

without and the hand of Will Green on the latch: all go to build up a dramatic moment of singular spiritual beauty.

I must not overload these notes with quotations and will give but one example from the romances of the weaving of everyday life with the sense of marvel to come. Ralph the hero of *The Well at the World's End* is at Whitwall and we are shown the life of the hostel and the market-place and the very human figure of the rich chapman-brother, who rather patronizes Ralph but respects him as a fighter and possible protector of wealthy men. We have the finely-felt picture of the quiet country and river and little hills, with the grey tower of Swivenham rising up against the blue mountains. We are amidst the chatting of friends, the coming and going of town-life, and upon all this everyday movement comes the breath of wonderland and the eager searching for news of the Wall of the World and the Well at the end of it. The story of the three who set out from Swivenham on the Quest is told in a matter-of-fact manner as it might be an occurrence of yesterday, and one is inclined to believe it. The hand of the playwright shows here more than that of the inventor of fairy-tale. It is but one out of many such passages in which excitement and expectation are worked up by aptly placed touches of significance.

Of all these prose tales, the two first are in an historic setting; in the others we have at first the Plantagenet medieval atmosphere which the writer knew inside-out and could call up without effort, but this gradually merges into the Kingdom of pure fairy romance, though of course with the medieval furniture. The invasion of Gothic settlements by the Romans in *The House of the Wolfings*, and the descent of the Huns in later times in *The Roots of the Mountains* were periods of great interest to my Father, and many discussions used to take place at home on the facts and probabilities of these great folk-struggles; how the Romans disposed their armies; how the men of the North theirs, what weapons each used. His thoughts were fixed on this point in mid-Europe where the great forces came and went and met

in conflict before blending. His reading and his eager sympathy built up the detailed life of the races who were to become the great craftsmen of a later time—the builders and artificers of the Middle Age, the men of whom he spoke in the young ardent days as his 'breathing friends.' It needs no more than to note this to divine how much of himself he put into these two works. In the one tale the exhausted Roman is the villain of the play, in the other it is the Savage of the East, the wild horsemen that 'move like to the stares in autumn.' Against these two elements, of outworn tyranny and ignorant brute-force, the free intelligent tribes are in warfare. We feel in every passage the eager sympathy with a race he has drawn strong, sturdy, in love with life, full of inventions and labours that help to make their corner of the earth good to live in. They are fighting against the forces of slavery and ignorance that are surging against them. In the highly-detailed pictures of the tribal life we read something of the writer's wistful enjoyment of his subject, casting his eyes back over centuries towards a time that seemed happy and simple enough compared with the unrest of the difficult days in which he lived. Love of the tribe and the kindred is the keynote in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountain*. The effacement of personal happiness in service of the people hangs over all the action in *The Wolfings*. The Hall Sun—the Vestal Virgin—is not ordained for personal happiness, but to be the soul of the kindred, gaining peace at least. One might contrast Morris's frame of mind now with that in which *Love is Enough* was written. In the poem of the earlier period all leads up to the absorption of self in the Eternal Love; in the later work we get the absorbing of self in love of kindred. Morris is entering into the feeling of the free man; comradeship and the comfort that it brings is the note that glows throughout in the melancholy temper at the back of this romance.*

* See Professor Saintsbury's remarks on 'The Lament of the Wood Sun,' quoted on p. 477.

Love theme a
counterpart
also.

The following letter to J. L. Joynes has an amusing reference to *The Roots of the Mountains* and one of its critics:

Kelmescott House,
Upper Mall,
Hammersmith.
Nov: 28 [1889].

My dear Joynes

Thank you for your letter. I am a beast: for hearing to my sorrow that you were ill I intended months ago to write to you, and owing to the inherent selfishness of human nature, of which we still hear something at our discussions on lectures, I never did so. I have no excuse to make except that I was made so, and didn't make myself. I will certainly come to see you if I am going to Rottingdean,* which however may not be for some little time.

I don't know if you have seen my new book the *Roots of the Mountains*: the chap in the P.M.G. (whose head I should like to punch) implies that it is like to send a body to sleep, so as you are still weak it may do you good. Ha! it will be long before that fool (whoever it is) will be able to send anyone to sleep with his twaddle. I was going to add an adjective but forebore because it might weaken my sentence. I am about from pillar to post very much in these days, which to you who are so kept in may seem jolly, but to me is not so. I find that people will insist in looking on me as a young man, and expect work out of me accordingly; I shall have to turn round on them soon if they don't look out.

The movement is going on curiously now, it seems to me. So many of our hopes in small matters overthrown; and on the wider scale things going on so much faster than we dared to hope.

Well, I hope to see you before long somehow, and in mean time, I wish you better luck and that you will soon be able to be about again.

Yours very truly,
William Morris.

* To Burne-Jones's house.

Clutton Brock says in his study on William Morris that the experiment of *The Wolfings*, where the narrative is in prose and the speech in verse has 'made it less easy to read for those who would have their reading made very easy.' Anyway this method was given up, and in *The Roots* we have only occasional bursts of song. The opening description in *The Roots of the Mountains* of the cultivated tribal life in the Alpine dales is unsurpassed in its beautiful precision. There is nothing dim or vague about this conception of settlers by the great river: a bird's-eye picture-map could be drawn by a practised hand of the lie of the land, of town and home-
stead. The touch is so familiar, so effortless, that we can quite naturally enter with the writer into the life of the story; we read it as an account of 'what really happened' not a building-up of imagined adventure. The story-teller has us in thrall and we listen happily, unconscious of the devices by which he wraps us in his changing moods, and before the long tale is done, the hardy, resourceful men and their beautiful women have entered into our thoughts as real personages do.

The Roots of the Mountains and *The Well at the World's End*, in their different ways, seem to me the very type of adventurous romance: the one on a basis of history; the other placed in Wonderland. Such romance can scarcely be too long. With each adventure, it is life starting again, and the excitement of setting forth for new and strange country. We see the stage set afresh and get new zest for what is to come. All this is part, too, one may note, of that spirit of courage that laments no more than is manly over personal trouble, that looks forward to the new deeds to be done, new riddles to be read, determined to get interest if not enjoyment out of the whole of life.

Anyhow, that is how my Father liked a romance. It used to be a lament of his, well known in the family circle, 'Why isn't there some nice long novel of Dumas that I haven't read?' The retort was sometimes, 'Well, you might write one yourself.' And the fun of writing a long story like 'The

Interminable,' as *The Well at the World's End* came to be called by him, must have been something akin to that of reading a Dumas story of adventure in ten volumes for the first time.

I think that some day these romances will take their right place among Morris's writing, and more especially that these two, *The Wolfings* and *The Roots*, will stand for something more than fantasy; I mean, that they will count a little as a contribution towards the study of early races and their doings. The writer on pre-history and on early history with his special endowment of scientific knowledge, is not the man to 'look down with contempt upon those who have not enjoyed similar advantages' to quote from a famous Oxford sermon;* he with his intuition, his imagination excited by the work of research may well meet at certain points with the romance-writer whose imagination is of a different quality. You can conceive, for instance, the writer on palaeolithic matters wishing he had the leisure, also the special skill for developing scenes of the lives of the dwellers in those dim caves whose farthest recesses with their finely-modelled painting hold secrets we may guess at for ever. We may be told by unquestioned authority what dyes were bought by our Goths in the early centuries, what choice weapons were made in mid-Europe in their day; but such information as archaeology and history give us is enriched by our poet's imagining of how the human industry was at work. The description of the Spring Market in *The Roots of the Mountains* forms an admirable summing-up of the goods both rare and necessary that were likely to be current in those early times. It is full of colour and movement—too long to quote, but here is one phrase: they brought 'madder from the marshes, and purple of the sea, and scarlet grain from the holm-oaks by its edge, and woad from the deep clayey fields of the plain.' There is no loose

* A 'classical education' was referred to here; my Father often quoted the passage with great unctious.

or misleading statement anywhere: in these few items the toilers of the sea, the workers in the marshland, &c., are called up, at their work, and the picture stamped for always on our mind. Or, later, we are shown a choice sword, 'marked with dark lines like the stream of an eddying river,' and I am reminded of a description, clear and accurate though less poetical, of just such a weapon in some recent book on early arts—a sword from the treasures of Kings. It is not a little for anyone who has visited the old encampments in England to have one such made alive with the movement of early days by a picture like the following from *The Wood beyond the World*: we are looking at the circle of big stones, the Doom-ring, 'and now it was all peopled with those huge men, weaponed after their fashion, and standing up so that the grey stones thereof but showed a little over their heads. But amidmost of the said Ring was a big stone, fashioned as a chair, whereon sat a very old man, long-hoary and white-bearded, and on either side of him stood a great-limbed woman clad in war gear, holding, each of them, a long spear, and with a flint-bladed knife in the girdle.'

In such passages Morris makes the silent speak to us, and their voices are real and the story of their lives credible and reasonable, even when woven with magic; in a passage in *The Roots of the Mountains* that is nothing short of moving it is told how a kindred separated aforetime by the fortune of war, are come together again, and the burst of passion in which the Woodlander finds his kin strikes a note of deep drama here. Over all is the warmth and colour of life; the nameless folk are come to their own and 'the banner of the Wolf with the Sunburst behind him, glittering bright, new-woven by the women of the kindred, ran out in the fresh wind, and flapped and rippled before his warriors there assembled.'

Of all the fighting that occurs in the pages of the romances, the great battle with the Aliens in *The Roots* is the most important, and will, I think, always rank high among imaginative battle-literature. The account occupies some

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forty pages, and the descent of the Gothic kindred united to withstand the blue-eyed, wide-nosed savages, is no simple onslaught on one spot, but is watched by the chronicler from every point. Now he throws himself into the passion of the *melee*, and he pauses to describe how the wedge formation at a certain place scatters the dusky axe-men, or to follow the fighting in the city streets. This long passage is so built-up that it cannot be read lazily, but must be followed stroke by stroke to the climax, to be properly enjoyed.

Of the later group of romances, *The Well at the World's End* stands out as the most important by reason of its wealth and variety of incident. It is no small feat to keep up the interest and invention through all that length of story. It gains much, too, by its brilliant medieval setting, where, as mentioned above, everyday life is on the border of magic and adventure, while the weaving in of medieval legend of the Dry Tree and so forth, gives a special zest to the story. Another point of interest lies in this, that there are so many things that stamp the tale as written in our own age, no pastiche of a romance fashionable in the fifteenth century. There are the little human touches put in a way familiar to use, the wilfulness of love that wanders a little, the griefs and resignations, the sturdy bearing of trouble, all the tangled experiences of the human heart: the attitude towards life generally: all these things are modern, and the pretty scene between Clement and his wife after Ralph the beloved boy has gone out into the world could scarcely have been written in the days of the long romance.

All through the stories magic is thrown off at the end and the personages settle down to a sane and tranquil life: and always in the midst of overwhelming grief you will find the hero taking comfort in the thought of the bit of earth which is Home: that and the remembrance of the Wonders of the World keep him happy. We think of this as very characteristic of Morris and his own attitude towards life. His

Adventurers are not seeking the grandeur and power which Later means tyranny, but a life of peace in good-doing so 'that men might say of them, "They brought down Heaven to the earth for a little while."' At the conclusion of *The Well at the World's End*, the band of men wending up the Green way to the ancient fortress which is set with fire at the four quarters (a passage of great beauty) are on their road to the defence of the little house of Upmeads: and this is Kelmscott, and Morris gives a loving picture of the medieval manor-house which doubtless stood once on the site of our home.

Towards the end of life my Father showed the hand of a master in the construction of fairy-tale, more especially throughout the length of *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*. And all through the pageantry and grouping of many-coloured pictures, and account of flood and desert, I feel the sense of reality, so that there seems nothing grotesque or unnatural in the magic that broods over all; even the antics of the Sending-Boat are horribly exciting to a grown-up who reads *The Water* in the proper spirit.

One of the striking things about *The Sundering Flood*, the last story written, is its saga-setting and saga-like treatment of men and events, yet so clearly handled by a modern: one who has translated many of the Sagas and now tries his hand on an original tale in the same temper. It is the medieval North-land of which he treats; and the *mise en scène* is the strip of land each side of one of the terrible glacier-rivers, while lower down the country blossoms into cultivation, all imagined in the medieval atmosphere. The picture of Icelandic life with its hardships and dangers is called up clearly, sometimes in two or three words, and one passage gives us a description of the ancient hall, hung with the story of Troy. Once more, the historian lies behind the romance-writer in his pictured life, and Morris shows us in this tale the life and movement of a great Icelandic chieftain's home: it might be at Hjardarholt, now a poor stead

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above miles of birch-wood scrub, once a splendid dwelling
in its forest-land, with a hall as described here, of which the
chronicler tells us that the carved pillars were hewn from
the trees of the chieftain's wood.

JUVENILIA

BALLAD

*smoke
death
of
with*

WHERE have you been so long to-day?
Tell me true, sweet Step-daughter.
To my brother's house I went to play:
Something hurts me, Step-mother.

What did you eat for dinner there?
Roasted eels and black pepper.

What did you do with the broken meat?
I gave them to my dogs to eat.

What then did to your dogs betide?
The flesh fell from them that they died.

What do you leave to your father dear?
My barn of wheat to make good cheer.

And what will you leave to your brother dear?
My great ship that sails everywhere.

And what will you leave to your sister dear?
My gold that shineth red and clear.

And what will you leave to your Step-mother?
The flames of Hell I leave to her.

And what then will you leave your nurse?
Mother, what can I wish her worse?

BALLAD

MALMSTON had a dream in the night
That harm had come to his heart's delight.

He called his pages fair and free:
'Get up and saddle the grey for me.

'Get up in haste and saddle the grey;
I must see my love before the day.'

Morris as a
Writer

his comments in *Commonweal* on schemes of Emigration, and this brings to his mind a picture of the setting out of a Norse family for Iceland, for in sportive mood he gives the title

STATE-AIDED EMIGRATION IN 889

Lo trim on the rollers all ready for sea
The Wood's Daughter lieth, the Maid of the Tree;
And hither comes creeping the arm of the tide,
All eager for clasping her wind-whistled side.
Lay hand to the gunwhale, shove down to the brine;
For the night of the spring-tide grows little and fine;
And the moon-drowning heaven grows bright into day,
And clear the King's gables that drive us away.

Now fair on the ripple she floats as a swan;
So swing in the meal-bags and softly thereon
Lay down the long-hoary, the warrior of old,
And the grandam beside him, the nurse of the bold;
Be speedy ye maidens, lift kirtles and tread
Firm foot o'er the threshold of this the new stead!
No need to the mountains to look aback now,
For Rut of the sheepfold and Rolf of the bow.

Lo, Rut there be singing, too rough-voiced he is,
Thou cold-cheek, thou red-lipped, stop that with a kiss;
Yea, Thora, Rolf's right arm about thee is stark
That came down through the spear-drift amidst of the dark
Nay Asny, nay Asta, why weep ye so sore
That no Biorn and no Brand come adown to the shore?
Three feet from the King's shield fell Biorn to earth;
Scowled the King as he hearkened Brand's death-scorning

Go as softly, O Gudrun, as wendeth the doe
In the summer-tide bracken to couch her alow;
The burden thou bearest ere old is the moon
Shall hear the rope rattle and crow to the tune
Of the lads on the benches that singeth the wind,

A-piping his story from time out of mind.
There the world-new shall wonder a-gaze o'er the sea
In the hand of the dauntless with eyes of the free.

The
Influence of
the North

Ye thralls of the westland, that sang us in lays
Of the Ford of the wicker wall deeds of old days,
Be ye free, be ye friends now in this the new house,
Where the sea-mew's our blackbird, the herring our mouse;
Where the pathless wet meadow-land round us is spread,
And the lift is the roof of the feast-hall o'er head.
Is it wide enough, brothers, this lea-land we win,
With its pasturing bisons oar-driven therein?

During the years of the early seventies my Father had now and then expressed in letters to friends some sense of dissatisfaction that he was writing no original work. The misgiving comes naturally enough to an active-minded man in mid-life that his inspiration may fail him somewhat, though more often than not this uneasiness is but a sign that something on a bigger or on a different scale is to see the light in due course. In thus taking stock of his output of work, he was forgetting to add up the sum-total of activities in other paths; he had all the particular worry of the business upon him; the business was expanding and enlarging his inventions, he was busier than ever in man's life. And his 'pleasure' period! It was only the other, laid up with family treasures, considering the list of them. It was a tiny quarto on finest Romyam, a tiny quarto on finest Romyam, writing finished and all ready for picture the happy restfulness of his hand now on the fairy-writing the proud bold letters of his Virgil. his magnificent folio, consisting of