



TAPESTRY MADE AT THE MERTON ABBEY FACTORY
The Visit of the Magi. Design by Burne-Jones

A Visit to William Morris's Factory

By Rho Fisk Zueblin

NOT many years ago, Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell made a Canterbury Pilgrimage—a modern pilgrimage, since, unlike the Monk and Knight, Nun and Wife of Bath, they rode a tricycle; a *very* modern pilgrimage, as described in Mrs. Pennell's sprightly and slightly irreverent pages. After exciting mishaps all along the way, the final catastrophe reads thus: "The verger pointed to the pavement, 'which now,' he said solemnly, 'you have come to the shrine of the saintly Thomas.' We had reached our goal. We stood in the holy place. Even the verger seemed to sympathize with our feelings. For a few moments he was silent; presently he continued: 'Enery the Height', when he was in Canterbury, took the bones, which they were laid beneath, out on the green, and had them burned. With them he took the 'oly shrine, which it and the bones is here no longer!'"

Last summer two other travelers made a still more modern pilgrimage, since we not only rode a tandem, in a gala spirit, but we journeyed to a *Pagan* shrine. Alas! the catastrophe was changed, for, though monks and priests no longer roam the monastery walks at Merton Abbey, and it could doubtless be said of its patron saint, Austin, "the 'oly shrine and his bones are here no longer," yet the spirit of a religion dwells here in such might that the pilgrim learns many lessons in truth and beauty. Of this religion, the present patron saint of the Abbey, Mr. William Morris,¹ gives an idea, by words in a letter to a friend: "I am an artist or workman, with a strong inclination to exercise what capacities I may have, and a determination to do nothing shabby, if I can help it; or, if I do anything shabby, to admit that I have done so, and to be sorry for it. This appears to me to be the socialist religion."

¹Of course this article was written before the death of Mr. Morris.

Our missal for this pilgrimage was the writings of Mr. Morris on Art, its glories and duties and sorrows, providing such texts as these to ponder: "It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do; which shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do; and which should be done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious." "In a properly ordered state of society every man willing to work should be insured: 1. Honorable and fitting work. 2. A healthy and beautiful house. 3. Full leisure for rest of mind and body."

These are some of the tenets of the high priest of this religion. Will a visit to the shrine show them a mockery, or will there be an ardent living and working toward this ideal?

Mr. Triggs has written: "In 1861 Morris and Burne-Jones and Rossetti formed an art firm—a guild of idealists! The distinguishing mark of these artists was their conviction of the honor of labor and the glory of thoroughness. Each was gifted with a love of order and splendor, and filled with a deep sense of the need of beauty and human life. To join art to labor, to add pleasure to the things of common use, was the purpose of this company." We crossed over a small stream which could easily be thought of as forming an ancient moat, but which now, after curving through the grounds, has the peaceful duty of making the mill-wheel go! We found Mr. Triggs's description true: "Under the trees are gathered the low and unpretentious buildings of the factory. From the garden comes an odor of grass and roses. There is no air of the factory, no clang of machinery, no dust, no haste or distraction." The fact most impressed upon me by these grounds (in which we were lost several times before we could find the factory) and by the insignificance of the factory buildings, was that the *just emphasis* is put upon the nobility of the work and life within its walls. Mr. Morris has acted consistently

with these words of his: "Love of nature in all its forms must be the ruling spirit of works of art, and the brain that guides the hand must be healthy and hopeful; must be keenly alive to the surroundings of our own days."

At the station we asked to be directed to the Morris factory, and the man, pointing over the way, said: "You see all those trees? well, right straight in through them you'll find it." Not by any gigantic smoke-stack was this factory revealed, but—ponder it—by *trees*! And with a true ring still sound these words of William Morris: "Pray do not forget that any one who cuts down a tree wantonly or carelessly, especially in a great town or its suburbs, need make no pretense of caring about art."

Our guide was delightful, being one of the workmen in the stained-glass rooms. His face shone with good will, and he had such a factory complexion as I had never seen—the most wonderful glow of health. The stained-glass work was first shown to us. Here the genius of Burne-Jones reigns supreme, since all the stained-glass work in the Morris factory is from his designs. We saw many of the cartoons, and the glass in all degrees of disarrangement and arrangement, the cutting with the diamond chisel, and the hand shading of the brush. A genial, gray-headed man had under his brush Stephen dividing his cloak with his sword. While we were admiring the rich coloring, the art workman jocosely said: "'E's not cuttin' 'is cloak in 'alf: the hother won't get 'is good share." In these stained-glass rooms the signs of work were cheery and inspiring. Often there was the buzz of friendly talk, and the whole fellowship appeared to be one of intelligence and mutual interest, and, certainly in that department, these words of Morris have been fulfilled: "This seems to me most important—that our daily and necessary work, which we could not escape if we would, which we would not forego if we could, should be human, serious, and pleasurable, not machine-like, trivial, or grievous. I call this, not the very foundation of architecture in all senses of the word, but of happiness also in all conditions of life." Amid this glass art work we are pleasantly reminded of the story of Morris's and Burne-Jones's college days together, of their query as to calling in life, since they were both supposed to be destined for the service of the Church, and, finally, of their mutual pledge to devote their lives to art. This comradeship of purpose and work has lasted long years, and many English churches have been abundantly served in these glorious windows.

Next we passed into the mazes of weaving—the plainer rug-weaving, the daintier silk-weaving, and the wonderful tapestry-work. In all these rooms there were simply hand-looms, which moved back and forth with a sort of click-clack of sociability, but with no wearying thunder. There were younger people at the heavier looms where the rugs were growing, but the two places of honor were held by the patriarchs of the art: a gray-haired man who was carrying through his loom the daintiest silk brocade in white and green and gold, and who stopped with the pleasure of the artist to turn it over that we might see the beautiful imagery of the light side; over by a quiet window

sat an old, old lady gently casting her shuttle threaded with pale blue silk, and who smiled when we wondered what fair maiden should be gowned in it. Of this beautiful work, yet possibly monotonous, William Morris writes quite justly: "I do not call the figure-weaver's craft a dull one, if he be set to do things which are worth doing; to watch the web growing day by day, almost magically, in anticipation of the time when it is to be taken out, and one can see it on the right side in all its well-schemed beauty, to make something beautiful, that will last, out of a few threads of silk and wool, seems to me not an unpleasant way of earning one's livelihood, so long as one lives and works in a pleasant place, with work-day not too long, and a book or two to be got at."

But, oh! the tapestries! Two looms were bearing these lovely burdens. One picture growing in most delicate tints was a copy of Botticelli's "Spring," this the first time it has ever gone into tapestry, it being the special order of a woman who had long fancied it would well lend itself to being thus wrought. The other was "The Visit of the Magi," this being from Burne-Jones's design, and the third time, I think, it has gone on the Merton Abbey loom. The only discouraging feature of the tapestry-weaving was that these sensitive, quick fingers belonged to men from the Far East, and that it is not yet an English art. Our appreciative guide spoke in honest, rapturous terms of tapestries that during their weaving had lent their beauty to the factory and to all the workers. A series representing the King Arthur legends had been with them seven years. Seemingly they had grown to love them as their life, and now in rich memories their thoughts followed them to the courtly home whither they could not go. I know of no home adornment that Morris writes of with more keen feeling and love than of wall-hangings. These are his words in an essay where he is mourning the decadence of the art: "What a noble art it once was! To turn our chamber walls into the green woods of 'the leafy month of June,' populous of bird and beast, or a summer garden with man and maid playing round the fountains, or a solemn procession of the mythical warriors and heroes of old: that surely was worth the trouble

of doing, and the money that had to be paid for it; that was no languid acquiescence in an upholsterer's fashion." In "Jason" he verses an ideal:

With richest webs the marble walls were hung,
Picturing sweet stories by the poets sung
From ancient days, so that no wall seemed there,
But rather forests black and meadows fair,
And streets of well-built towns, with tumbling seas
About their marble wharves and palaces;
And fearful crags and mountains; and all trod
By changing feet of giant, nymph, and god,
Spear-shaking warrior, and slim-ankled maid.

The pattern-stamping room seemed quite natural, for there we saw the glorious designs and rich coloring in the cretonnes and velvets and fabrics which American importers have graciously made more familiar to us. An old design was slowly growing under the strong and skillful hands of one of these art workers—a design that could



WILLIAM MORRIS

easily suggest Mr. Morris's dictum, "The absolute necessities of this art are beauty of color and restfulness of form." It required muscle to carry the copper plate steadily, and perfection of touch to plant it firmly in its proper place. The coloring was in rich golden brown, which the interested stamper told us was the most durable color, it being practically *rust*! We all know Mr. Morris's love of the Persian designs which reappear with new life under his pencil, in stamped fabrics and in woven stuffs. If we heartily enjoy these gorgeous things, we may partially sympathize with Mr. Morris's feeling about the old Persian workers and designers when he writes: "I believe I am not thinking only of my own pleasure, but of the pleasure of many people, when I praise the usefulness of the lives of these men, whose names are long forgotten, but whose works we still wonder at. In their own way they meant to tell us how the flowers grew in the gardens of Damascus, or how the hunt was up on the plains of Kirman, or how the tulips shone among the grass in the Mid-Persian valley, and how their souls delighted in it all, and what joy they had in life; nor did they fail to make their meaning clear to some of us."

The allied craft of nearly all these arts is that of the dyer, and these pure, ravishing colors we next traced to their abiding-place in the Merton Abbey vats. Certainly these seemed like magic caldrons! We hear much of the poet's love of color, and this poet's fondness is also ascribed to Morris. Mr. Triggs speaks of his "Summer Dawn" as "touched with grayness."

The summer night waneth, the morning light
slips,
Faint and gray, 'twixt the leaves of the aspen,
betwixt the closed bars
That are patiently waiting there, for the morn
Patient and colorless, though Heaven's gold
Waits to float through them along with the sun.
Far out in the meadows, above the young
corn,
The heavy elms wait, and, restless and cold,
The uneasy wind rises; the roses are dun;
Through the long twilight they pray for the morn,
Round the lone house, in the midst of the corn.

But what other poet, besides feeling color and writing of color, could say, in discussing the niceties of the color craft, as Morris does in such plain workman's prose—"I myself have dyed wool by the self-same process that the Mosaical dyers used"! Mr. Morris rather enjoys color tirades, and, after having delighted in the perfect glasses or wools or fabrics from the factory, or having felt his painstaking care when looking in a vat where the dye had stood for seven years, we can quite easily sympathize with an attack upon the new dyes like this: "The fact is that every one of these colors is hideous in itself, whereas all the old dyes are in themselves beautiful colors—only extreme perversity could make an ugly color out of them. Under these circumstances it must, I suppose, be considered a negative virtue in the new dyes that they are as fugitive as the old ones are stable; but even on that head I will ask you to note one thing that condemns them finally—that whereas the old dyes, when fading, as all colors will do more or less, simply gradually change into paler tints of the same color, and are not unpleasant to look upon, the fading of the new dyes is a change into all kinds of abominable and livid hues. I mention this because otherwise it might be thought that a man with an artistic eye for color might so blend the hideous but bright aniline colors as to produce something at least tolerable; indeed, this is not unfrequently attempted to-day, but with small success, partly from the reason above mentioned, partly because the hues so produced by 'messing about,' as I should

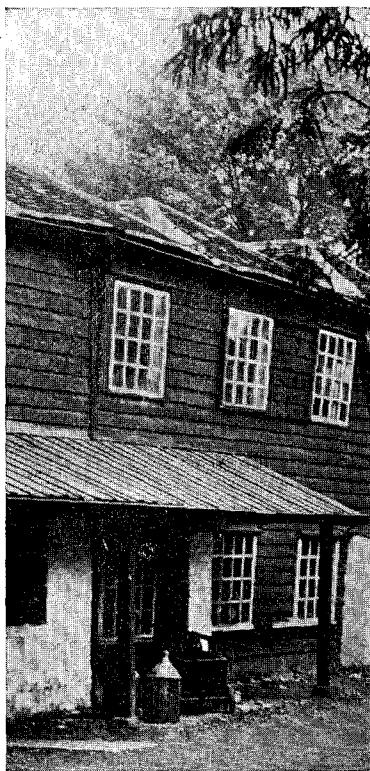
call it, have none of the *quality* or character which the simpler drug gives naturally. In short, this is what it comes to, that it would be better for us, if we cannot revive the now almost lost art of dyeing, to content ourselves with weaving our cloths of the natural color of the fiber, or to buy them colored by less civilized people than ourselves."

The workers in all these crafts, by their goodly occupation, eight-hour working day, and highest wages known in the trade, seem to be realizing, as far as is possible at present, the claims of a decent life as Mr. Morris has himself stated them: "First, a healthy body; second, an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future; thirdly, occupation fit for a healthy body and an active mind; and, fourthly, a beautiful world to live in."

Our visit to Merton Abbey Factory was over, and with reluctance, yet with satisfying thoughts, we left the interesting group of people behind, and passed again through the trees into the dingy world. The charm of William Morris's idealism was not broken by having visited the spot where of all others this ideal must be tested. We felt, indeed, that this visit had marked our most hopeful and instructive and inspiring day in England. Juliana Horatia Ewing says of one of her heroines what very well belongs to a character-sketch of William Morris: "It is so easy to become more thick-skinned in conscience, more

tolerant of evil, more hopeless of good, more careful of one's own comfort and one's own property, more self-satisfied in leaving high aims and great deeds to enthusiasts, and then to believe that one is growing older and *wiser*! And yet those high examples, those good works, those great triumphs over evil which single hands sometimes effect, we are all grateful for, when they are done, whatever we may have said of the doing. But we speak of saints, and enthusiasts for good, as if some special gifts were made to them in middle age which are withheld from other men. Is it not rather that some few souls keep alive the lamp of zeal and high desire which God lights for most of us while life is young?" William Morris and Burne-Jones have valiantly and radiantly kept their college-day pledge to Art.

Among modern prophets, Ashbee¹ has written: "It is only in the reconstructed workshop that we may hope to find our citizen perfected in heart and hand and head." The artist, Mr. G. F. Watts, in his preface to "Plain Handicrafts," writes: "To lead the weary toiler along the dreary road of every-day mechanical work into its wayside gardens, to open closed eyes to a world of loveliness and



ENTRANCE TO FACTORY

grace, where every flower that blows and every tendril that twines enlist themselves in his service and become his friends, is the function of the Plain Handicrafts." Ruskin has said, "Life without industry is guilt, and industry without art is brutality." We might easily have said, "These are hard sayings; who can hear them?" But with the grand reality and accomplishment at Merton, such words no longer fall upon our ears with a hollow tone of hopelessness and impossibility, but with the stirring ring of alarum and incentive.

With good faith in William Morris's hand and heart, in his *sense* and *vision*, we can read such words of his own as the following. In "A Dream of John Ball" he says: "Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell; fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death; and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them." He makes Sigurd say to the King of the Niblungs:

And I would that the loving were loved, and I would that the weary should sleep.
And that man should hearken to man, and he that soweth should reap.

¹ Ashbee, "Workshop Reconstruction and Citizenship" (D. C. Heath & Co.).

In one of his essays he writes: "What other blessings are there in life save these two, fearless rest and hopeful work? Troublesome as life is, it has surely given to each one of us some times and seasons when, surrounded by simple and beautiful things, we have really felt at rest; when the earth and all its plenteous growth, and the tokens of the varied life of men, and the very sky and waste of air above us, have seemed all to conspire together to make us calm and happy, not slothful, but restful. Still oftener, belike it has given us those other times, when at last, after many a struggle with incongruous hindrances, our own chosen work has lain before us, disentangled from all encumbrances and unrealities, and we have felt that nothing, not even ourselves, could withhold us from doing the work we were born to do, that we were men and worthy of life. Such rest and such work I earnestly wish for myself, and for you, and for all men: to have space and freedom to gain such rest and such work is the end of politics; to learn how best to employ it is the end of education; to learn its inmost meaning is the end of religion."

With paramount force and insistency we have been taught the fleetness of life, resulting in great stress upon immortality. In hard, narrow fashion has this truth been carried into our lives. The Bible words, noble and beautiful, are often too much with us: "My days are consumed like smoke;" "My days are like a shadow that declineth;"

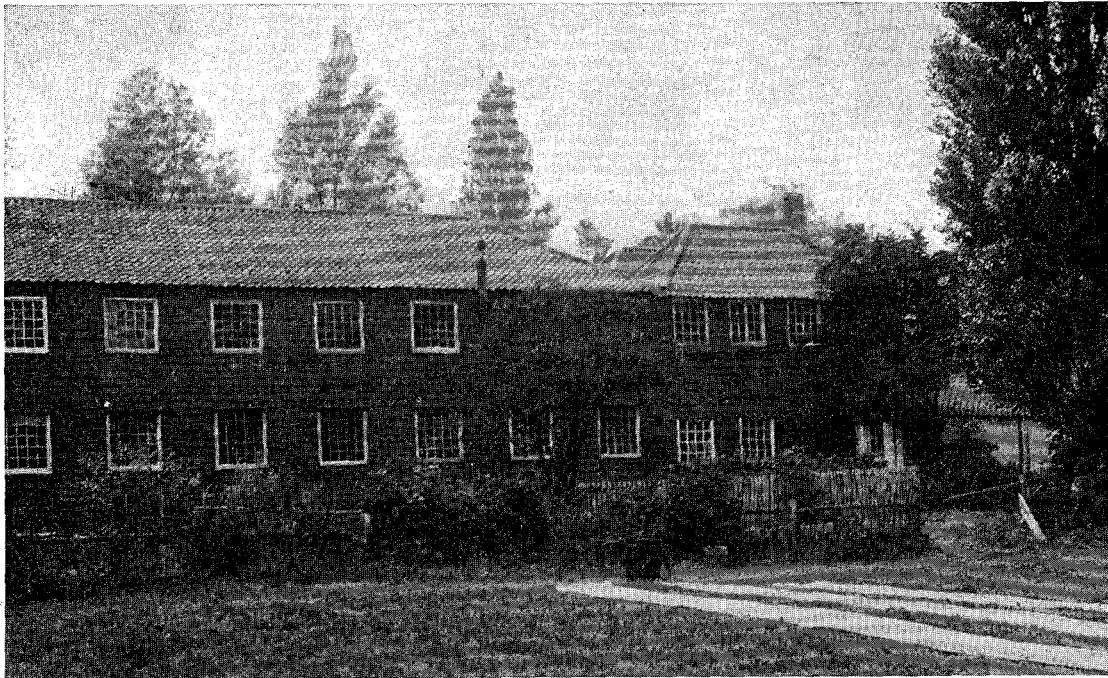


FROM THE RIVER

"He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust;" "As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourisheth; for the wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more."

But this is only a half-truth; *the place thereof shall know it more*; the quasi-immortality of material things is also true, magnificently and gloomily true. Our deeds live after us, and how stubbornly and sturdily, in the things we

build! The tree we hew down for our street railway, for our factory, can never bloom a leaf for our grandchild. The ugly mansion we build so solidly may be the life-torment of our son or somebody else's son. Some gracious bit of beauty your hand leaves behind may be the treasure of some ardent heart for many a year! The Bible tells us this, too: "Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Thy years shall know no end. The children of Thy servant shall endure, and their seed shall be established." "For



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none of us liveth to himself, and *no man dieth to himself*." This thought, this belief, makes for us two duties: to make our works beautiful and true, that *their* everlasting life may be wealth and benediction for those who come after, and also to *demand* like things from others, that beautiful things, noble things, may represent the activities of all men and women. With this view we can understand Ruskin's extreme statement, "Taste is the only morality," since it simply means the constant duty of appreciating all material values in terms of life.

October

By William Morris

O love, turn from the unchanging sea and gaze
Down these gray slopes upon the year grown old,
A-dying 'mid the autumn-scented haze
That hangeth o'er the hollow in the wold,
Where the wind-bitten ancient elms enfold
Gray church, long barn, orchard and red-roofed
stead,
Wrought in dead days for men a long while dead.

Come down, O love; may not our hands still meet,
Since still we live to-day, forgetting June,
Forgetting May, deeming October sweet—
Oh hearken, hearken! through the afternoon
The gay tower sings a strange old tinkling tune!
Sweet, sweet and sad the toiling year's last breath,
Too satiate of life to strive with death.

And we, too—will it not be soft and kind,
That rest from life, from patience, and from pain,
That rest from bliss we know not when we find,
That rest from love which ne'er the end can gain?—
Hark, how the tune swells that erewhile did wane!
Look up, love!—ah, cling close and never move!
How can I have enough of life and love?

—From "The Earthly Paradise."



ROOM IN SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS'S BUSINESS PREMISES, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, IN WHICH THE FIRST YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE ASSEMBLED

Sir George Williams

Founder of Young Men's Christian Associations

By Lord Kinnaird



Sir George Williams
(About 1860)

"There is not any other one man in the world to-day who has touched so many men for good." Such is the pronouncement of the Hon. John Wanamaker, ex-Postmaster-General of the United States, in regard to the subject of this brief sketch. It refers to Sir George Williams, of course, in the light of his life's work—the Young Men's Christian Association. To trace his career is of necessity to recite the leading facts in the history of that great and beneficent movement, so completely has he absorbed himself in it. While all forms of religious and philanthropic effort have for many years received his munificent support—at the present time he is President of not a few societies—he has been pre-eminently the Friend of Young Men, and, to an extent altogether unique, has devoted himself and his substance to the promotion of their highest and best interests, not alone in this country, but in all the principal countries of the world.

The remarkable series of gatherings in London in June, 1894, which celebrated the Jubilee of the Y. M. C. A., and of which he was the central figure, gave unmistakable evidence of the vitality and universality of the work; show-

ing, as Canon Fleming aptly put it, that it had "made a deep mark upon the young men of this age, upon the Church of God, and, indeed, upon the world at large." The Convention, it was estimated, was the largest delegated Evangelical assembly that had ever met. Two thousand men, speaking seventeen languages, represented the work as it is carried on in twenty-six nationalities; and all delighted to honor the man whom God had thus honored in originating and developing their beloved enterprise. Huge meetings, in almost bewildering succession—in Exeter Hall, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Guildhall, the Royal Albert Hall, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the City Temple, and the Great Park at Windsor—gathered around the founder in demonstrative acknowledgment of what, by the blessing of God, he had been enabled to accomplish; the press of the whole country, as well as of America and the Colonies, cordially indorsed the tribute; and, to the utmost gratification of members of the Association in all lands, her Majesty the Queen signified her approval of the lifelong effort of "a peaceful hero" by conferring upon him the dignity of knighthood, while the Corporation of London marked their appreciation of his services to young men in the metropolis by bestowing upon him the honorary freedom of the city. Probably no such distinguished public recognition had been given to any work of the kind that had been in existence fifty years only.

Sir George treated the matter with characteristic modesty. "It has been to me a glorious service," said he. "In it