



## Interview with the Poet Morris as Printer.



**M**R. WILLIAM MORRIS some time ago set up in business as a printer at Hammer-smith, calling his place the Kelmscott Press, and an interviewer from the *Daily Chronicle* has obtained the following information from him as to his reasons for taking this novel step:—

"I wanted to print some nice books. Also I wanted to amuse myself. I think I may say I have done both. Of course, the serious point is the nice books. During the past twenty years printing has improved very considerably in this country. I should imagine that it has improved here more than anywhere else. Thought I to myself, any effort which can still help us in getting the very best printed books can only do good."

"So for printing you to-day put England well first?"

"There is no doubt about that. Even taking the worst view of English printing, we are far ahead of other countries. Here and there in France nice type may be in use, but not often, and now there are one or two good founts in Germany. Italy has the worst printing in Europe, and as for American printing, it is quite abominable."

"I suppose you desired to improve the general get-up of books as well as the printing pure and simple?"

"Certainly—the paper, the binding, the whole appearance of the book. Good paper and good binding naturally follow good printing. It would be absurd to waste beautiful type on bad paper, bound with bad, or rather, I should say, not the best binding. What I say is, that it is just as cheap to print from a pretty stamp as from an ugly one, and fine paper is not so great a concern when you come to books costing more than 7/6 or half-a-guinea. To-day we cannot get the same quality in leather binding as our forefathers were able to get, and largely for that reason I bind most of the books I produce in vellum."

"Then your object in founding the Kelmscott Press was the missionary one of trying what could be accomplished in beautiful printing?"

"Precisely. In the course of my life I had obtained a good deal of knowledge of type. Particularly I was much among type when I was editor of the *Commonweal*. It is two years ago last January—yes, that is accurate—since we started work. My prime idea was to go back to that period of printing when type was admittedly the best and at the same time the simplest. Take the Venetian printers of 1470, who in roman type reached, I might almost say, the perfection of combining beauty and simplicity. One, Nicholas Jensen, comes down to us as a famous printer of the Venetian school. He was a Frenchman, by-the-bye. Before his time there had been certain crudities in the Venetian printing. After him

Venetian type began to suffer degradation, so much so that by 1490 Venetian printing had fallen off. But to the point. For printing my books I have three founts—one roman and two gothic or semi-gothic. As I consulted the Venetian printers in designing my roman type, so I consulted the early printers of Mentz and Augsburg in designing my gothic founts."

"Now for the literary side of the Kelmscott undertaking. Being able to produce beautiful books, which class of beautiful books did you wish to produce?"

"I thought I should like to see my own writings in the handsomest type, but apart from that I wished to print masterpieces in literature, and particularly to give a turn to early English classics like Caxton's. Take 'Reynard the Fox,' which I have brought out from the Kelmscott Press, and the 'Golden Legend,' they are admirable from a literary point of view. Now the 'Golden Legend' was last printed in 1527, and until my edition came out at ten guineas you had, if you wanted a copy, to pay something like £200. And if you had gone to a bookseller and asked for a 'Golden Legend' he would simply have looked at you as much as to say, 'My dear sir, you must wait until you get it.' Then 'The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye,' a mediæval view of the Greek and Roman mythology, is another very remarkable work."

"You have been pretty active during the two years the Kelmscott Press has been in existence."

"We have printed thirteen books, although they are not all issued yet. Of these, four are my own writings—'The Story of the Glittering Plain,' 'John Bull,' 'Guenevere,' and 'Poems by the Way.' 'Godfrey of Bouloyn,' a history of the first Crusade, is in the press, and so is a quite new work by myself, called 'The Well at the World's End.' I don't know if it would interest you to be told that this is a romance of the vague mediæval period, and that it will run to about 700 pages. By and by I am to print 'Chaucer,' and Lady Wilde's translation of that wonderful story of the German witch-fever by Meinhold, 'Sidonia the Sorceress.' Mr. F. S. Ellis is editing the text of 'Chaucer' for us, and Mr. Burne-Jones is doing sixty illustrations."

"Are you satisfied with your career as a printer so far, and with the reception your books have obtained?"

"Very much so. I did not expect that I should be able to carry on except at a loss, but up to the present I have made both ends meet. I am pretty well satisfied that there are a fair number of people in this country who really like beautiful books. I do believe that most of our books are bought not so much by folks who desire to say they have them, as by those who really wish to possess them for their own sake. I have a small public in America, but not in France as yet."

"Does the issue of the beautiful Kelmscott volumes have any direct influence on literature, do you think?"

"Primarily the object, I need hardly repeat, is the good printing of good books; but literature never suffers for being handsomely put out. True, the prices are not the prices which Tom, Dick, and Harry can pay. I wish—I wish indeed that the cost of the books was less, only that is impossible if the printing, the decoration, the paper, and the binding are to be what they should be."