CHAPTER VII

WILLIAM MORRIS

WILLIAM MORRIS suffers by comparison with the more exquisite poets of his own time and circle. Nevertheless he is quite great enough to call for a special lecture. I am not sure whether I shall be able to make you much interested in him; but I shall certainly try to give you a clear idea of his position in English poetry as something entirely distinct, and very curious.

A few words first about the man himself—in more ways than one the largest figure among the Romantics. He was the great spirit of the Pre-Raphaelite coterie; he was the most prolific poet of the century; and he was in all respects the nearest in his talent and sentiment to Sir Walter Scott. All these reasons make it necessary to speak of him at considerable length.

He was born in 1834 and died in 1896, so that he is very recent in his relation to English poetry. There was nothing extraordinary in the incidents of his life at school or in his university career. In this man the extraordinary gift was altogether of the mind. Without the eccentricity of genius, he was also without the highest capacity of genius; but in his life as well as in his poetry he was always correct and always charming in a certain gentle and dreamy way. He had the stature and strength of a giant, perfect health, and immense working capacity, and did very well whatever he tried to do. Fortunately for his inclinations, he was the son of a rich man and never knew want; so that when he took to literature as a profession, he never had to think about pleasing the public, nor to care how much money his books might bring. After leaving Oxford

University he devoted his life to art and literature, becoming equally well known as a painter and a poet. At a later day he established various businesses for an æsthetic purpose. For example, he thought that the early Italian printers and Venetian printers had done much better work and produced much more wonderful books than any modern printer; and he founded a press for the purpose of producing modern books in the same beautiful way. Then he thought that a reform in the matter of house furniture was possible. The furniture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been good, solid, costly, and beautiful; but the later furniture had become both cheap and ugly. Morris's artistic interests had led him to study furniture a great deal; he became familiar with the furniture of the Middle Ages, of the Elizabethan Age, and of later times, as scarcely any man of the day had become. It occurred to him that the best and most beautiful forms of mediæval and later furniture might be reintroduced, if anybody would only take pains to manufacture them. The ordinary manufacturers of furniture would not do this. Morris and a few friends established a factory, and there designed and made furniture equal to anything in the past. This undertaking was successful, and it changed the whole fashion of English house furnishing. Only a decorative artist like Morris would have been capable of imagining and carrying out such a plan; and it was carried out so well that almost every rich house in England now possesses some furniture designed by him.

Thus you will see that he must have been a very busy man, occupied at once with poetry, with romance (for he wrote a great many prose romances), with artistic printing, with house furniture, with designs for windows of stained glass, and with designs for beautiful tiling — also with a very considerable amount of work as a decorative artist. All this would appear almost too much for any one person to attempt. But it was rendered easy to Morris by the simple fact that the whole of his various undertakings

happened to be influenced by exactly the same spirit and motive, the artistic feeling of the Middle Ages, and of the period ending with the eighteenth century. Whether Morris was making books of poetry or books of prose, whether he was translating sagas from the Norse or writing stories in imitation of the early French romances, whether he was casting Italian forms of type for the making of beautiful books or designing furniture for some English palace, whatever he was doing, he had but one thought, one will—to reproduce the strange beauty of the Middle Ages. There was almost nothing modern about the man. The whole of his writings, comprising a great many volumes, contained scarcely ten pages having any reference to modern things. Even the language that he used has been correctly described by a great critic as eighteenth century English, mixed with Scandinavian idioms and forms. Thus there were two men among the Pre-Raphaelites who actually did not belong to their own century—Rossetti and Morris. Both were painters as well as poets, and though the former was the greater in both arts, the practical influence of Morris counted for much more in changing English taste both in literature and in æsthetics.

We have chiefly to consider his writing, and, of that writing, especially the poetry. As a poet I have already mentioned him as having points of resemblance with Sir Walter Scott. But he also had even more points of resemblance with Chaucer. He was like Scott in the singular ease and joyous force of his creative talent. Scott could sit down and write a romance in verse beautifully, correctly, without any more difficulty than other men write prose. Byron, you know, used to write his poetry straight off, without even taking the trouble to correct it; as a consequence it is now becoming forgotten. But Scott took very great trouble to make his verse quite correct, without trying to be exquisite, and his verse will always count as good, stirring English poetry. Morris had almost exactly the same talent, the talent that can give you a three-

volume story either in verse or prose, just as you may prefer. And he wrote in verse on a scale that astonishes, a scale exceeding that of any modern poet. To find his equal in production we must go back to the poets of those romantic Middle Ages which he so much loved, the poets who wrote vast epics or romances in thirty or forty thousand lines. Eleven volumes of verse and fifteen volumes of prose represent Morris's production; and the extraordinary thing is that all his production is good. It does not reach the very highest place in literature; no man could write so much and make his work of the very highest class. But it is good as to form, good as to feeling, much beyond mediocrity at all times; and sometimes it rises to a level that is only a little below the first class.

I am not going to give selections from his larger works, so I can only mention here what the large works signify and how he is related to Chaucer through one of them. The most successful, in a popular sense, of all his poems is "The Earthly Paradise," originally published in five volumes, now published in four — and the volumes are very thick. This vast composition is much on the plan of the "Canterbury Tales"; and Morris and Chaucer both followed the same method, and were filled with the same sense of beauty. Both found in the legends of the Middle Ages and in the myths of antiquity, material for their art in the shape of stories; and as these stories had no inter-relation, belonging even to widely different epochs of human civilization, it was necessary to imagine some general plan according to which all could be brought harmoniously together, like jewels, upon a single tray. This plan of uniting heterogeneous masses of fiction or legends into one artistic circle was known to the East long before it was known in Europe; the great Indian collections of stories, such as the "Panchatantra" and the "Kathâ-sarit-sâgara," are perhaps the oldest examples; and the huge Sanskrit epics show something of the same design, afterwards adopted by Arabian and Persian story-tellers. But Chaucer was the first to make the attempt

with any success in English literature. His plan was to have the stories told by pilgrims travelling on their way to Canterbury, every man or woman of the company being obliged to tell one or two stories. The plan was so good that it has been followed in our own day; Longfellow's "Tales of a Wayside Inn" are constructed upon precisely the same principle. But Chaucer made a plan so large that he had not the strength nor the time to carry it to completion; Morris, upon a scale nearly as large, brought his work to a happy conclusion with the greatest ease. He makes a company of exiled warriors tell the stories of a foreign court, as results of their experience or knowledge obtained in many different countries. There are twenty-four stories, twelve mediæval or romantic and twelve classical; and each pair of these corresponds with one of the twelve months, the first two stories being told in January, the second two in February, and so forth. The division neatly partitions the great composition into twelve books, with the regular prologues and epilogues added. The English are not apt to trouble themselves to read very long poems these days; but Morris was able actually to revive the mediæval taste for long romances. Tens of thousands of his books were sold, notwithstanding their costliness, and the result was altogether favourable for the new development of romantic feeling, not only in literature, but in art and decoration. One might suppose that such composition was enough to occupy a life-time, but Morris threw it off quite lightly and set to work upon a variety of poetical undertakings nearly as large. He translated Homer and Virgil into the same kind of flowery verse; and he put the grand Scandinavian epic of Sigurd the Volsung into some of the finest long-lined poetry produced in modern times. This epic seems to me the better work of the two long productions by which Morris is best known; later on some lines from it may be quoted. But Morris was scarcely less attracted by Greek myths than by the old literature of Scandinavia; and he also produced a long epic poem upon

the story of Jason and Medea, the story of the Golden Fleece. Nevertheless, I can much better illustrate to you what Morris is in literature and what his influence and his objects were, by means of his still earlier and shorter poems. There are several volumes of these, now published in more compact form under the titles of "Poems by the Way" and "Love is Enough" and "The Defence of Guenevere." From the last, originally dedicated to Rossetti, I will make some quotations that will show you how Morris tried to revive the Middle Ages.

One of the most remarkable things in the late Mr. Froude's charming account of a voyage which he made to Norway, is his statement of a sudden conviction that there came to him about the character of the ancient Vikings. He felt assured, he said, that the modern Norwegian and the ancient Norwegian were very much the same; that modern customs, religion, and education had produced only differences of surface; and that if we could go back against the stream of time to the age of the sea-kings, we should find that they were exactly like the men of to-day in all that essentially belongs to race character. Now Morris, while studying mediæval romances and loving them for their intrinsic curious beauty, came to a very similar conclusion. It is true, he thought, that the Middle Ages were much more cruel, more ignorant, more savage than the ages before them or after them; but after all, the men and women of those times must have felt about many things just like modern men and women. Why should we not feel enough of this to study their fashions, joys, and feelings under the peculiar conditions of their terrible society? And this is what he did. You may say that, except for some difference in the home speech, the talk of these people in the poems of Morris is the talk of modern men and women. There is some difference as to sentiment. But you cannot say that it is not natural, not likely; in fact, the seeming pictures often have such force that you cannot forget them. That is a test of truth.

They are very brief pictures, like sudden glimpses caught during a flash of lightning: a glimpse into an arena where two men are about to fight to the death in presence of their king, according to the code of the day; a knight riding through a flooded country in order to take a castle by surprise; a woman driven to madness by the murder of her lover; a woman at the stake about to be burned alive, when the sound of the hoofs of the lover's horse is heard, as he gallops to her rescue; ladies in the upper chamber of a castle, weaving and singing; the capture of a robber and his vain pleading for life; also some fairy tales of weird and sensuous beauty, told as people of the Middle Ages must have felt them. To me one of the most powerful pictures is the story of "The Haystack in the Floods." We are not told how the tragedy began, nor how it ended; and this is great art to tell something without beginning and without end, so well that the reader is always thereafter wondering what the beginning was and what the end might have been. The poem begins with the words:

> Had she come all the way for this,
> To part at last without a kiss?
> Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
> That her own eyes might see him slain
> Beside the haystack in the floods?

We know from this only that the woman referred to is a woman of gentle birth, accustomed to luxurious things, so that it was very difficult for her to travel in rainy weather and cold, and that she thought it was a great sacrifice on her part to do so even for a lover. If she thought this, we have a right to suspect that she is a wanton — though we are not quite sure about it. The description of her does not explain anything further than the misery of the situation.

> Along the dripping leafless woods,
> The stirrup touching either shoe,
> She rode astride as troopers do;
> With kirtle kilted to her knee,

To which the mud splash'd wretchedly;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face.

The delicate woman has also the pain of being lonesome on her ride; for the lover, the knight, cannot ride beside her, cannot comfort her; he has to ride far ahead in order to see what danger may be in the road. He is running away with her; perhaps he is a stranger in that country; we shall presently see.

Suddenly, nearby in the middle of a flooded place the enemy appears, a treacherous knight who is the avowed lover of the woman and the enemy of the man. She counts the number of spears with him—thirty spears, and they have but ten. Fighting is of no use, the woman says, but Robert (now we know for the first time the name of her companion) is not afraid — believes that by courage and skill alone he can scatter the hostile force, and bring his sweetheart over the river. She begs him not to fight; her selfishness shows her character — it is not for him she is afraid, but for herself.

But: O! she said,
My God! my God! I have to tread
The long way back without you; then
The court at Paris; those six men;
The gratings of the Chatelet.

And worse than the gratings of the Chatelet is the stake, at which she may be burned, or the river into which she may be thrown, if her lover is killed; there is only one way to secure her own safety—that is to accept the love of another man whom she hates, the wicked knight Godmar, who is now in front of them with thirty spearsmen. Evidently that is no warrior woman, no daughter of soldiers; she may love, but like Cleopatra she is afraid of battle. Her lover Robert, like a man, does not answer her

tearful prayers, but gives the command to his men to shout his war-cry, and boldly charges forward. Then, triple sorrow! his men stand still; they refuse to fight against three times their number, and in another moment Robert is in the power of his enemy, disarmed and bound. Thereupon Godmar with a wicked smile observes to the woman:

> Now, Jehane,
> Your lover's life is on the wane
> So fast, that, if this very hour
> You yield not as my paramour,
> He will not see the rain leave off.

He does more than threaten to kill her lover; he reminds her of what he can further do to her. She has said that if he takes her into his castle by force, she will kill either herself or him (we may doubt whether she would really do either); and he wants a voluntary submission. He talks to her about burning her alive; how would she like that? And the ironical caressing tone of his language only makes it more implacable.

> Nay, if you do not my behest,
> O Jehane! though I love you well,
> Said Godmar, would I fail to tell
> All that I know? Foul lies, she said.
> Eh? lies, my Jehane? by God's head,
> At Paris folks would deem them true!
> Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you:
> Jehane the brown! Jehane the brown!
> Give us Jehane to burn or drown!
> Eh! gag me Robert! Sweet my friend,
> This were indeed a piteous end
> For those long fingers, and long feet
> And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet;
> An end that few men would forget
> That saw it. So, an hour yet:
> Consider, Jehane, which to take
> Of life or death!

She considers, or rather tries to consider, for she is almost too weary to speak, and very quickly falls asleep in the rain on the wet hay. An hour passes. When she is awakened, she only sighs like a tired child, and answers, "I will not." Perhaps she could not believe that her enemy and lover would do as he had threatened; and in spite of the risk of further angering him, she approaches the prisoner and tries to kiss him farewell. Immediately,

> With a start
> Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
> From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
> Of silk and mail; with empty hands
> Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw,
> The long bright blade without a flaw
> Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
> In Robert's hair; she saw him bend
> Back Robert's head; she saw him send
> The thin steel down; the blow told well,
> Right backward the knight Robert fell,
> And moaned as dogs do, being half dead,
> Unwitting, as I deem: so then
> Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
> Who ran, some five or six, and beat
> His head to pieces at their feet.

The knight groans involuntarily, in the death struggle only, and probably the sound of his pain pleases Godmar, but in order to make sure that he cannot recover again, he makes a sign to his followers to finish the work of murder; so they beat in his skull—an ugly thing for a woman to see done. There were rough-hearted men in those days who could see a woman burned alive and laugh at her suffering. You have read, I think, the terrible story about Black Fulk, who made a great holiday on the occasion of burning his young wife alive, and took his friends to see the show, himself putting on his best holiday attire. This Godmar seems to be nearly as harsh a brute, judging from what he next has to say.

Then Godmar turn'd again and said:
So, Jehane, the first fitte is read!
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet!
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods.

Notice the brutal use of the word "fitte" (often spelled fytte). This was an old name for the divisions of a long poem, romance, or epic. Later the Italian term "canto" was substituted for it. Godmar refers to the woman's love as her romance, her poem: "Now the first canto of our love-romance has been read — only the first, remember!" The second fitte will be perhaps the burning of the woman when she is brought back to the castle prison from which she fled. It all depends upon circumstances. If she has really become mad, she may escape. The poem ends here, leaving us in doubt about the rest. We can only imagine the termination. I think that she has not really become mad, that she is too selfish and weak to bear or even to feel the real emotional shock of the thing; and that when they are half way to the prison she is likely to yield to Godmar's will. If she does so, he will probably keep her in his castle until he tires of her, and finds it expedient to end her existence with as little scruple as he showed in killing Robert. But, as an actual fact, it is difficult to be sure of anything, because we know neither the beginning nor the end of the affair. We have only a glimpse of the passion, suffering, selfishness, cruelty—then utter darkness. And this method of merely glimpsing the story causes it to leave a profound impression upon the imagination. Please do not forget this, because it is the most important art in any kind of narrative literature, whether of poetry or of prose.

A second example of the same device is furnished by

another terrible poem called "The Judgment of God." The judgment of God is an old name for trial by single combat. It was a superstitious law, a foolish and wicked law, but it served a purpose in the Middle Ages, and it afforded an opportunity for many noble and courageous deeds. Browning took up this subject in his stirring poem of "Count Gismond." The law was this: when one knight was accused by another of some evil, cruel, or treacherous act, he was allowed to challenge the man who brought the charge against him to fight to the death — *à outrance*, as the old term expressed it. The combat took place in the presence of the lord or king and before a great assembly, according to fixed rules. If the man who brought the charge lost the fight, then it was thought that he had proved himself a liar. If the person accused won the battle, then he was declared to be innocent. For it was thought that God would protect the truth in such cases; and therefore these combats were called "the judgment of God." Nevertheless you will perceive that a very skilful knight might be able to kill a great number of accusers, and lawfully "prove" himself innocent of a hundred crimes. That was a great defect of the system.

"The Judgment of God" is a monologue, quite as good in its way as many of the short monologues of Browning. It is the knight against whom accusation has been brought that tells us the feelings and impressions of the moment that he enters the lists to fight. In this case we are more moved to sympathy than in the former stories, because we know that the man, whether otherwise bad or good, has saved a woman from the stake, and killed the lords who were about to burn her. So we are inclined to think of him as a hero. We have just one sudden vision of a man's mind, as he stands in the face of death, with no sympathy about him except that of his old father, who comes to give him advice about fighting, because he is to be matched against a very skilful knight.

Swerve to the left, son Roger, he said,
When you catch his eyes through the helmet-slit,
Swerve to the left, then out at his head,
And the Lord God give you joy of it!

The old man knows how to fight, has probably won many a battle, and he has observed the way that the light is falling. So he tells his son, "When you begin to fight, don't turn to the right — turn to the left; then you will be able to see his eyes through the helmet, and immediately that you see them, strike straight for his head, and may God help you to kill him." He has just heard these words from his father when the prologue begins.

The blue owls on my father's hood
Were a little dimm'd as I turned away;
This giving up of blood for blood
Will finish here somehow to-day.

So, when I walk'd from out the tent,
Their howling almost blinded me;
Yet for all that I was not bent
By any shame. Hard by, the sea

Made a noise like the aspens where
We did that wrong, but now the place
Is very pleasant, and the air
Blows cool on any passer's face.

And all the throng is gather'd now
Into the circle of these lists:
Yea, howl out, butchers! tell me how
His hands were cut off at the wrists;

And how Lord Roger bore his face
A league above his spear-point, high
Above the owls, to that strong place
Among the waters; yea, yea, cry.

The owls on the crest are the emblem of the family. The knight has been waiting in his tent according to rule,

until the signal is given; and his father and his retainers probably helped to arm him there. He feels no emotion except at the moment of bidding his father good-bye, and then he knows that there are tears in his own eyes, because the owl crest on his father's hood suddenly appears dim. Then, as the signal is given, he walks out of the tent into the lists, only to hear a roar of hatred and abuse go up from all the circles of seats. The friends of the dead are evidently in great force, and he has no friend except his father and his retainers. And they shout at him, his enemies, telling him what he has done—how he cut off the hands of the knight and cut off his head and carried it upon the top of a spear for three miles, carried it above his own banner to his own castle. This was indeed considered an unknightly thing in those days, for such was the treatment given to common people in war, not to knights or men of rank.

Then he sees the man with whom he must fight, waiting for him, all in armour, with white linen over his arm, to indicate that he is fighting for the cause of truth. At this Roger can very well laugh; and he remarks that the face of the champion's lady looks even whiter than the linen upon her lord's arm. She has reason, perhaps, to be afraid for him. And though he has not much time for thinking, Roger remembers his own beloved, waiting for him, remembers even how he first met her. Addressing her in thought, he says:

> And these say: No more now my knight,
> Or God's knight any longer: you,
> Being than they so much more white,
> So much more pure and good and true,
>
> Will cling to me forever; there,
> Is not that wrong turn'd right at last
> Through all these years, and I wash'd clean?
> Say, yea, Ellayne; the time is past,

Since on that Christmas-day last year
  Up to your feet the fire crept,
And the smoke through the brown leaves sere
  Blinded your dear eyes that you wept;

Was it not I that caught you then,
  And kiss'd you on the saddle-bow?
Did not the blue owl mark the men
  Whose spears stood like the corn a-row?

Evidently she has reason to love him and his house; did he not save her from the fire?—did he not come with his spearmen and crush her enemies, and take her away upon his horse to safety? And was not that enough to atone for whatever other wrong he might have done? But he has only a moment in which to think all this, for the trumpet is about to sound for the fight, and there are other things to think about. One of these is that his antagonist is a very good man, difficult to overcome; the other is that there is danger for him even if he conquers, because there are so many present who hate him.

This Oliver is a right good knight,
  And must needs beat me, as I fear,
Unless I catch him in the fight,
  My father's crafty way: John, here!

Bring up the men from the south gate,
  To help me if I fall or win,
For even if I beat, their hate
  Will grow to more than this mere grin.

If the reader could imagine the result of the combat, the real effect of the poem in its present form would be lost. No man can imagine it. The challenged knight acknowledges his antagonist to be a better man — indeed, he says that he can only hope to conquer him by the cunning trick taught him by his old father. But the really dangerous man never underrates the capacity of an enemy; and we may suspect that the forces are at least even. So, as I

have said, no man can guess the result of the battle, and the reader is forced to keep wondering what happened. He will always wonder, but he will never be able to feel convinced. And to leave the mind of the reader thus interested and unsatisfied is a great stroke of literary art. The same book contains a number of mediæval pieces of the same sort, showing how very unimportant it is whether you begin a story in the middle or whether you leave it without an end. The greatest French story-tellers of modern times have made almost popular the form of art in fiction to which I refer. Take, for example, the late Guy de Maupassant, many of whose short stories have, I am told, been translated into Japanese. No one modern prose writer ever succeeded better in telling a story without any beginning or without any end. Positively no beginning and no end is necessary, in many cases; and remember, this method of representing only the middle of things is exactly true to life. We never see or hear of the whole of any incident that happens under our eyes. We see only a fact, without knowing what caused it to come about, and without knowing what will be the consequences of it. Outside of our own homes we do not see much of other people's lives, and never the whole of any one's life.

Among other pieces in the book I should call your attention to "The Little Tower," "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," "The Wind," "The Eve of Crecy," "In Prison," and "The Blue Closet." They are very different in idea, but I think that you will find them all extremely original. "The Little Tower" has no beginning and no end. It only describes faithfully the feelings of a knight riding over an inundated country, swimming his horse along the side of bridges under water, and thinking to himself of the joy of capturing an enemy's castle by surprise, killing the lord and burning the lady. It is brutal in a certain way, but supremely natural. The story of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" is not a monologue; it is a very dramatic narrative in which a number of men of different character play their parts. It

has no beginning, but the end is plainly suggested — and this shows the tender side of human nature in the Middle Ages. Sir Peter is brave, kindly, and true. Therefore, when he has his enemy at his mercy, instead of killing him, he only cuts off his ears. As a consequence he is afterwards himself destroyed; the obvious moral of the narrative is that a merciful heart was a dangerous possession in those times. The good men were easily trapped by playing upon their feelings of pity or sympathy. "The Wind" represents the madness of a very old knight, alone in his castle. The sound of the wind makes him think of the voices of the dead whom he knew, and brings him back to the memories of his youth, and of a woman that he loved. And at last the ghosts of forgotten friends enter and glide about him. This has no beginning and no end, and it remains very strongly impressed upon the memory. We should like to know the story of that woman, the story of the madness of the old man, but we shall never know. "The Eve of Crecy" represents the state of mind of a young French knight just before the fatal battle, when the flower of the French chivalry was destroyed by a mere handful of English soldiers driven to bay. You may remember that before the battle the English prepared themselves very thoroughly and made fervent prayers to heaven for success. But the French spent the night in carousing and jesting, never dreaming that they could lose the fight. Here Morris shows us one of the young noblemen thinking only about his sweetheart, some girl of noble rank whom he hopes to win. He is going to do great deeds the next day, then the king will smile upon him, and he will not be afraid to ask the father of that girl to permit him to become his son-in-law. And so the poem abruptly breaks off. The end here we can guess — a corpse riddled with English arrows, and trampled under the feet of thousands of horses. "In Prison," among the others, represents the emotions of a knight confined in a mediæval dungeon. "The Blue Closet" is a fantasy, a wild mediæval fairy-tale, put into a dramatic form that reminds one

singularly of the later work of Maeterlinck. It is, however, a noteworthy composition as poetry, and attained immediate popularity among all those who looked for beauties of colour and sound rather than reflections of life.

Those notes will give you an idea of the variety of the book. And the mediæval pieces are worth thinking about, if any of you should care to attempt authorship in a similar direction, whether in poetry or in prose. There was a period in Japanese feudalism, a period of constant civil wars and baronial quarrels, which would have produced a very similar condition of things to that described in certain of these poems, and I even think that more startling effects could be produced by a judicious handling of Japanese themes in the same way, that is, without attempting any beginning or suggesting any end.

But observe that I am not holding up these poems to you as great masterpieces of verse. I mean only that they suggest how great masterpieces might be made. And please to note especially one phase of the art of them, its psychological quality. Morris was not so great a psychologist as Browning, who came nearest to Shakespeare in this respect of all English poets. But Morris has considerable ability in this way, and the most striking effects in his short poems are produced by making us understand the feelings of persons in particular moments of pain or terror or heroic effort. For example, how natural and horrible is the soliloquy of Guenevere in the long poem with which the book opens. You know that Tennyson did not follow the original account of Malory in regard to the more cruel episodes of the old story. He felt repelled by such an incident as the preparations for burning the queen alive. In the real story she is about to be burned when Launcelot comes and saves her, not without killing half the knights present and some of his own relations into the bargain. But Morris saw in this episode an opportunity for psychological work, and took it, just as Browning might have done. He makes the queen express her thought:

". . . I know
I wonder'd how the fire, while I should stand,

And burn, against the heat, would quiver so,
Yards above my head."

This startles, because it is true. The quotations which I gave you from "The Haystack in the Floods" contain several passages of an equally impressive sort. We can best revive the past in literature not by trying to describe the details of custom and of costume then prevalent, but by trying to express faithfully the feelings of people who lived long ago. And this can be managed most effectively either by monologue or dialogue.

The only other collection of short poems written by Morris is now compressed into a companion volume entitled "Poems by the Way." All of it is later work, but it is not more successful than the youthful productions which we have been considering. Nevertheless it excels in greater variety. You have here dramatic pieces of several kinds, ballads and translations of ballads, fairy tales and translations of fairy tales, mediæval and Norse stories, and strangely mixed with these a number of socialist poems — for Morris believed in the theories of socialism, in the possibility of an ideal communism.

The bulk of the pieces in the volume, however, are Scandinavian, and the general tone of the book is Northern. Morris was a tremendous worker in the interest of Scandinavian literature. He loved the mediævalism of the pagan Norse even more than the corresponding period of the Christian and chivalrous South. He helped the work of those great Oxford professors who brought out the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, translating in conjunction with one of them several ancient Sagas. And as a poet he did a great deal to quicken English interest in Norse literature, as we shall see later on. In this book we have only short pieces, but they are good, and a number of them have the value of almost literal translations. As for the style, a good example

is furnished by the story of the killing of the Hallgerd (or Hallgerda) by Hallbiorn the Strong.* The story is taken from an old Icelandic history, and is undoubtedly true. Hallbiorn wedded a daughter of a man called Odd, on account of his odd character. She was very beautiful. Her father insisted that Hallbiorn should spend the whole next season, winter, with him, and said that he might take his bride away in the spring for the summer. During the winter Hallgerd had a secret intrigue with a blood relation called Snæbiorn. The husband did not know, he only felt a little suspicious at times. When the summer came, and he asked Hallgerd to go with him to the house which he had built for her, she did not answer. He asked her twice, still she did not answer. The third time she refused. Then he killed her. Then Snæbiorn, her lover, attacked him, and after a terrible fight in which eight or nine men were killed, Hallbiorn was cut down. Snæbiorn then left the country vowing that he would never speak to man again, and settled in Greenland, where he died. The incidents are not wonderful, but the simple and terrible way in which they are told by the Icelandic chronicle makes them appeal greatly to the imagination. And Morris did justice to the style of the old Landnamabok, as it is called. The following lines relate to the tragedy only:

> But Hallbiorn into the bower is gone
> And there sat Hallgerd all alone.
> She was not dight to go nor ride,
> She had no joy of the summer-tide.
> Silent she sat and combed her hair,
> That fell all round about her there.
> The slant beam lay upon her head,
> And gilt her golden locks to red.
> He gazed at her with hungry eyes
> And fluttering did his heart arise.
> "Full hot," he said, "is the sun to-day,
> And the snow is gone from the mountain-way,

* *Of the Wooing of Hallbiorn the Strong.*

The king-cup grows above the grass,
And through the wood do the thrushes pass."
Of all his words she hearkened none,
But combed her hair amidst the sun.
"The laden beasts stand in the garth
And their heads are turned to Helliskarth."
The sun was falling on her knee,
And she combed her gold hair silently.
"To-morrow great will be the cheer
At the Brothers' Tongue by Whitewater."
From her folded lap the sunbeam slid;
She combed her hair, and the word she hid.
"Come, love; is the way so long and drear
From Whitewater to Whitewater?"
The sunbeam lay upon the floor;
She combed her hair and spake no more.
He drew her by the lily hand:
"I love thee better than all the land."
He drew her by the shoulders sweet:
"My threshold is but for thy feet."
He drew her by the yellow hair:
"O why wert thou so deadly fair?
O am I wedded to death?" he cried,
"Is the Dead-strand come to Whitewater side?"

In order to know how terrible all this is, we must understand the character of the Norse woman. Like the will of the man, her will is iron; she cannot be broken, she cannot be made to bend, except by love, and when she refuses to bend there is nothing to be done but to kill her. All the facts stated here in rhymed verse are even more terrible and more simple in the prose chronicle. Throughout Norse history we repeatedly hear of women being killed under like circumstances. These ferocious men would not beat or abuse their women; that would have been no use. But they insisted upon being obeyed; to refuse obedience was to court death. In the present true story, however, the refusal to obey means much more than to court death; it means a bold confession by the bride that she has loved

and still loves another man than her husband, and that is the reason of his sudden and terrible question, "Oh, am I wedded to death? Is the Dead-strand come to this place?" The Dead-strand or Corpse-strand was, in Norse mythology, the name of a part of Hel, the region of the dead, the Hades of old Norse. So his question really means, "Have the evil dead come here for us both?" for good men and women did not go to the Dead-strand. Now hear her answer. When he speaks at last, she sings in his face her secret lover's favourite song, which is just the same thing as to say, "I am glad to be killed for my lover's sake." And to kill a Norse woman meant, of course, death for the man who slew her, for her kindred were bound to avenge her. So she is defying him in every way.

> And the sun was fading from the room,
> But her eyes were bright in the change and the gloom.
> "Sharp sword," she sang, "and death is sure,
> But over all doth love endure."
> She stood up shining in her place
> And laughed beneath his deadly face.
> Instead of the sunbeam gleamed a brand,
> The hilts were hard in Hallbiorn's hand.

The last line contains a phrase from old Northern war poetry. To say that the hilt of a man's sword was hard in his hand, signifies that he was a terrible swordsman, accustomed to mighty blows. But Morris here makes a little departure from the original chronicle. He makes Hallbiorn pass his sword through the woman's body. As a matter of fact he did nothing of the kind; he simply cut her head off at a single blow. Very dramatic, however, is his telling of the subsequent flight of Hallbiorn, and the pursuit by Snæbiorn. Hallbiorn's men are surprised at the fact that he does not hold his ground, for they know nothing of what happened in the house, and one of them says, "Where shall we sleep to-night?" Hallbiorn answers grimly, "Under the ground." Then his retainers know for the first time that they are going to be attacked. The attacking party consists

of twelve men. Hallbiorn's retainers urge their master to hasten forward; it is still possible, they think, to escape. But he stops his horse and leaps down, exclaiming:

> "Why should the supper of Odin wait?
> Weary and chased I will not come
> To the table of my fathers' home."

That is a fine expression about the supper of Odin, referring to the hope of every brave man to enter, at his death, into Valhalla, the hall of Odin, and to sup with the gods. And to enter there one had to be killed in battle. So you can see the fierce humour of Hallbiorn's remark that he does not want to come late to the supper of the gods, and to keep the feast waiting. Snæbiorn does not speak. Hallbiorn only laughs. He kills five men; then one of his feet is cut off, but he rushes forward upon the bleeding stump, and kills two more before he is overpowered. It was a terribly savage world, the old Norse world; but we like to read about it, and we cannot help loving the splendid courage of the men and women who passed their lives among such tragedies, fearing nothing but loss of honour.

Several other Norse subjects have been treated by Morris with equal success; and one is remarkable for the strange charm of a refrain used in it, a refrain from the Norse. It is called "The King of Denmark's Sons," and it is the story of a fratricide. King Gorm of Denmark had two sons, Knut and Harald:

> Fair was Knut of face and limb
> As the breast of the Queen that suckled him.
>
> But Harald was hot of hand and heart
> As lips of lovers ere they part.

In history Knut was called the beloved. All men loved him, he was the heir; and the old king loved him so much that he one day said, "If any one, man or woman, ever tells me that my son Knut is dead, that person has spoken the word which sends him or her to Hel." But this great

love only made the younger brother jealous. Harald was a Viking; he voyaged southward and eastward, ravaging coasts in the Mediterranean or desolating provinces nearer home. His name was a terror in England at one time. But his father never praised him as he praised his brother. So one day at sea he attacked his brother, overcame all resistance, and killed him. Then he went home and told his mother what had been done. But who dare tell the King? The mother imagined a plan. During the night she decked the palace hall all in black, taking away every ornament. So in the morning, when the King entered the hall, he asked, "Who has dared to do this?" The Queen answered, "We, the women of the palace have done it." "Then," said the King, "tell me that my son Knut is dead!" "You yourself have said the word," the Queen made answer. And therewith the old king died as he sat in his chair; and the wicked son became king. This is the simple history, and Morris has not departed from historic truth in his version of it. The refrain excellently suits the ballad measure chosen; from the very first stanza, the tone of it suggests all the tragedy that is going to follow.

> In Denmark gone is many a year,
> *So fair upriseth the rim of the sun,*
> Two sons of Gorm the King there were,
> *So grey is the sea when the day is done.*

Sunrise symbolizes happiness, joy; grey is the colour of melancholy; and nothing is so lonesome, so sad looking, as the waste of the sea when it turns to grey in the twilight. The refrain reminds one of a famous line by an American poet, Bryant, who certainly never saw this ballad:

> Old ocean's grey and melancholy waste.

Besides the above Norse subjects, I might call your attention to the following titles: "The Folk-Mote by the River," "Knight Aagen and Maiden Else," "Hafbur and

Signy," "The Raven and the King's Daughter." All these are well worth reading. So are the purely fairy tales. Northern fairy tales had a great charm for Morris. He chose them as subjects, perhaps because he saw a way of putting into them a new charm, a charm not suited for child readers, but attractive to the adult public. I suppose you know that fairy tales, as written for children, are written so as to appeal chiefly to the imagination, and to those simple emotions of which children are capable. But originally such stories were told for the amusement of grown-up people, and a great deal of love sentiment figures in some of them. Morris remembering this, took several charming stories and infused them with a new artistic sensuousness, making love the motive and the principal sentiment. In the other volume of which I spoke, the old story of "Rapunzel" is treated in this way; in the volume now under consideration we have the story "Goldilocks and Goldilocks." It is the wildest, the most impossible kind of fairy tale (so, for that matter, is Coleridge's "Christabel"), but he gave it a very human charm by putting delightful little bits of human nature into it — such as the passage where the enchanted maiden, who never saw a man before, meets the handsome knight for the first time:

> But the very first step he made from the place
> He met a maiden face to face.
>
> Face to face, and so close was she
> That their lips met soft and lovingly.
>
> Sweet-mouthed she was, and fair he wist;
> And again in the darksome wood they kissed.
>
> Then first in the wood her voice he heard,
> As sweet as the song of the summer bird.
>
> "O thou fair man with the golden head,
> What is the name of thee?" she said.

"My name is Goldilocks," said he;
"O sweet-breathed, what is the name of thee?"

"O Goldilocks the Swain," she said,
"My name is Goldilocks the Maid."

He spake, "Love me as I love thee,
And Goldilocks one flesh shall be."

She said, "Fair man, I wot not how
Thou lovest, but I love thee now."

And they go on talking together, like two children, in their eighteenth century English—she full of wonder at the beauty of the stranger of another sex, he full of loving pity for her supreme innocence. And then all kinds of magical dangers and troubles come to separate them, but love conquers all. The story is known by many children, but not as Morris tells it. His principal purpose is to picture a character of perfect innocence and perfect trust; and he does this so delightfully that we cease to care whether the tale is a fairy one or not. It stirs most agreeably something which is true in everybody's heart; we love what is beautiful in the character of the child or the supremely innocent young girl.

As a single work in one key, the greatest production of Morris is "The Story of Sigurd"; indeed, we might call it the masterpiece of the poet, but for the fact that it is not original in the true sense. It is little more than a magnificent translation in swinging verse of the Volsunga Saga. But in more ways than one, it has become a literary work of extreme importance. It was through this metrical version that the Volsunga Saga first became known to English readers in a general way. Since then we have had prose translations.

I want to speak about this Saga, because the subject is of extreme literary importance. To-day you can scarcely open a literary periodical or any volume of esssays on liter-

ary subjects without finding there some reference to the famous Northern story. It is one version of an epic which in various forms belongs to the whole Northern race; and one of the forms best known is the Nibelungenlied of Germany. Through German musical art the latter form of the story has in our own time become universally known in all great cities of the West, for Wagner made it the subject of a magnificent composition; the greatest of all modern operas, dramatically at least, is certainly his musical presentation of the epic cycle.

A word now about the place of this story in European literature. Mediæval Europe produced four great epics. Each of these represents the beginning of a vast national literature. The great English epic is the story of Beowulf, and I am sorry to say that it is not the best. The great French epic is the story of Roland. The great Spanish epic is the story of the Cid. And the great German epic is the Nibelungenlied or Nibelunge Nôt, as it has also been called. Of these four the German epic is the grandest. Its date is not exactly known. But the best critics assert that it cannot be older than the middle of the twelfth century, and not later than the middle of the thirteenth. Therefore the date must be somewhat between 1150-1250.

But the German epic is by no means the oldest form of the story. The older forms are Norse. There are poetical fragments of the story to be found in the ancient Scandinavian literature (you can find them in the library in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*), and there is a splendid prose version of the story in the old Icelandic — this is the Volsunga Saga, from which Morris took his poetical materials. Between the versions of the German and the North, there are great differences of narrative, but perhaps not great differences of merit. If we could have the whole of the old Norse epic, we should perhaps find it even grander than the German. But only fragments have been preserved of the poetry, and we can only imagine from the prose Saga how magnificent the lost poetry may have been. And now

a word about the story itself.

When Herbert Spencer, some years ago, criticized certain English translations issued by the Japanese Department of Education, he stated that the story of the great swordsman Musashi was not a proper subject of the admiration of the youth, because it is a story of vengeance. He was speaking from the standpoint of ideal education, and from that standpoint his criticism is not disputable. But ideal education, in the present state of humanity, he himself would acknowledge to be impossible. It is only something toward which we can all work a little, slowly and patiently. In the meantime, the same objection made to the story of Musashi might equally well be made to all the epic poems of the Western world, and to nearly all the great romances of the past. To begin with, the grand poems of Homer, both the Iliad and the Odyssey, are epics of vengeance. The great story of King Arthur is a narrative full of incidents of revenge and even of crime. We can scarcely mention any great composition which is not full of vengeance, and which is not also admired. But I wonder what could Mr. Spencer say of the Volsunga Saga or the Nibelungenlied. For all stories of vengeance ever told, whether in verse or prose, pale before the immense quarrel and cruelty of these. They are terrible stories, and the Volsunga version is even more terrible than the German.

The story takes its name from the great family of the Volsung. It opens with an account of the might and power of King Volsung, the heroism of his sons and the beauty of his only daughter Signy. These rule in the far North. After a time the King of the Goths in the South, hearing of the wonderful beauty of Signy, asks for her hand in marriage, and obtains it. He goes to the country of the Volsung to wed her, and during the wedding he becomes jealous of the splendour and strength of the Volsung family. When he takes his bride South with him there is an evil purpose in his heart—the purpose to destroy the family of his bride by treachery whenever opportunity offers. What

follows does not belong to the German story at all; it is only to be found in the Norse.

Siggeir, the Gothic king, next year invites the King Volsung and his sons to come south and pay him a visit. The sons of King Volsung suspect treachery, and they advise their father not to go without a great army. But the old king wants to see his daughter, and he thinks that it would be showing fear to go with a great army, so he tells his sons that they must go as invited, with only a small following. They go. But the suspicion of the sons was justified by events. In the middle of the festival of welcome, King Volsung and his party are attacked by an immense force, and nearly all the followers of the king are killed. The sons are taken prisoners and left in a wood tied to trees for the wolves to devour. Only one escapes, Sigmund. He hides in the forest and becomes a hunter, and dreams of vengeance.

But the real avenger is Signy, the daughter of the dead King Volsung and the wife of the murderer. Signy knows that her brother Sigmund is alive. But that makes only two Volsungs; and two young people alone cannot hope to destroy a king and an army. But Signy believes that three can do it. Secretly she keeps her brother supplied with provisions and weapons, and she resolves to raise up sons to avenge the wrong. When her first son is born she begs to train him, and when he is old enough to begin to learn what war means, she sends him to her brother in the wood that he may teach the lad.

Sigmund does not much like the boy. He thinks that he talks too much to be really brave. He tests the lad's courage in different ways, telling him, among other things, to bake and knead cake in which a poisonous snake has been hidden. The boy is afraid of the snake. Sigmund sends him back to Signy, saying that he will not do.

Signy almost despairs. Must her sons be cowards because they have a coward father? Suddenly a strange idea comes to her. "I shall do as the Gods did in ancient times,"

she said; "only my brother can produce such a child as I wish for, and I shall have a child by him." She goes to a witch, who changes her body, transforms her so completely that her brother can have no suspicion of what has taken place. Then by him she has a son, Sinfiotli. When he is old enough she sends the boy to Sigmund.

Sigmund is astonished by the extraordinary fierceness and sullenness of the child. "Is it possible," he wonders, "that my sister can have such a child by her husband?" The boy scarcely speaks at all, but does whatever he is told, and is afraid of nothing. Sigmund gives him flour to knead and bake containing a poisonous snake. Instead of being afraid of the serpent, the child breaks and crushes the creature in his fingers and rolls the poisonous body in the flour, and makes the whole thing into cakes. Sigmund is delighted. He sends word to his sister, "This boy will do."

The rest of this part of the story you can imagine. The boy grows up a giant, and is trained in all arts by Sigmund. On a certain day these two unexpectedly force their way into the palace of the King Siggeir, slaughter his people and himself, and set fire to the palace. Thus King Volsung is avenged. But Signy, after having told her brother the story of Sinfiotli, goes back into the burning house of the king, and voluntarily dies. She has done her duty, but she does not care to live any longer. This ends the great episode of the Volsung Saga.

The next part contains the story of the dragon Fafnir. Here we have no more Sigmund. Sinfiotli has been poisoned, Sigmund has been killed in battle. But there is still one child of the Volsung blood alive in the world. This is Sigurd (the Siegfried of the German story). Sigurd is kindly brought up by a foster-father, a Viking, who teaches him all the arts of seamanship and war. One of the teachers who helped the Viking in the work is a strange old man called Regin, who much resembles the Merlin of the story of King Arthur. Sigurd wants a sword, a magical sword, that will not break in his hand; for he is so strong that

common swords are of no use to him. Regin alone knows the art. But he does not wish to give Sigurd such art. He makes in succession a number of swords. Sigurd takes each one of them and strikes the anvil with it, whereupon the blade flies into pieces. He threatens Regin so terribly that the latter at last is obliged to make the magical sword. When he finished, Sigurd strikes the anvil with the blade, and the anvil is cut in two pieces. In the musical presentation of the story by Wagner, the finest episode is this forging of the sword. If you ever see that performed in a great theatre, you will not easily forget it. But in the German story it is not Regin but the hero himself who makes the blade. The anvil is placed upon the stage and all the forging is really done there. When the anvil is cut in two, a flash as of lightning follows the blade of the sword; the spectacle is very grand.

But to return to the Volsung legend. Sigurd needs the sword in order that he may perform great deeds in the world, and the first great deed that he wishes to perform is to secure a magical hoard of wealth, belonging to the Dwarfs of the underworld and guarded by the terrible dragon Fafnir. He goes with Regin to the place of the hoard, and meets the dragon, and kills him. Regin then says to him, "Give me his heart — cut it out and roast it." Sigurd obeys, cuts out the heart of the dragon, and begins to roast it over the fire. But while roasting it, some grease gets upon his fingers, and he licks it off with his tongue. Immediately a wonderful thing happens—he can understand the language of birds and animals. In the trees above him he hears the birds speaking, and they give him warning that Regin intends to kill him. Thereupon he kills Regin. This story of the dragon's heart is very famous in European literature, and you will find many references to it in the poetry and prose of to-day.

The next part of the story is one of the finest — the meeting of Sigurd and Brynhild, the first love episode. Brynhild is half human, half divine. Though born among

men, she had been taken to heaven by Odin and made a Valkyria, one of the celestial virgins called "The Choosers of the Slain." But for a fault which she committed she had been sent back to earth again, to suffer pain and sorrow. In an enchanted sleep she was left upon the summit of a mountain, and all about her sleeping-place towered a wall of never-dying fire. "Only the man brave enough to ride through the fire shall have this maiden"—so spake Odin.

Sigurd rides through the fire, and the fire, although roaring like the sea, does not hurt him, because he is brave. Entering the enchanted circle, he there sees a human figure lying, all in golden armour not made by any human smith. He tries to awake the sleeper, but cannot. He tries to take off the armour, but he cannot unfasten it. Then he takes his wonderful sword and cuts open the armour as easily as if it were silk. Then he finds that the sleeper is a woman, more beautiful than any woman of earth. She opens her eyes and looks at him. They fall in love with each other, and pledge themselves to become man and wife. Probably this part of the story is one of the sources from which the beautiful fairly tale of the Sleeping Beauty came into our child literature. But the idea is also found in very ancient Eastern literature.

The third part of the great story treats of the history of Brynhild especially. Being a Valkyria, she has power to see much of the future; she can foretell things in a dim way. She warns Sigurd that there is danger for him if he should ever be untrue to her. Sigurd accepts the warning in the noblest spirit. But the Fates are against him. He goes upon a warlike expedition to the kingdom of the Niblungs in the North. The Niblung family, after a great battle which Sigurd has helped them to win, wish to adopt him as a son, and the beautiful daughter of the King falls in love with him. Her father and her brothers wish Sigurd to marry the girl, whose name is Gudrun. But Sigurd remembers his promise to Brynhild. Then the wicked Queen Grimhild, the mother of Gudrun, gives Sigurd a poisonous

drink that causes him to forget the past; and while he is under the influence of this magical drink he is persuaded to marry Gudrun.

But this is not the worst thing that he is obliged to do through the magical arts of Grimhild. He is obliged to go to Brynhild, and persuade her to become the wife of young Gunnar, the brother of Gudrun. He rides through the fire again, and persuades Brynhild to become the wife of Gunnar. She obeys his will, but the result is the destruction of Sigurd and all concerned. For the two women presently begin to quarrel. Brynhild loves Sigurd with a supernatural love, and he knows that he has been deceived. Gudrun also loves Sigurd fiercely, and her jealousy quickly perceives the secret affection of Brynhild. In short, the result of the quarrel between the women is that the brothers of Gudrun resolve to kill Sigurd while he sleeps. One of them stabs him in the middle of night. Sigurd, awakening, throws his sword after the escaping murderer with such force that the man is cut in two. But Sigurd dies of his wound, and Brynhild then kills herself, and the two are burnt upon the same funeral pyre.

The last part of the story is the revenge of Gudrun, one of the most terrible characters in all Northern stories. She lives only to avenge Sigurd. On finding that her brothers have caused his murder, she curses her house, her family, her people, and vows that they shall all suffer for the wrong done her. Her brothers, who know her character, are afraid, but there is a hope that time will make her heart more gentle. At all events she cannot remain always a widow. Presently she is asked for in marriage by Atli, King of the Goths. Her brothers wish for this marriage, all except one, who is against it. Gudrun marries Atli. This gives her power to plan her longed-for revenge. She persuades her husband that the great treasures which Sigurd got by killing the dragon are worth securing even at the cost of the lives of her brothers and father. She does not lie to the King; she frankly tells him that she hates her people, and

he believes her. By treachery, all the Niblungs are allured to Atli's hall. In the middle of the day of their arrival, they are suddenly attacked. They make a great fight, but all their followers are killed, and they themselves are taken prisoners—that is, the brothers, the father having died before the occurrence. During the fight Gudrun is present and the blood spurts upon her dress and hands, but the expression of her face never changes. This is one of the most awful scenes in the poem.

When all the brothers are dead but two, Hogni and Gunnar, the King says to Gunnar, "Give me the treasure of the Niblungs, and I will spare your life." Gunnar answers; "I must first see the heart of my brother Hogni cut out of his breast and laid upon a dish." The King's soldiers take among the prisoners a tall man whom they imagine to be Hogni, but who is really only a slave, and they cut out the man's heart and put it upon a dish and bring it to Gunnar. Gunnar looks at it and laughs and says, "That is not my brother's heart; see how it trembles —that is the heart of a slave!" Then the soldiers kill the real Hogni and cut out his heart and bring it upon a plate. This time Gunnar does not laugh. He says, "That is really my brother's heart. It does not tremble. Neither did it ever tremble in his breast when he was alive. There were only two men in the world yesterday who knew where the treasure of the Niblungs is hidden, my brother and myself. And now that my brother is dead, I am the only one in the world who knows. See if you can make me tell you. I shall never tell you." He is tortured and killed, but he never tells.

There is only one of the whole Niblung race still alive, Gudrun. She has avenged her husband upon her own brothers, but that does not satisfy her. By the strange and ferocious Northern code she must now avenge her kindred, though they be her enemies, upon the stranger. She has used Atli in order to destroy her brothers; but, after all, they were her brothers and Atli only her husband. She sets

fire to the palace, kills Atli with her own hands, and then leaps into the sea. Thus all the characters of the story meet with a tragic end. There is no such story of vengeance in any other literature. Yet this epic, or romance, is the greatest of mediæval compositions, and every student ought to know something about it, either in its Scandinavian or its German form. In the German form the character of Gudrun—she is there called Kriemhild—is much less savage; and the German story is altogether a more civilized expression of feeling. But any form of the story (and there are several other forms besides those of which I have spoken) shows the moving passion to be vengeance; and to return to the subject of Mr. Spencer's criticism, we may say that there is no great tale, Western or Eastern, in which this passion has no play.

The values of the story are in the narration, in the descriptions of battles, weapons, banquets, weddings, in the heroic emotions often expressed in speeches or pledges, and in the few chapters of profound tenderness strangely mingled among chapters dealing only with atrocious and cruel passions; all these give perpetual literary worth to the composition, and we cannot be tired of them. The subject was a grand one for any English poet to take up, and Morris took it up in a very worthy way. He has put the whole legend into anapestic verse of sixteen syllables, a long swinging, irregular measure which has a peculiar exultant effect upon the reader. To give an example of this work is very difficult. Any part detached from the rest, loses by detachment — for Morris, although a good poet, and a correct poet, and a spiritual poet, is not an exquisite poet. He does not give to his verses that supreme finish which we find in the compositions of the greater Victorian poets. However, I shall attempt a few examples. I thought at first of reading to you some passages regarding the forging of the sword; but I gave up the idea on remembering how much better Wagner has treated the same incident where the hero chants as he strikes out the shape of the blade

with his hammer, and at last, with a mighty shout lifts up the blade and cuts the anvil in two. Perhaps a better example of Morris's verse may be found in these lines:

"By the Earth that groweth and giveth, and by all the Earth's increase
That is spent for Gods and man-folk; by the sun that shines on these;
By the Salt-Sea-Flood that beareth the life and death of men;
By the Heaven and Stars that change not, though earth die out again;
By the wild things of the mountain, and the houseless waste and lone;
By the prey of the Goths in the thicket and the holy Beast of Sôn,
I hallow me to Odin for a leader of his host,
To do the deeds of the Highest, and never count the cost:
And I swear, that whatso great-one shall show the day and the deed,
I shall ask not why nor wherefore, but the sword's desire shall speed:
And I swear to seek no quarrel, nor to swerve aside for aught,
Though the right and the left be blooming, and the straight way wend to nought:
And I swear to abide and hearken the prayer of any thrall,
Though the war-torch be on the threshold and the foemen's feet in the hall:
And I swear to sit on my throne in the guise of the kings of the earth,
Though the anguish past amending, and the unheard woe have birth:
And I swear to wend in my sorrow that none shall curse mine eyes
For the scowl that quelleth beseeching, and the hate that scorneth the wise.
So help me Earth and Heavens, and the Under-sky and Seas,
And the Stars in their ordered houses, and the Norns that order these!"

And he drank of the Cup of the Promise, and fair as a star he shone,
And all men rejoiced and wondered, and deemed Earth's glory won.*

This will serve very well to show you the ringing spirit of the measure. Here is an example of another kind taken from the pages describing the first secret love of the maiden Gudrun for Sigurd. It is true to human nature; the Northern woman is apt to be most cruel to the man whom she

* Bk III *Brynhild* (p. 200—1).

loves most, and these few lines give us a dark suggestion of the character of Gudrun long before the real woman reveals herself — immensely passionate and immensely strong in self-control.

But men say that howsoever all other folk of earth
Loved Sigmund's son rejoicing, and were bettered of their mirth,
Yet ever the white-armed Gudrun, the dark-haired Niblung Maid,
From the barren heart of sorrow her love upon him laid:
He rejoiceth, and she droopeth; he speaks and hushed is she;
He beholds the world's days coming, nought but Sigurd may she see;
He is wise and her wisdom falters; he is kind, and harsh and strange
Comes the voice from her bosom laden, and her woman's mercies change.
He longs, and she sees his longing, and her heart grows cold as a sword,
And her heart is the ravening fire, and the fretting sorrows' hoard.*

A great deal is said in these lines by the use of suggestive words and words of symbolism. Paraphrased these verses mean much more. "No matter how much all other people showed their love and admiration for Sigurd by making festival and public rejoicing, feeling happier and better for having seen him, all their affection was as nothing to the love that Gudrun secretly felt for him, out of her lonesome heart; and great was her secret grief at the thought that he might not love her. Then she acted with him after the manner of the woman resolved to win. Whenever she saw him rejoice she became sad. Whenever he spoke to her, she remained silent. Many things Sigurd knew—so wise he was that he could see even the events of the future; but she saw nothing and knew nothing thereafter except Sigurd, nor did she wish to see or to know anything else. And when he showed himself wise, she acted as a foolish child. And when he tried to be kind to her she answered him with a strange and harsh voice, and suddenly became without pity. And at last when he began to long for love, and she perceived it, then her heart be-

* *Ibid* (p. 184).

came cold as a sword. So was the soul of this woman in the time of her passion—now like the ravening fire, now again desolate with all the sorrows that corrode and destroy."

Because she sees still that love is not for her, the whole scene of the courting — this is one of the cases where the maiden woos the man without ever losing her dignity as a maiden — is of consummate skill, showing Gudrun at one moment simple and sweet as a child, revealing suddenly, at another time, the strange height and depth of her, many things terrible in her, capable of the making or the ruin of a kingdom.

I am not going to quote, but I hope that you will notice particularly the fine scene of the death of Brynhild. There is a grand thought in it. I did not tell you, in the brief epitome of the plot which I gave you, about the second wooing of Brynhild. When Sigurd wooed her for King Gunnar, he lay down beside her at night; but he placed his naked sword between them. This episode is famous in Western literature. So he brought her chaste to her bridegroom. And when afterwards Brynhild kills herself, in order that she may be able to join him in the spirit world, she shows her admiration of Sigurd's action by saying, "When you put my dead body on the funeral pyre beside the dead body of Sigurd, put his naked sword again between us, as it was put between us when he wooed me long ago, for the sake of King Gunnar." The suicide chapter is very grand. And the ending of the long tragedy has also a peculiar grandeur, when Gudrun leaps into the sea.

. . . . . the sea-waves over her swept,
And their will is her will henceforward; and who knoweth the deeps of the sea,
And the wealth of the bed of Gudrun, and the days that yet shall be?*

A finer simile could not be imagined than this sudden transformation of a passionate woman's will into the vast motion and unimaginable depths of the sea. The idea is,

* Bk IV *Gudrun* (p. 345).

"Deep and wide was her soul like the sea; and the strength of her and the depth of her are now the strength and depth of the ocean; and who knows what her spirit may hereafter accomplish?"

In concluding this little study of the romance, I may say that some of its incidents are probably immortal because they contain perpetual truth. I am not now speaking particularly of Morris's work, but only of the legend of Sigurd. The studies in it of evil passions need not demand our praise, but the stories of heroism, like that of the naked sword laid between the man and the maid, will always seem to us grand. Symbolically we may say that the wealth of the world is still guarded by dragons as truly as in the story of Sigurd; formidable and difficult to overcome are the powers opposing success in the struggle of life, and the acquisition of the prize can be only for the hero, the strong man mentally or morally. Again that strange fancy of Brynhild ringed about in her magical sleep with a wall of living fire — I do not know how it may seem to the far Eastern reader, but to the Western it is the symbol of a real truth, that beauty, the object of human desire, is still truly ringed about by fire, in the sense that the winner of it must risk all possible dangers of body and soul before he succeeds. Still in Northern countries the finest woman is for the best man; only the hero can truly ride through the fire of the gods.

I have said enough about the great poems of Morris; I do not think that it will be necessary to say anything about "The Life and Death of Jason." If you like his other work, probably you will like that book also. But I think that the story of Jason is more charmingly told by Charles Kingsley in his "Greek Fairy Tales," and that Morris was at his best, so far as long narrative poems are concerned, in Norse subjects. I have already told you about his strong personal interest in Norse literature, and about his work as a prose translator. In this connection I may mention a queer fact. Morris, who claimed to have Norse blood in

his own veins, became so absorbed by the Norse subjects that his character seems to have been changed in later life. He became stark and grim like the old Vikings, even to his friends. But if he offended in this wise, he certainly made up for the fault by that tremendous energy which he appeared to absorb from the same source. No man ever worked harder for romantic literature and romantic art, and few men have made so deep an impression upon the æsthetic sentiments of the English public.