Azalais has been longing, not yet for him, but for love; and so when she sees him, she too recognizes that she has been longing for the meeting.

After the first raptures are over, Pharamond, to please his foster-father, and to gratify his natural self, or what is left of it, goes back to his kingdom to resume it if he can. He finds that Theobald the constable (whose *lâches* did much to aggravate his early difficulties) has usurped the throne to the general satisfaction. Accordingly he goes back to his love under the impression that he is too good for a king, and that there would be little pleasure in conquering his subjects after conquering their enemies. The emperor and empress are much pleased with the play, and wish in vain that they could make friends with the players; but they are cut off by their rank from a felicity which is reserved for Giles and Joan. After each scene there is a musical interlude, which becomes more and more like a hymn; and Love delivers an address to the audience, which becomes more and more like a sermon by a saint; and the talk of Giles and Joan as they go home from the show lets the reader down gently and happily to common life again.

When we pass from the conception to the execution, it is impossible to speak too highly of the rich rapturous melody of the songs, which are all in long anapaestic stanzas with double rhymes, that have an echo here and there of Mr. Swinburne—perhaps inevitable, but hardly welcome. We extract the last and the sweetest:—

LOVE IS ENOUGH! Ho ye who seek saving,
Go no further; come hither; there have been who have found it,
And these know the House of Fulfilment of Craving;
These know the Cup with the Roses around it;
These know the World's Wound and the balm that hath bound it,
Cry out, the world heedeth not, 'Love, lead us home!'
He leadeth, He hearkeneth, He cometh to you-ward;
Set your faces as steel to the fears that assemble
Round his goad for the faint, and his scourge for the forward;

Lo his lips, how with tales of last kisses they tremble!
 Lo his eyes of all round that may not dissemble!
 Cry out, for he heedeth, 'O Love, lead us home!'

O hearken the words of his voice of compassion:

'Come, cling round about me, ye faithful who sicken
 Of the weary unrest and the world's passing fashion!
 As the rain in mid-morning your troubles shall thicken,
 But surely within you some Godhead shall quicken,
 As you cry to me heeding, and leading you home.

'Come—pain ye shall have, and be blind to the ending!

Come—fear ye shall have, mid the sky's overcasting!

Come—change ye shall have, for far are ye wending!

Come—no crown ye shall have for your thirst and your fasting,
 But the kissed lips of Love and fair life everlasting!
 Cry out, for one heedeth who leadeth you home.'

Is he gone, was he with us?—ho ye who seek saving.

Go no further; come hither; for have we not found it?

Here is the House of Fulfilment of Craving;

Here is the Cup with the Roses around it,

The World's Wound well healed, and the balm that hath bound it:
 Cry out! for he heedeth, fair Love, that led home.

The following lines are perhaps as fair a sample as can be isolated of the tone and doctrine of Love's discourses:—

Have faith, and crave and suffer, and all ye
 The many mansions of my house shall see
 In all content: cast shame and pride away,
 Let honour gild the world's eventless day,
 Shrink not from change, and shudder not at crime,
 Leave lies to rattle in the sieve of Time!
 Then, whatsoe'er your work-day gear shall stain,
 Of me a wedding-garment shall ye gain
 No God shall dare cry out at, when at last
 Your time of ignorance is overpast;
 A wedding-garment and a glorious seat
 Within my household, e'en as yet be meet.

The last line seems hardly finished; and there are other indications here and there that Mr. Morris has lost something of his easy mastery in abandoning the ruder form of the heroic couplet which he inherited from Chaucer. The writer himself seems to be aware of a more serious

fault: with all his gracious delightful fervour, Love argues and insists too much; his discourses are not merely a commentary on the poem, they are a defence of it, almost a criticism; and it is only a very youthful literature which is ingenuous enough to permit itself such confidences. Perhaps too, it might be said that the several disguises of Love, who sometimes appears as a maker of images, sometimes as a maker of pictured cloths, have little value for the reader; though, if there could be found worthy actors and a fit audience, they would add another grace to the pageant.

It is hard to pronounce upon a single trial whether the revival of alliterative rhythm will be a permanent addition to our poetical resources. We are inclined to think that Mr. Morris himself has gained by it a greater directness and energy of expression, and consequently more of the eloquence of passion, and this without any sacrifice of delicacy; but after all he has not yet shaken our impression that the harmony of regular metre was a decided artistic progress.

Here is an extract from the speech of Azalais, as she sees Pharamond asleep:—

As one hearkening a story, I wonder what cometh,
 And in what wise my voice to our homestead shall bid him.
 O heart, how thou faintest with hope of the gladness
 I may have for a little if there he abide,
 Soft there shalt thou sleep, love, and sweet shall thy dreams be,
 And sweet thy awaking amidst of the wonder
 Where thou art, who is nigh thee—and then, when thou seest
 How the rose-boughs hang in o'er the little loft window,
 And the blue bowl with roses is close to thine hand,
 And over thy bed is the quilt sewn with lilies,
 And the loft is hung round with green Southland hangings,
 And all smelleth sweet as the low door is opened,
 And thou turnest to see me there standing, and holding
 Such dainties as may be thy new hunger to stay—
 Then well may I hope that thou wilt not remember
 Thine old woes for a moment in the freshness and pleasure,
 And that I shall be part of thy rest for a little.

Perhaps the anapaestic movement is here as elsewhere too unbroken, indeed there are whole paragraphs that only want rhymes to remind us of Mr. Swinburne when he writes in a minor key. But we feel it is ungracious to criticize music at once so rich and so simple: the idyllic grace of Azalais' awaking shyly to the consciousness of love furnishes the ideal relief after the passionate scene in which Pharamond's hushed

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

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

32. Sidney Colvin, review, *Fortnightly Review*

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

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