

The Poet, William Morris, and the "Kelmscott Press."



CONSIDERABLE interest has recently been excited in the author of the "Earthly Paradise" by reason of his establishing a private press of his own in which to print his works, and more recently still by the issue of a beautiful portrait plaque by Mr. A. J. Smith, a reproduction of the original exhibited at the Royal Academy. The reproduction is beautifully modelled in bold relief in fictile ivory, measures $6 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and is sold for 7/6, the publishers being Messrs. J. E. Garratt & Co., 48 Southampton-row, W.C. There is wonderful fidelity about this little work of art, which we reproduce in "Dallastint," by permission of the publishers. The hair, eyes, moustache, and beard are Morris's own, whilst the artist has succeeded in catching, to a striking degree, the actual expression of the original. All who know the poet will want a copy. It is simply irresistible if seen. Only a few copies have as yet been sold to friends, &c., at a guinea each (not a penny too much either for so choice a bit of art-work). The first one done was for a wedding present to the poet's daughter, Mrs. Sparling (*née* Miss May Morris).

Of the poet's press at Hammersmith, we quote the following from the *Manchester Guardian* :—

"Leaving Hammersmith bridge on our left, looming dark and sullen through the mist of a sunless morning, we passed through narrow courts and alleys down to the river side, catching a glimpse here and there of an almond tree blooming in a dull little garden, its delicate blossom shining fair against the sombre sky, flinging a veil of poetic loveliness between us and the dingy houses; down to the very water's edge, where stands Kelmscott House, the old fourteenth century house in which William Morris, the artist-poet, now lives and works. Passing from a room made beautiful by Dante Rossetti's noble drawings, we entered the small study overlooking the grey river, which, almost ascetic in its simplicity, is very suggestive of the poet who is so much more a worker than a dreamer. Our quest was the "Kelmscott Press," which Mr. Morris has set up in a cottage close to his own house, and by which he is producing books that for beauty and fine style of printing have not been equalled, if even approached, since the days of the old masters of the craft. Mr. Morris modestly assured us that there was little to be seen in the "Kelmscott Press" to justify our pilgrimage. "If," he said, "you have seen the 'Chiswick Press,' you have seen all and more than I can shew you." But with all due deference to the "Chiswick," famed as it is, one may be forgiven for thinking the "Kelmscott" the more interesting of the two. Mr. Morris first shewed us the paper, which, like that of the early printers, is made entirely of linen rags. It is of the most delicious quality, rough in texture, but firm and hard, of a soft cream tone, the colour it is born with, not afterwards added as with other cream papers, which are first bleached and then tinted. The "watermark" is a little plant, three-leaved and three-blossomed, standing upright between the letters

"W. M." The type, designed by Mr. Morris himself, and which he had great difficulty in getting cut to his satisfaction, is most exquisite in its delightful *embonpoint*, its perfect artistic form and symmetry. Every word seems to have a preciousness, a fulness of meaning utterly unfelt with our commonplace modern type, and the charm of all this is enhanced by original woodcut initial letters and borders of great richness and beauty.

"Mr. Morris has followed the style of Nicholas Jenson, the famous Venetian printer (a Frenchman by birth), who, about 1470, produced the finest "roman" type of the world, destined to become the ruling character of European typography. Jenson was 20 years later than the celebrated trio, Gutenberg, Schæffer, and Faust, the earliest inventors of printing; and Mr. Morris, in speaking of these old masters of that art which caused the greatest revolution the world has ever known, seemed to find pleasure in recalling details of their struggles, defeats, or successes.

"Mr. Morris's hand press, set up in one of the upper rooms of a small cottage overlooking the river, is practically the same kind which was used in the old days. There we saw struck off a page or two of Caxton's "Golden Legend." Mr. Morris also shewed us a copy of "The Glittering Plain," that charming romance of his which first appeared in the *English Illustrated Magazine*. Nothing more beautiful in the way of printing can be conceived than this dainty white vellum-bound book. There is shortly to be issued a second edition, in folio, with illustrations by Mr. Walter Crane. The third book to be printed by the "Kelmscott Press" will be a volume of miscellaneous poems by Mr. Morris.

"Standing in this bare old-fashioned cottage room, looking at an almost exact counterpart of the press that might have been used, say, by Caxton or Wynkyn de Worde in those far-off days, listening to these old-world stories of the men who lived, struggled, triumphed, and died, made one

Forget the snorting steam and piston-stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town,

and transported one back to the days when machinery was unknown, when men laboured with their hands, and loved the labour which they wrought."

AFTER 1830, amateurs of binding came to the front again, and the art rapidly improved. Purgold, the contemporary of Simier and Thouvenin, began to reform the forwarding, and from his workshop came Bauzonnet, to be known later, and especially in conjunction with Trautz, as among the chief of French modern binders and finishers. Purgold bound with flat backs, Bauzonnet rounded his books much more, while Trautz carried the rounding to excess, thereby making his books open with much difficulty, a fault which is characteristic of the majority of recent French work, excellent as it otherwise is in technique. When Trautz became head of the business he reserved the finishing to himself, leaving the forwarding to skilled men under his superintendence.—S. T. P.



WILLIAM MORRIS.

FROM THE PLASTER PLAQUE BY A. J. SMITH, EXHIBITED AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY, 1891.

REPRODUCED IN "DALLASTINT" BY DUNCAN C. DALLAS, 5 FURNIVAL STREET, LONDON, E.C.

