

WRITING  
ON THE IMAGE:  
READING  
WILLIAM MORRIS

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the 'Religion of Humanity' as elaborated in Comte's *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830-42) and *System of Positive Polity* (1851-4). Rossetti, who discovered Jane Burden, was obsessed with the poetry of his namesake Dante Alighieri, particularly the *Vita Nuova* in which the narrator struggles to accommodate the conflict between the idealized Beatrice and the agony of sexual repression on which that idealisation is predicated. For Dante's narrator, Beatrice symbolises not just love, or even spiritual love. She is the incarnation of spiritual perfection. For details of Burne-Jones's affair with Maria Zambaco, see Wildman and Christian, 138-40.

In 1851 John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor published 'The Enfranchisement of Women' in the *Westminster Review*, in which they declared: 'What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges, not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood' (311). In 1865 John Ruskin published his sentimentally reactionary essay 'Of Queen's Gardens.' Mill responded with *On the Subjection of Women* in which he laid responsibility for the 'nature' of women firmly at the feet of the patriarchal gendering process rather than natural or divine ordination. A year earlier a group of Manchester women had initiated the movement for the enfranchisement of women in England by attempting unsuccessfully to place their names on the register of voters.

## The River at the Heart of Morris's Ecological Thought

David Faldet

As Ellen and William Guest pause under the arch of Shillingford Bridge, in *News from Nowhere*, so that Ellen can get 'a good look at the landscape through the graceful arch,' Guest tells her, 'It was one of the minor stupidities of our time that no one thought fit to write a decent book about what may fairly be called our only English river' (*News* 204, 205). One of the minor missions of *News from Nowhere* is to rectify that lack of a book on the Thames. *News* is not, of course, a detailed guide. Such guides for boaters were amply supplied in Morris's own day, from *Dickens' Dictionary of the Thames* to Henry Taunt's *A New Map of the River Thames*. *News from Nowhere* is instead a book that has the large aim of seeing both the river and civilization by a new light: by the light of what Florence Boos has called an 'Ecocommunist' future ('Aesthetic Ecocommunist'). In that future, Kensington Wood 'spreads out along the heights above the Lea marshes' (*News* 64) and the salmon water is good, on the Surrey banks of the Thames across from Hammersmith. The communism is embodied in the life and values of the characters who depend both materially and imaginatively on the River Thames, a stream which is at the heart of the romance and which embodies the environmentalism of Morris's vision. Aldo Leopold has defined conservation as the 'attempt to convert our collective knowledge of biotic materials into a collective wisdom of biotic navigation' (189). A collective new ecological wisdom is demonstrated by the inhabitants of Nowhere as Guest makes his way around and up the Thames. The river figures in the late phase of pattern designs

Morris did in the 1880s and in the ecological vision of *News from Nowhere*; it is, in fact, a unifying key to the romantic vision of that book.

In his 1953 essay 'The Round River,' Aldo Leopold used the river metaphor to define conservation. Much ecological thinking since then has followed this example. Leopold describes environmental problems as changes or modifications in the 'biotic stream' that result in imbalances and blockages in the circular stream of living materials. Imbalances result in the destruction of pieces in the whole complex 'land organism,' and threaten its general health. Environmental stability is usually based on a well-tuned set of biotic relationships. Morris applied a round river view to society as well as to the natural world. His definition of socialism was all people 'living in equality of condition,' managing 'their affairs unwastefully' ('How I Became' 379). The savage inequalities of industrial capitalism are shown in *Nowhere* to have been guilty of causing human unhappiness as well as environmental havoc. Guest comes from a society out of balance and out of tune. In *Nowhere* social imbalances have been corrected and the healthy flow of life's materials has been restored.

Morris's mature life was lived in a period that marked the first reclamation of the Thames from its worst extremes of urban pollution. The last Thames salmon at Boulter's Lock had been caught in 1824 (Weightman 132). The foulness of the tidal waters of the Thames served as a lethal barrier to the migration of salmon, even if some of the waters further upstream remained acceptable. Asiatic cholera carried off over 30,000 Londoners in the 1840s and 1850s, and its source was linked to London's foul water supply by Dr John Snow in 1854 (Halliday 124, 130). In the dry year of 1858, the choking stench of the exposed Thames bed inspired Parliament to charge Joseph Bazalgette with the construction of the sanitation system that would begin to divert urban waste from the river. Though his work was not completed in time to save the prince consort from water-borne typhus in 1861, over the next thirty years he would create 1200 miles of London sewer lines (Halliday 183). Bazalgette's conduits diverted most sewage away from the London stretches of the Thames, and beginning in 1887 the solid sewage was settled out and dumped at sea before the waters were returned to the Thames (Halliday xiii). Though salmon could not be sustained in the Thames until the 1980s, due to continuing industrial pollution, the waters of the tidal Thames were cleaner in 1890 (the year *News* began serialization) than they had been in decades. Another important political response to the condition of the river

was the Thames Conservancy Act of 1857, which placed the river under the care of a board of conservators. Though Morris resented their often misdirected focus on locks, weirs, and tree clearing, they were charged with preventing pollution, another sign of a dawning respect for environmental standards in mid- to late-Victorian England. By the 1880s, when Morris first travelled the upper river, it had become one of the chief recreation areas of Victorian England. The railways that had erased the barge and passenger traffic of the upper river were now hauling Londoners to such departure points as Henley and Oxford for leisure boating trips. The upper Thames represented, for the urban masses as for Morris himself, a site of pastoral rejuvenation. In his 1886/7 edition of *A New Map of the River Thames*, Henry Taunt wrote, 'in an age so fast and energetic ... what greater pleasure can there be to a man ... than to throw himself on his back under some wide-spreading tree, and listen to the gentle stream that murmurs by?' (Read 229). Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, the 1889 bestseller about a boat trip up and down the upper Thames, chronicled the congestion caused by steam launches full of tourists and the 'various germs of poison' resulting from dead dogs and suicides in the river (117). Yet Jerome and his companions went to the upper Thames in the 1880s for the same reason Morris did when he found time to leave Kelmscott House for Kelmscott Manor: for what Jerome's narrator called 'rest and complete change' (5). For the 125 years prior to the composition of *News from Nowhere*, the Thames below Hammersmith was more and more built up with docks to serve the commercial interests of an increasingly industrialized country. Yet the portion of the river up which Guest would row in *News from Nowhere* was increasingly sought out as a place for regattas, scenery, and weekend angling. In all these, the river's health made a difference. In his concern for the ecology of the river and in seeking rest there, Morris was in tune with his times, but his environmentalism was radical both in its depth and in its links to socialism.

The environmental vision Morris applies to the Thames in *Nowhere* is well in keeping with ideas he had been refining through the socialist years of the 1880s. In his essay 'Art under Plutocracy,' which Morris delivered in a meeting chaired by John Ruskin at Oxford in November of 1883 and which created a storm of indignation because of his surprise appeal to the socialist cause, Morris argued that the duty of true civilization was

To keep the air pure and the rivers clean, to take some pains to keep the meadows and tillage as pleasant as reasonable use will allow them to be; to allow peaceable citizens freedom to wander where they will, so they do no hurt to garden or cornfield; nay, even to leave here and there some piece of waste or mountain sacredly free from fence or tillage as a memory of man's ruder struggles with nature in his earlier days. (63)

In Morris's dream, the freedom of citizens is equated with a new liberation of the environment from the unloving exploitation of the nineteenth century.

Throughout the 1880s, Morris lived within throwing distance of the Thames at both Kelmscott House and Kelmscott Manor, and he first travelled between the two by river in 1880. The following year he bought and began to develop the Merton Abbey works along the Wandle, and used its waters in the dyeing work that went on there. In 1883 he wrote to Ruskin, who had cleaned up one of the source springs of the Wandle in a St George's Guild project:

I need not say that I should be very glad to see you at our place at Merton Abbey: though I fear it would be a grief to you to see the banks of the pretty Wandle so beset with the horrors of the Jerry-builders: there is still some beauty left about the place however, and the stream itself is not much befouled: I am doing my best to keep the place decent, and can do so in the seven acres our works command; but as to the rest can do but little. (*Letters* 2:186-7)

Morris now lived in all seasons along the Thames and had his main works situated so as to use the waters of one of its London-area tributaries. The responsibility he felt for this piece of the environment rings clear in the mixture of pride and despair he voices in the Ruskin letter.

The intimacy of Morris's involvement with the Thames is celebrated in his 'tributary series' of patterns. In these tributary patterns the stems of plant and vine take on the meandering shape of a river: Evenlode, Wey, Kennet, Windrush, Lodden, Wandle, Cray, and Lea. These designs recreate in beautiful form the riverine environments upon which Morris's existence depended and to which he had grown attached. Three of these patterns, all designed in 1884 and 1885, celebrate rivers that closely figured in Morris's own life. *Lea* (fig. 1),

registered in 1885, commemorates the watershed on which he grew up at Walthamstow and Woodford in Essex. *Cray*, from 1884, honours the watershed on which Morris lived at Red House in Kent, and the river that flows through Bexley, near the house he built there. In *Wandle* (fig. 6.2), which takes its name from the river on which the Merton Abbey works was located, Morris most clearly abstracted the stem shape into a stream shape. Morris's pattern depicts three layers of flowers. In the most prominent layer, the diagonal meanders grow extravagant red poppies and push out small leaves. Between the double walls of the diagonal meanders runs a stream of bold stripes. In the middle ground, between the parallel meanders, twines an interlace of yellow poppies, anemones, and marigolds. At the base layer, as if in the shadow of the larger plants, spreads a white net of eyebrights against a blue background. The pattern is a microcosm: light in colour, the metaphorical meander of water, and the plants that convert light and water into the basic stuff of life.

The meander, though a standard feature of pattern design, became a concrete reference to environmental principle in Morris's *Wandle*. Morris hated stream straightening out of aesthetic intuition. Yet there is a sound environmental imperative for the meandering of rivers. A meandering stream is, as the word 'meander' suggests, a slow one. Its winding across the face of its descent decreases its rate of fall and its rate of flow. Whereas a straightened or 'channeled' stream carries away flood waters more quickly, it also deepens and scours its bed with increased force. The result is an environment less hospitable to vegetation such as rushes and cress or the simpler forms of animal life such as mollusks and crustacea upon which higher forms feed. The channelized stream is likely to be a more sterile aquatic environment. It also carries away water that enlivens the surrounding environments of wetlands and flood plains. Morris's meandering river designs, bursting with flower and vine, are emblems of the fertile power of slowness and of the vitality that is concomitant with rest.

In *News from Nowhere* the metaphor of the river, which typifies the utopian romance's vision of renewal, begins in the form of its demonic contrary on the first page of the book. The twin images that provide a brief peek into the horrors of Morris's contemporary life as the book opens are a fractious meeting of socialists and William Guest's ride home from that meeting in a 'stinking railway carriage' (44). The underground railway is the demonized counterpart of the Thames, a metaphor for civilized humanity's subjugation of the powers of Nature

to its own infernal ends. The narrator of the first chapter calls the underground a 'vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity' which 'civilisation has forced upon us like a habit' (43). One only need remember that Morris wrote before the introduction of electric trains to the Metropolitan District line to realize that there is a literal as well as a figurative truth to his description of the ride on the underground steam train as a 'vapour-bath.' In this fast-travelling conveyance Guest 'stew[s] discontentedly' in the bad hot air of the carriage and in the remembered heat of the arguments with his socialist comrades (43). The vapour bath of the underground is the engineered and high-speed contrary of the natural highway of a watershed. Guest dispels his bad feelings with a wish that he might 'but see a day' of life in his ideal world, a wish he repeats in solitary muttering as he leaves the underground station. The immediate sign that his wish has been granted is a rejuvenated Thames. Counteracting the hurry of his journey by railway he walks, pausing to take in 'the moonlit river, near upon high water' (44). Here, we are told, he suddenly 'felt as if he were in a pleasant country place - pleasanter, indeed, than the deep country was as he had known it' (44). In this suddenly relaxed peace of mind Guest fails to notice the disappearance of the modern bridge at Hammersmith, though he does notice that the lights he is used to downstream are gone. When Guest retires to his bed his mood of heated agitation has been replaced by the pleasure 'of peace and rest, and cleanness and smiling goodwill' (44). Though he does not realize it, he has already been walking through a cleaner environment, less disrupted by urban intrusions. Without having seen another human being, he already feels much better disposed to his fellow humanity.

The Thames is the symbol of what the subtitle of *News* calls an 'epoch of rest.' The meandering flow of the river, against which the characters row, provides Guest, as it did Jerome's narrator, with 'rest and a complete change' (Jerome 5). Though the first half of *News* is largely taken up with the land journey to Bloomsbury and a long discursive explanation of the life and history of Nowhere, the book returns, in the final half, to the river where it began. In journeying up the Thames Dick, Clara, Ellen, and Guest recentre the reader's attention on the river. During his brief visit to Nowhere, Guest fulminates on the political subjects dear to Morris: the social inequalities and suffering caused by industrial capitalism, but also tree cutting, water quality, green spaces, industrial pollution, and the ravishing of the countryside. In reimagining the landscape without its current

problems, Morris needed to focus on the old lines of connection not only between person and person but also between people and what Ellen calls 'the earth, and the seasons, and the weather ... and all that grows out of it' (220). In the trip up the Thames, Guest falls in love with Ellen, knowing that he will be pulled back to the past that troubles him throughout the narrative. Guest is attracted to Ellen by more than her beauty. She understands him and shares his thoughts. Equally important, she shares some of the tragedy of his fate. As she rows up the Thames with him, she too is 'as good as gone from the Thames-side' (210). The past indirectly haunts her through her father, who longs for the civilization of the nineteenth century, and who hopes to alleviate his unhappiness by removing to Cumberland, away from the Thames which Ellen has grown to love. The past will pull both Guest and Ellen away from the brief pleasure they experience together on the Thames in Nowhere.

Guest develops an intellectual admiration of Nowhere through observation and through conversation. This becomes paired with his love for Ellen, whom he meets on the journey up the Thames. His love for both Nowhere and Ellen is linked to his love for the rejuvenated countryside adjoining the Thames. All three are of a piece. The society of Nowhere is not industrial or urban or capitalist, and these changes have left their mark on the stream. From the river the first morning Guest notices that 'the soap-works with their smoke-vomiting chimneys were gone; the engineer's works gone; the lead-works gone; and no sound of riveting and hammering came down the west wind from Thorneycroft's' (48). At the pottery and glass works in Westminster Guest is shocked at the absence of smoke (82). He later notices the absence of 'the sprawling mess with which commercialism had lettered the banks of the wide stream about Reading and Caversham' (186). The lack of heavy industry endears Guest to Nowhere's society and the river that flows through it. He also is pleased to see the effects of de-urbanization. The orchard growing in Trafalgar Square is but one of a dozen signs that the population pressure has been removed from London. 'The population,' old Hammond says, 'is pretty much the same as it was at the end of the nineteenth century; we have spread it, that is all' (106). And finally, not one piece of Nowhere is owned and no one accumulates wealth. As Paddy O'Sullivan points out, 'it is the removal of surplus production which enables the society of Nowhere to lighten the pressure it exerts on the rest of nature' (176). The results of these changes charm William Guest

as he moves through the countryside in his journey. The return to hand industry has erased industrial pollution. From the river on the first morning Guest immediately notices the 'fresh air and pleasant breeze' (45) and 'no marks of the grimy sootiness which I was used to on every London building more than a year old' (148). The rain and rainwater run-off that enters the river in Nowhere is therefore more free of corrosive particulate. So too the wetlands, forests, and meadows that have replaced the hard urban landscape of the crowded nineteenth-century population have allowed the natural purification systems, the green cells, of the environment to clean the waters before they enter the river. The waters themselves have been released from culverts to their natural green courses, as Guest notices immediately as he drives through Hammersmith. The result is a clear Thames that, again, on the first morning startles Guest as he bathes in it. The society and the river have been given a new life, a freshness and youth that also marks the countenance and bearing of the people of Nowhere.

In the society of Nowhere, no person catches Guest's eye more than Ellen, and in the scene where Ellen and Guest reveal their feelings and situation it is partly their words about the river that let them know they are united in feeling. In chapter 28, entitled 'The Little River,' Guest — alone in the boat with Ellen — confesses that he belongs to the 'ugly past' and resolves 'to hide nothing' from [her] at all. Ellen responds that she knew Guest was 'not one of us' and admits that this attracted her to him and made her desire to 'make [him] as happy as [he] could be.' She admits she wants to 'make a proposal to [him]' and he reciprocates that he 'would do anything in the world for her' (208). This string of passionate confessions has been inspired by Ellen's statement that gives the chapter its title: 'How pleasant this little river is to me, who am used to a great wide wash of water; it almost seems as if we shall have to stop at every reach-end.' Ellen's keenest pleasure is the meandering of the 'little river': the frequent turns and variations that mark its likeness to Morris's pattern idylls of the 1880s. When Guest calls the countryside of the upper river 'pretty,' Ellen continues: 'Don't you find it difficult to imagine the times when this pretty country was treated by its folk as if it had been an ugly characterless waste, with no delicate beauty to be guarded, with no heed taken of the ever fresh pleasure of the recurring seasons, and changeful weather, and diverse quality of the soil?' (208). So too, in the wash of feelings that follows their confessions, Guest pairs his view of 'walls of tall reeds, whose population of reed sparrows and warblers

were delightfully restless ... in the still, hot morning' with Ellen, whose 'lazy enjoyment of the new scene seemed to bring out her beauty doubly ... her idleness being the idleness of a person, strong and well-knit both in body and mind, deliberately resting' (209). The woman and the riverscape around her are both filled simultaneously with rest and energy. The meandering river is a slowed or restful river, yet one charged like Nowhere, and like Ellen, with a stirring density of life.

Ellen seems to recognize that she is like the land and the river. She tells Guest, once they arrive at Kelmescott, that in a past age 'I should never have bought pleasure from the rich men, or even opportunity of action ... I should have been wrecked and wasted in one way or another, either by penury or by luxury' (223). Society under capitalism would have used her as it had used the river. In chapter 30, it is following what Ellen calls Guest's 'history of the river' (215) that she makes her proposal that he stay with her, moving with her to the north. In Guest's history he has explained that until the advent of the railways the river was used as a highway, and therefore 'some care was taken of the river and its banks' (216). With the advent of the railways, however, 'the river ... lost its practical or commercial value' and therefore 'it was utterly neglected, fill it became a nuisance' (216). In the system of capitalism, viewed from the Marxist perspective Morris had adopted by the time he wrote *News from Nowhere*, ownership and economic privilege grant agency and freedom on the one side, but take it away on the other. Poor but pretty women and a useless but pretty river suffered similar fates under the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth-century London in which Morris made his home.

In Nowhere, however, neither the woman nor the river environment is treated in this way. Ellen enjoys the agency and pleasure that show in her manner and physical beauty. She is free to leave her father and row up the river by herself to catch up with the party of two men and a woman, strangers who had stayed overnight at their home: a freedom that would be shocking in a young woman of middle-class Victorian society. Under communism the river has regained some of its agency and freedom as well. Instead of being cleared and dredged, the river's beauty is enhanced. Guest reports at the beginning of chapter 30:

In spite of my new-born excitement about Ellen, and my gathering fear of where it would land me, I could not help taking abundant

interest in the condition of the river and its banks; all the more as she never seemed weary of the changing picture, but looked at every yard of flowery bank and gurgling eddy with the same kind of affectionate interest which I myself once had so fully, as I used to think, and perhaps had not altogether lost even in this strangely changed society with all its wonders. Ellen seemed delighted with my pleasure at this, that, or the other piece of carefulness in dealing with the river: the nursing of pretty corners; the ingenuity in dealing with difficulties of water-engineering, so that the most obviously useful works looked beautiful and natural also. (214-15)

Morris takes care to make it clear that the river, in a society that no longer believes in private property and the accumulation of wealth, has regained both respect and love. Guest even adds a footnote that the mills on the Thames of Nowhere were often 'strikingly beautiful; and the gardens about them marvels of loveliness' (215). In short, though the river is used for both transportation and power, its beauty is also cultivated for its own sake. Part of Ellen's spiritual unity with Guest is seeing this perfected river with him for the first time, a fellow guest and traveller on the river as it should be. Its very perfection sharpens their mutual sorrow and urgency, knowing that they must each soon lose the river in all its fully realized beauty because of the claims of the past only as they were each now seeing it for the first time.

In addition to the perfect society and the perfect woman, Guest finds, in Nowhere, the perfect river. The condition of the Thames and the watercourses that empty into it indicates a wide social practice of environmental values that are the mark of 'a collective wisdom of biotic navigation' well in place. A group of girls, fresh from bathing in the river, prove 'eager to discuss all the little details of life: the weather, the hay-crop, the last new house,' and 'the plenty or lack of such and such birds.' And women, as well as men, 'could name a flower and knew its qualities; could tell you the habitat of such and such birds and fish, and the like' (193). Morris is quite calculatingly showing that haycrops and houses, matters of material well-being and human interest, are valued no more highly than the nesting habits of birds, whether the person be an adolescent girl or a middle-aged man. 'It is almost strange,' Guest records, 'what a difference this intelligence made in my estimate of the country life of that day,' for 'here were people as eager about all the goings on in the fields and woods and downs as if

they had been Cockneys newly escaped from the tyranny of bricks and mortar' (193).

In 'The Land Ethic' Aldo Leopold explains that 'the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community' beyond the human community 'to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land' (239). Such an ethic is clearly at work in Nowhere. The result of this loving attention to the plant, animal, and mineral world is a richly diverse landscape where human predation and environmental pressure has relaxed. Besides being a place of orchards and woods, London has become a garden spot. Local producers fill its market spaces, and local produce makes up the breakfast Guest enjoys the first day at the Hammersmith Guest House, where fresh strawberries are brought to the table wrapped in an equally fresh cabbage leaf, and fresh lavender and balm are scattered around the room to perfume it. The lower Thames supports a native salmon population, and fresh perch is on the table at Runnymede. In the shadows beneath the willows at Runnymede, bleak feed on the flies, and chub splash 'here and there at some belated moth' (178). Besides the warblers and sparrows that he sees above Godstow and the blackbirds, doves, and swifts that inhabit the garden around Kelmscott, Guest sees kites, magpies, sparrow-hawks, ravens, and a merlin, all in more abundance than he was used to seeing in the bleak times of the nineteenth century. In short, *Homo sapiens* is not the only species to flourish with more vigour and life in the recharged environment of Nowhere. The 'vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity' with which the book begins is replaced in the 'Epoch of Rest' by a long, slow row against the current of a living river, musically alive with the twittering of songbirds, and continually surprising Guest and Ellen by the wild diversity of its meanders.

Besides serving figuratively in ideas like Leopold's 'round river,' actual rivers and their physical watersheds are a basic point of focus in ecological understanding and practice. Putting together the Greek words 'oikos' or 'household' and 'logos' or 'study,' German evolutionary biologist Ernst Haeckel invented the term 'oecology' in 1866, to describe the scientific study of the way living things interact in and with their environment. A watershed is a natural 'household' within the larger ecosystem, biome, and biosphere. In *News from Nowhere* Ellen explains why she resents being uprooted by her father from her life along the Thames at Runnymede: 'One gets so pleasantly used to all the detail of the life about one,' she says, 'it fits so harmoniously

and happily into one's own life, that beginning again, even in a small way, is a kind of pain' (210). 'Fitting in' is a biological necessity that becomes an imaginative and spiritual habit for people in tune with their environment. Morris's ideal social reform, communism, extends beyond people to the life and elements around them. As Guest quizzes Old Hammond about Dick and Clara's life together, it takes him some time to conceptualize their radical social freedoms. Guest cannot see how they can be married without legal contract and witnesses, how Clara has been free to leave Dick and free now to return, with their two children staying in the home of Clara's sister, and in the meantime Dick stays in a household with a loose confederation of friends and acquaintances, who are neither legally nor biologically a family. In short, human households have been liberated from systems of property and control. This is the human equivalent of Kensington, where 'naturalists haunt' because it has become a 'wild spot' of woodlands where children tent like gypsies throughout the summer. The environmental 'household' has regained its wild status where water, soil, air, tree, bird, fish, and insect all have their original rights and freedoms.

William Morris loved rivers. In particular, he loved the Thames along which he lived at Kelmscott House and Kelmscott Manor. Some of his best later fabrics paid honour to the Thames tributaries that figured most importantly in Morris's life. In these he abstracted streams, such as the Wandle, into vegetative patterns with a meander as the prominent focal point. *News from Nowhere* is, in part, a picture of what Morris dreamed the Thames might be, if liberated from the burdens placed on it by urban and industrialized Victorian England. But the meandering upper river also provides an image of what Morris hoped from communism: a world where people, liberated from the overproductive demands of capitalism, find themselves recharged. In the book, he imagines a future where people care for the earth and its rivers. In that society of true equals, people regain a life of balance, even as they restore a healthy flow to the materials of the natural world.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 6.1 William Morris. *Lea*. Hand-block printed cotton. Morris & Co., 1885.

Fig. 6.2 William Morris. *Wandle*. Hand-block printed cotton. Morris & Co., 1884.