

*Abstract*

The system of education which William Morris saw spawned by the commerce-oriented nineteenth century society horrified him. Formal schooling, as evidenced in the Board school era (and prior to this) was governed by the ideology of Robert Lowe — Benthamite thinking in terms of cheapness and efficiency. Morris found it unacceptable for any stratum of society, since true education was lacking and it was all conducted in an atmosphere of bleakness, non-spirituality and "process-mindedness," the opposite of that which he had experienced himself as a child and youth. He accordingly decried the system and launched an appeal of his own.

*Résumé*

William Morris trouvait horrifiant le système d'éducation que cette société centrée sur le commerce avait engendré dans la dixième siècle. L'école, ainsi qu'on le constate à l'époque du "Board School" (et avant cela), était influencée par l'idéologie de Robert Lowe, c'est-à-dire, qu'elle était organisée selon la pensée de Bentham en termes d'économie et d'efficacité. Morris trouvait cette école inacceptable pour n'importe quelle couche de la société étant donné que l'éducation vraie en était absente, que la vie y était plutôt sombre, sans spiritualité, que ses activités étaient entièrement centrées sur le processus, en somme qu'elle était à l'opposé de ce qu'il avait connu lui-même pendant son enfance et sa jeunesse. Il attaqua donc le système et lança son propre appel pour une éducation vraie.

Peter Clamp\*

### ***William Morris: A Claim for Education***

Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream.

William Morris, *News From Nowhere*.

William Morris, artist, writer, craftsman and poet, was a man out of his time, although very much a product of it. In the fashion of the nineteenth-century romantic, he yearned for the simpler life of the Middle Ages, yet looked to the future, hoping for a new society of justice and equality, beauty and truth. The squalor and sham of industrialized England would, he hoped, drop away as new values took hold of the philistines — as Matthew Arnold labelled the middle class — and the populace. Work would once again become enjoyable, blending creativity with art and labor, making for pride of craftsmanship, as in the days when the guilds held sway. The medieval world would re-impose itself upon the machine-world and drudgery would never haunt England's workshops. And education, he thought, was the key to all this.

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Morris's mind was as rich as the tapestries which his own workshop produced: Ruskin, Carlyle, Shelley and Keats were his well-springs; Norse sagas and Homeric heroes stirred his imagination as works in Middle English syntax on myths, legends and chivalry flowed from his pen. His whole life was a frantic odyssey in a twilight world of fairy tales and utopias, where he, the Quixote of the pre-Raphaelite group, tilted his lance at Blake's dark satanic mills. He may have been clad in Thomas More's livery, yet his steed was red-hued; utopian socialism was his banner, design his squire. He claimed to know how we might live — an oracle speaking in non-delphic tones — and it is this aspect of Morris' work which this paper will examine, with particular reference to his ideas on education, since education provided the plinth upon which was constructed the Morrisian world of post-industrial equality and joy.

The system of schooling which Morris saw in operation was a system which stratified the populace and was principally aimed at the insertion of all into the world of commerce. Such preparation even extended into the realms of higher education:

At present, all education is directed towards the end of fitting people to take their places in the hierarchy of commerce - these as masters, those as workmen. The education of the masters is more ornamental than that of the workmen, but it is commercial still; and even at the ancient universities learning is but little regarded, unless it can in the long run be made to pay.<sup>1</sup>

The system prepared the masters for a "life of commercial success on the one hand," and the workers for "irresponsible labour on the other." In either case, it was a "short and perfunctory exercise with a definite object, more or less sordid in view."<sup>2</sup> Morris, however, saw that education could be so much more: by looking at each individual thoroughly, education could lead each person to make the best use of his or her abilities on a life-long basis. No-one would ever "finish" such a process, and early training would be put to far better use, not lying "a mere piece of waste" behind the majority of people.<sup>3</sup>

Formal schooling, then, as Morris viewed it, was little more than an exercise in child exploitation, of submission and cramming and distasteful degradation of the human spirit. Industrialism had turned education into a mockery and Morris' attitude towards his own post-secondary education, at Oxford, was less than complimentary, as George Bernard Shaw recounted:

Far from being proud of his university education, Morris declared that the only item in his past expenditure he thoroughly grudged was the twenty pounds his Oxford degree of Master of Arts had cost him.<sup>4</sup>

If he declined to admit the benefits of Oxford, Morris did admit that his experiences of formal schooling at Marlborough were pleasant enough. Marlborough was then a new public school where there was little insistence upon discipline and boring routines, and where indeed there was often chaos — all permitting great individualism.<sup>5</sup> Morris was at liberty to wander around the countryside of Savernake Forest by himself, studying man's past on the Downs, dreaming up fantasies of long ago. Such freedom for self-development was dear to him and he was angered by the brand of schooling being pressed upon the working class child. Where the utilitarian ethic of Robert Lowe's "payment by results" controlled virtually every minute of the school day, mechanical drill and "M'Choakumchild thinking" in fact-cramming and gerund grinding did untold damage to the spirit of the child:

Though even our mechanical school system cannot crush out a natural bent towards literature . . . yet certainly its dull round will hardly implant such a taste in anyone's mind . . . I must say in passing that

on the few occasions that I have been inside a Board-school, I have been much depressed by the mechanical drill that was being applied there to all the varying capacities and moods. My heart sank before Mr. M'Choakumchild and his method, and I thought how much luckier I was to have been born well enough off to be sent to a school where I was taught — nothing, but learned archaeology and romance on the Wiltshire Downs.<sup>6</sup>

But the nature of society in which the child was thrust upon his processing at a Board school made Morris despair. A child fortunate enough to have gained a reasonable measure of education and a glimpse of the beauty of the human spirit — despite M'Choakumchild pedagogy — would be destined for unhappiness and disillusionment as he took his place in the factory, the workshop or the mine. As Morris posed the question: if, after having acquired a taste for literature under the most favorable circumstances allowed in such schools,

how will this treasure of knowledge and sympathy accord with his life? Will it not make his task seem duller? Will it not increase the suffering of the workshop or factory to him? And if so, may he not strive to forget rather than strive to remember . . . .<sup>7</sup>

Here, then, was the tragedy of schooling as he saw it in terms of the larger picture: it was more often than not a chilling and dispiriting procedure at the hands of unthinking teachers, which, although perhaps of relatively short duration, did little to prepare the child for the harsh reality of life in the drudgery of the industrial world. Fulfilment as a human being was to be denied to the child in school as it was to the man in the factory; all that could be hoped for was to be an adjunct to a machine. Such was the school-factory progression, as he interpreted it, in the England of the 1870's and 1880's. What, then, did he propose to do about it all? What solutions did he offer to education and to society, if the latter always forges the former?

His proposal, not surprisingly, was to create a mode of education which might be described as "voluntary opportunism," for want of a better term. In many ways, Morris anticipated progressive education, as Dewey and Kilpatrick were to formulate it, and even may be likened to a J.B. Watson or A.S. Neill in his thinking regarding child-centered education. He may have drawn from Rousseau, Pestalozzi or Froebel — we cannot say, but what is apparent is that Morris looked to his own childhood, with its freedoms and unfettered pursuits, for inspiration and even concrete proof of the effectiveness of child-centered learning. He became, by dint of his personal experience, an advocate of all that the system was not, and, as a proto-free-schooler, Morris saw that natural abilities, and their encouragement, would provide the means to a richer, happier society: the child was most definitely to be father to the man in the utopian society which he hoped would succeed that in which he lived.

Formal schooling, in the Morrisian view, would no longer concern itself with the "fortuitous cramming of unwilling children."<sup>8</sup> Nor would it mean young men submitting to a process for the sake of "getting on in their careers;" rather it would become "one of the most serious businesses of life, even to men of the greatest natural capacities."<sup>9</sup> The claim for education issued from Morris during the mid-1880's, at a time when his Marxist sympathies were perhaps at their height, and his Establishment confrontations nearing their climax with the Trafalgar Square fiasco. His claim against the formal schooling which he saw and for something else was well expressed in the *Commonweal* of 1887:

You must not say that every English child is educated now; that sort of education will not answer my claim, though I cheerfully admit it is something: something, and yet after all only class education.

What I claim is liberal education; opportunity, that is, to have my share of whatever knowledge there is in the world according to my capacity or bent of mind, historical or scientific; also to have my share of skill of hand which is about in the world, either in the industrial handicrafts or in the fine arts; picture-painting, sculpture, music, acting or the like: I claim to be taught, if I can be taught, more than one craft to exercise for the community.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, for Morris, education was to be liberal, yet designed to serve a function — the general good of the community. The education system would not impose itself upon the individual, in the manner of schooling in Board, grammar and public school, but rather it would complement him, providing avenues for learning and facilitating natural aptitudes and interests. This was the most obvious and rewarding form of education, for the individual and the community, and was what he termed “due education,” or the education which the state owed to all. As he further elaborated, “due education” primarily should concern itself with finding out what different people were fit for, and then “help them along the road which they are inclined to take.”<sup>11</sup> In a “duly ordered society,” therefore, young people and adults would be taught such handicrafts “as they had a turn for as part of their education, the discipline of their minds and bodies; . . . for the development of individual capacities would be of things aimed at by education . . .”<sup>12</sup> This would be in direct opposition to the system spawned by capitalism, where all capacities were subordinated “to the great end of “money-making for oneself - or one’s master,” and where talent and genius were crushed.<sup>13</sup> Daily work would thereby become easy and interesting for all — a goal which was idyllic to say the least.

Continuing in the claim for formal schooling, centering around capacities and community, Morris hoped to ensure that every child would be given opportunities to enrich the community:

You may think this is a large claim, but I am clear it is not too large a claim if the community is to have any gain out of my special capacities, if we are not to be beaten down to a level of mediocrity as we are now, all but the very strongest and toughest of us.<sup>14</sup>

Where education was imposed and forced, the child would come to detest both the process and the product and would not contribute to the community in any meaningful way. Anything smacking of forced learning, indeed, was anathema to Morris’s idea of an educational process: it had too much of the factory ethic about it, or at the very least, of Dickensian educators of the ilk of Gradgrind, M’Choakumchild, Squeers and Creakle. Freedom was the farthest thought in their minds for their charges, yet was uppermost in Morris’. Child-centered education, similar to that which Rousseau proposed in *Emile*, held more than a passing appeal for Morris: his utopian community would see freedoms in learning which almost bordered on acts of faith. As he held:

Children would teach themselves to read books at home, but they would not be taught to write until they were adolescent. Languages would be learned verbally through exchanges with foreign children.<sup>15</sup>

With adolescence marking a period of “positive” education, after a period which might only be interpreted as “negative,” the child would receive instruction in writing, following the act of self-taught reading. Languages, asserted Morris, were keys in the mutual understanding of communities, and were important in the better appreciation of one’s own language. Morris himself spoke and read German and French. Reading Marx’s *Capital* in French and Icelandic sagas in the original emphasized the usefulness of languages to him — and he realized that language acquisition, rather than a knowledge of books, gave a community perhaps greater viability in cross-cultural understanding,

in the exchange of goods, craft-techniques and so forth. Isolation would never be the lot of Morris' educated children and adults.

Despite his strong dislike of a "bookish" education, Morris saw the need for public libraries. Such repositories of knowledge were essential if the process of life-long learning was to be effected in a society where all people were equal. Libraries, as were schools, were necessities for the living of a "decent life:"

I also know that this claim for education involves one for public advantages in the shape of public libraries, schools, and the like, such as no private person, not even the richest, could command: but these I claim confidently, being sure that no reasonable community could bear to be without such helps in a decent life.<sup>16</sup>

But he did not want education to be associated entirely with books and languages, no matter how much he himself viewed these aspects of learning as essential: the other side of the educational coin, where physical and manual skills were to be developed, was not neglected by him. Libraries and schools — yes, these had their place in the more formal scheme of things — but mental activity needed a healthy counterbalance, and this Morris provided with his outdoor activities program; Hebraism needed Hellenism, albeit in Morrisian terms.

Morris wanted children to enjoy the outdoor life, every bit as much as he himself had done as a child, either on the back of a pony or rambling over the Downs. Indeed, in his desire that every child be at home in the woods and countryside outside the town community, he anticipated Lord Baden-Powell's work with the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Self-sufficiency would be promoted if physical skills for survival were taught to the young and an appreciation of the joy of working with one's hands would also make itself known. As Paul Thompson has stated, Morris believed that with the revival of the physical crafts, interest in literary culture would decline, which did not really cause him great regret.<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may, a thorough knowledge of outdoor pursuits was desirable in Morris' curriculum. As he stated, "all people should learn how to swim, and to ride, and to sail a boat on the sea or river; such things are not arts, they are merely bodily exercises, and should become habitual in the race; . . ." <sup>18</sup> They should also learn "one or two elementary arts of life," such as carpentry or smithying, he thought, and

most people should know how to shoe a horse and shear a sheep and reap a field and plough it . . . . Then again, there are things like cooking and baking, sewing and the like, which can be taught to every sensible person in a few hours, and which everybody ought to have at his fingers' ends.<sup>19</sup>

Such accomplishments, in conjunction with the techniques of camping, swimming, riding and sailing, would serve to make well-rounded youngsters and adults, in whom the joys of self-sufficiency would generate a new pride and self-esteem. A much more useful and enjoyable life could be had by the citizen of the new, model communities. Mutual respect, support and contribution to the greater good of all could not but help accrue, and no person would be confirmed — through class-aligned schooling — to be either a worker or a master. As he explained, in a rationale for his claim:

All this betokens that the end towards which our sham Society directs the means, "education", is the one end to which all its "social" dealings are directed, the sustaining and easy working of its usurpation of true Society. People are educated to become workmen or the employers of workmen, or the hangers-on of the employers. They are not educated to become men. With this aim in view, the conditions under which true education can go on are impossible.<sup>20</sup>

If the system which he saw around him failed to give each person his birthright — the opportunity to become a fully-rounded man — then his scheme would see that classless schooling for a classless society would do just that; indeed, it was essential that no man was dependent upon another for anything (or at least only for a modicum of things), thereby establishing egalitarianism, with interdependency replacing dependency, pride replacing sullenness and sense of co-operation replacing destructive competition.

Morris' 'Thoughts on Education Under Capitalism', penned in 1888, also furnish a further claim for education: that of increased leisure time and a corresponding "education for leisure" — a surprisingly far-sighted concept, given the tenor of the times. The conflict between capitalism and the claim for true education was seen by Morris in the following fashion:

Capitalism will not allow us the leisure, either for education or the use of it. Slave labour and true education are irreconcilable foes, for the latter means the continuous and duly balanced development of our faculties, whether in the school, the workshop or the field, and how can that co-exist with the continuous, hopeless, mechanical drudgery of the man who, whatever he produces, will have all taken from him that exceeds a bare subsistence?<sup>21</sup>

The present education system, stated Morris, was good for only one thing — aside from its uses by the "enemy", the "masters of Society" — and that was the creation of discontent.<sup>22</sup> It was good for little else. But once the slavery of profit was removed, labour would be organized more equitably and usefully, with no heavy burdens being placed upon any one person or group. This would, in part, make for a better distribution of leisure time. Machinery was also to be employed here, to aid the worker, not bind him. Lamentably, labour-saving machines belied their name: no worker, he asserted, worked an hour less on account of such machines.<sup>23</sup> But things could be radically different:

Under a happier state of things, they would be used simply for saving labour, with the result of a vast amount of leisure gained for the community to be added to that gained by the avoidance of waste of useless luxury, and the abolitions of the service of commercial war.<sup>24</sup>

With the release of workers from factory drudgery, a great deal of the "best work done would be done in the leisure time of men relieved from any anxiety to their livelihood . . .".<sup>25</sup> The mind could be expanded in a number of ways, given the new circumstances of leisure; for instance, travel — always a great educator — could be undertaken as never before. A shoemaker in England might exchange places with an Italian shoemaker in Rome, then return to England with new ideas on building, design, style and so forth. Reciprocity in ideas as well as in workers would bring a welcome cross-fertilization in culture and help to establish new levels of international understanding.<sup>26</sup>

But Morris had a further reason for wanting increased leisure time for children and workers: he desired all people to know, appreciate and contribute to art. Art was the love of his life, the single greatest cause for his espousal of socialism and, in his opinion, the most meaningful creation of man. Sadly, the state of art had reached despicable proportions at the hands of capitalists, and his concern over this tragedy induced him to embrace socialism as being the only way for society to be re-educated in the ways of "right art". Consequently, his claim for education had this at its base. As Morris saw the relationship between art and economics, men living under the system of "industrial slavery" could not produce good social art or architecture, even if they desired to do so.<sup>27</sup> From his study of Marx, Morris saw that economics was responsible for the prostitution of art, enlightening him as to why goods manufactured for consumption at home and abroad had

given the death-blow to British artisanship.<sup>28</sup> As Anna von Helmholz-Phelan has stated, Morris saw the poverty of art in the western world as a direct function of commerce; art was debased because of it and too few people had time to express themselves artistically or even to enjoy art. Inequality in time distribution, because of the struggle for daily bread, made this fact as sad as it was obvious.<sup>29</sup> Hence, Morris's claim for greater leisure time went hand in hand with a new approach to education.

As an artist and craftsman himself, Morris held that in being taught art and handicrafts, all people would come to see the value, worth and beauty of artistic creation. Great happiness would result in such activities. His joy in learning that this was actually happening in enlightened schools in the United States was expressed in "Thoughts on Education:"

Mr. Leland said that he had been engaged in this work of educating children's hands for many years, and he expected success to follow his efforts, a success which would mean, . . . that the interest in sound workmanship combined with beauty would become general, and that a demand for such work would follow and compel the manufacturers to get such work turned out.<sup>30</sup>

Art education, in its broadest sense, was looked upon by Morris as being a staple in everyone's life; in order to promote good art in the market place and the home, all those who were capable of being taught to draw should have ready access to such instruction.<sup>31</sup> As he often stated, "Art made by the people and for the people is a joy to the maker and the user".<sup>32</sup> By making art a familiar and appreciated entity at the broadest levels of society, it was Morris' hope that even in a non-socialist world, where market-demand supposedly counted for something, the demand for better design, architecture and art from the consumer group, educated to know the difference, would bring about a new renaissance in the very quality of living. As it happens, he was not incorrect in his assumptions.

Linked with the claim for education and increased leisure time was a further claim, one which was necessary for the enjoyment of all things: good health. The right to a healthy body had been denied to the populace, and in his travels in London, the Midlands and the North, he had seen the factory pallor, rickets, broken bodies and disease as well as hunger. The condition of the working class never ceased to weigh heavily upon his mind, and he was determined to restore health to all in order that education and leisure could be enjoyed. As he stated:

To feel mere life is a pleasure; to enjoy moving one's limbs and exercising one's bodily powers; to play, as it were, with the sun and wind and rain; to rejoice in satisfying the due bodily appetites of a human animal without fear of degradation or sense of wrong-doing: yes, and therewithal to be well-formed, straight-limbed, strongly-knit, expressive of countenance — to be, in a word, beautiful — that I also claim. If we cannot have this claim satisfied, we are but poor creatures after all; . . .<sup>33</sup>

This claim could not be satisfied, however, as long as the constant threat of unemployment hung over the worker's head, making for anxiety and discontent. Nor could it be satisfied where the worker was "ill-housed, nor if he is deprived of all enjoyment of the natural beauty of the world, nor if he has no amusement to quicken the flow of his spirits from time to time".<sup>34</sup>

Dignity in work, freedom from want and pleasant surroundings in which to work, health, leisure and education — Morris saw all these things as being needed in the lives of all men. His various claims, all stemming from education, stamp him as a man of the people, a champion of the common man at a time when the common man was regarded as little more than an exploitable commodity himself, stripped of various birthrights by the capitalist system. The mean, shabby and

dirty life to which countless millions were condemned made Morris brood over industrialism; his claim for a better life in its midst caused him to wax somewhat despondent:

If it cannot be satisfied, if every civilized community cannot provide such surroundings for all its members, I do not want the world to go on; it is mere misery that man has ever existed. I do not think it possible under the present circumstances to speak too strongly on this point.<sup>35</sup>

But Morris was not a nihilist; he was a socialist and socialism was the gospel which he preached whenever he stumped the industrial areas of England. If a new order was needed, to rise, phoenix-like from the ashes of industrial blight, then, reasoned Morris, a further aspect of education was to be undertaken — the education of the masses in the ideas of socialism. The socialist revolution, which he thought was at hand, needed a populace conversant with the major tenets of what a socialist utopia could be. As such, this aspect of the educational claim was decidedly political in intent, and Morris unashamedly saw himself as a latter-day Moses-cum-St. George, ready to lead his people from the valley onto sunnier uplands, slaying industrial dragons as he went. To this end, he formed the Socialist League in 1885.

The education of the workers in the aims of socialism would produce a proletariat well schooled in the processes of politics, communism and, quite appropriately as he thought, the machinations of revolution. Cultivating minor segments of upper-class society or gaining representation in Parliament were not the swiftest avenues to societal change, as Fabianism admitted, but it was the least painful. For Morris, this was painstaking evolution, not swift revolution. Revolution, for so long forecast in England, could only be successful if, in the initial stages, trained men orchestrated events. “When the seething forces of popular discontent could no longer be restrained, leaders should be forthcoming from among the people to tell them what to aim at and what to ask for.”<sup>36</sup> His business, as he said, was more than ever in education, although it was too much to hope that the whole of the working class could be educated in the aims of socialism before the advent of the revolution. However, a strong caucus could be educated in economics, organization and administration:

To such a body of men all the aspirations and vague opinions of the oppressed multitudes would drift, and little by little they would be educated by them, if the march of events should give us time; or if not, even half-educated they would follow them in any direction which it was necessary to take.<sup>37</sup>

“Education towards Revolution” was Morris’ slogan during the early years of the League, but he found himself in a no man’s land. No revolution came, not even when he led the Trafalgar Square demonstration of 1887. Evolution was to be the path trod by the British worker, and as such, Morris was doomed to disappointment. He abandoned the League and formed the Hammersmith Socialist Society in 1890, ever hopeful that a Paris Commune would present itself someday in London, with his socialist-educated workers at the barricades. Disillusionment stalked him on this account until he died; “education towards revolution” was not to be countenanced by the later Victorian proletariat, no matter what he hoped.

If a revolution was not forthcoming in reality, then one could certainly be had in imagination. And this is exactly what Morris did. His imagination built a utopia for him, where all his claims, from education to meaningful work, came to fruition. The novel, *News From Nowhere*, was Morris’s attempt to portray a post-revolutionary England in the early part of the twenty-first century.<sup>38</sup> The reader is taken along as a guest, discovering the future in a new format by avoiding direct comparisons between the time at which he was writing and the imagined society — something which other utopia writers failed to do.<sup>39</sup>

In *News From Nowhere*, Morris concerned himself with the people and not with the mechanics of society. He wanted to show relationships, values and the pleasure in describing the details of people's lives, and, as E.P. Thompson observes, "how remarkable his insights are, whether dealing with life, or labour or communal life: . . ."<sup>40</sup> Morris essentially described a civilization in which the highest traits of culture (as he understood them) were placed within a meld of city and country, a pastoral synthesis of medievalism transposed into credible terms.<sup>41</sup> A socialist/communist ethic, quite naturally, percolated through the whole of the new society, presenting communism (small 'c') in almost hagiographic terms. Chapter five, in particular, is of importance here, since it deals for the most part with education, and is a vindication of his claim for education as he expounded it in lectures and writings. The egalitarian life, backed by education, was accordingly brought to the fore.

Morris and his companion, Dick, are walking along the edge of Kensington Wood. A group of children comes into view, ranging in age from six to seventeen. All are healthy specimens and are engaged in camping and cooking. Dick explains that children live in tents during the summertime: they learn about nature and become more self-sufficient. Upon being asked about the part played by formal schooling in their lives, Dick explains that schools have nothing to do with children — but education has. He elaborates:

I can assure you our children learn, whether they go though a "system of teaching" or not. Why, you will not find one of these children about here, boy or girl, who cannot swim; as every one of them has been used to tumbling about the little forest ponies . . . They all of them know how to cook; the bigger lads can mow; many can thatch and do odd jobs at carpentering; or they know how to keep shop. I can tell you they know plenty of things.<sup>42</sup>

Morris is naturally impressed with such activities and with the accomplishments described. He proceeds to inquire as to the education of the mind, and is given this reply by Dick:

I understand you to be speaking of book-learning; and as to that, it is a simple affair. Most children, seeing books lying about, manage to read them by the time they are four years old; although I am told it has not always been so. As to writing, we do not encourage them to scrawl too early (though scrawl a little they will) because it gets them into the habit of ugly writing; . . .<sup>43</sup>

And as to the learning of languages, this accomplishment is achieved as easily as is the reading, with Gaelic as accessible as French or German:

Sometimes, even before they can read, they can talk French, . . . and they soon get to know German also, which is talked by a huge number of communes and colleges on the mainland. These are the principal languages we speak in these islands, along with English, or Welsh, or Irish, . . . and children pick them up very quickly, because their elders all know them; and besides, our guests from over the sea often bring their children with them, and the little ones get together and rub their speech into one another.<sup>44</sup>

As to the older languages of Latin and Greek, Morris is assured that they can be learned if a child seeks to know more than the modern languages. History is learned in a similar fashion: if a person desires it, it can be either read or related orally. Tastes are not forced upon children and, because they differ so much, their individual talents dictate their areas and pace of learning. The new society, it would seem, is not particularly book-oriented. After the style of Emile's program, little reading — apart from a few story books — is desired before the age of fifteen. In Dick's words, "we don't encourage early bookishness, though you will find some children who will take to

books very early; which perhaps is not good for them; but it's no use thwarting them; . . . .<sup>45</sup> Children did not look upon books as teachers; rather, their parents or commune neighbors provided learning experiences for them when performing interesting, daily tasks:

You see, children are given mostly to imitating their elders and when they see most people about them engaged in genuinely interesting work, like house-building and street-paving, and gardening, . . . that is what they want to be doing; so I don't think we need fear having too many book-oriented men.<sup>46</sup>

From the conversation with Dick, it is apparent that the educational format in the social utopia conforms in most aspects with the claim for education outlined in sundry writings, and especially in "How We Live and How We Might Live". Education is of the "natural" kind — informal and almost osmotic. The absence of regular schooling, in the traditional manner, means that all skills and accomplishments are transmitted by means of child-adult association, much after the fashion of proletarian learning before the advent of the industrial age in Britain. It was a Morrisian attempt to recreate, perhaps, the "world we have lost", as Peter Laslett terms it.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, with the absence of set institutions, distinctions, and prejudice, elitism and the like are far less likely to raise their heads; education becomes truly a community concern, and hence, perhaps, a more meaningful exercise in nurture and skill-transference. Egalitarianism is thereby further ensured and enhanced.

An additional discourse on education in Morris' utopia appears in chapter ten; this supplements the preceding exegesis on the subject and is designed to show the broader spectrum of the educational program proposed. In a style reminiscent of the dialogues in Plato's *Republic*, Morris converses with an older citizen. Remarking that children seem to be allowed great freedoms and receive no schooling, Morris is told that he is mistaken: education is taking place all the time. Schooling and education are not synonymous: You expected to see children thrust into schools when they had reached an age conventionally supposed to be the due age, whatever their varying faculties and dispositions might be, and when there, with like disregard to the facts, to be subjected to a certain conventional course of learning.<sup>48</sup>

The "old" style of education became discredited because it "pinched" people into roles and imparted a "niggardly dole of not very accurate information" to children who were treated with disdain by teachers who "didn't care about it."<sup>49</sup> The idea of growth, in body and mind, was totally ignored. "No one can come out of such a mill uninjured; and those only would avoid being crushed by it who would have the spirit of rebellion strong in them."<sup>50</sup> Fortunately, Morris is reminded, the spirit of rebellion is present in most children, or the present condition of social justice would not have been reached.

But the old system of discredited education was founded upon poverty, the older citizen asserts; the society of the nineteenth century was "miserably poor," with "systematized robbery" denying "real education" to everyone.<sup>51</sup> The citizen elaborates:

The whole theory of their so-called education was that it was necessary to shove a little information into the child, even if it were by means of torture, and accompanied by twaddle which it was well known was of no use, or else he would lack information lifelong; the hurry of poverty forbade anything else.<sup>52</sup>

The new system is far more humane and is geared to the child's needs: information "lies ready to each one's hand when his own inclinations impel him to seek it."<sup>53</sup> Time to grow is given to all and

there is no sense of urgency in education. Children are thus better adjusted, more satisfied, healthier and wealthier than their counterparts in the nineteenth century.

It may thus be seen that the claim to education, as shown in *News From Nowhere*, was as idyllic as it was unstructured. The traditional forms of schooling were supplanted by an unhurried process of adult and child association harking back to an earlier age of extended family, communality and craft guilds. Bucolic simplicity meant that crafts and physical well-being were no less important than languages and reading, the whole producing ruddy-cheeked, self-sufficient and assured youngsters, as at home speaking German as they were at riding, camping and hiking.

The idealization of children by Morris, in keeping with the social utopia which he constructed, was based upon recollections of his own childhood. He wanted others to have that which he had experienced and enjoyed as a child. His intentions were for the best and he may therefore be excused a number of oversights in his enthusiasm for a claim for education. There may be a lack of methodology in the claim, but this is counter-balanced by a genuine concern which he showed for the children of the working class, and indeed, those of the middle class also. For education to be given a fresh and enlightened footing, a new social and economic milieu had to be created. A commonwealth, as he envisioned it, would be a society in which there was neither rich nor poor, neither master, nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick brain workers nor heart-sick hand workers.<sup>54</sup> A world of equality meant a program of education built upon the same precepts, and since the traditional program was, in his opinion, fraught with injustice and fraudulent practice, and was meant to serve an economic system which promoted inequality, drudgery and corruption, then a completely new form of educational claim was justified. The catch was that he looked to the past for justification of such a system, seeing pre-industrial man as more community-minded, more humane, more seasonally-oriented. As was the wont of a pre-Raphaelite, the Middle Ages, seen through a chiaroscuro of mystery, romance and naivety, beckoned. It provided exemplars for the future in mutual help, pride of work, glory of design, unexcelled craftsmanship — and a mode of education which was a meld of socialization, apprenticeship and schooling. As such, it furnished the well-spring for his claim for education in the future.

In conclusion, the Morrisian claim may be seen as something which has been fulfilled, in part, during the course of this century as socialism made inroads into educational and recreational provision. Morris may have been, every bit as John Ball was,<sup>55</sup> a dreamer with a vision of a happier society, replete with true education, dignified art and meaningful work for all. But he was perhaps more in tune with the future than most of his literary and artistic contemporaries, despite his pre-1450 leanings. In a speech concerning "The Beauty of Life," he proclaimed that the twentieth century would be the "Century of Education," where the common man would be accorded education as never before.<sup>56</sup> Yet a question gnawed at him with regard to lifelong education, and is as applicable today as it was in 1880:

How can you really educate men who lead the life of machines, who only think for the few hours during which they are not at work, who . . . spend their whole lives in doing work which is not proper for developing them body and mind in some worthy way?<sup>57</sup>

Even in the "Century of Education," as he knew, despite societal advances, the problem of on-going education would present itself. Inequalities would never fully be eradicated as long as the world of commerce held sway. For William Morris, the claim for education could never be truly

met without the radical re-alignment of the socio-economic system, as he proposed in his writings. The development of mind and body were contingent upon the degree of socialism espoused by twentieth century society. If a considerable proportion of the Morrisian claim for education has been fulfilled this century, it now remains to be seen whether the corresponding political and economic claims — as presented in *News From Nowhere* — will be realized after the conclusion of the “Century of Education.”

#### REFERENCES

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- <sup>2</sup> Morris, William & Bax, E. Belfort. (1913). *Socialism: its growth and outcome*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., p. 239.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Shaw, George Bernard. (1966). *Morris as I knew him*. London: Williams Morris Society, p. 11.
- <sup>5</sup> Maynell, Esther. (1947). *Portrait of William Morris*. London: Chapman and Hall, p. 14.
- <sup>6</sup> Morris, William. (1962). *William Morris: Selected writings and designs*. (Ed.). Briggs, Asa. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, p. 147.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Morris and Bax. *Socialism*, pp. 239-240.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Morris. How we live and how we might live. *Signs of change*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 163.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 24
- <sup>15</sup> Thompson, Paul. (1967). *The work of William Morris*. London: Heinemann Ltd., p. 248.
- <sup>16</sup> Morris. *Signs of change*. p. 24.
- <sup>17</sup> Thompson. *The work of William Morris*, p. 248.
- <sup>18</sup> Morris. Cited by Thompson. *Work of William Morris*, p. 249.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Morris, William. Thoughts on education under capitalism. *William Morris: Artist, writer, socialist*. (Ed.). Morris, May (1936). 2. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 500.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. It is interesting to note what Shaw said of Morris here. As a definition of his political stance, he stated the following:  
“Morris, when he had to define himself politically, called himself a Communist. Very often of course, in discussing Socialism, he had to speak of himself as a Socialist; but he jibbed at it internally, and flatly rebelled against such faction labels as Social-democrat and the like. He knew

that the essential term, etymologically, historically and artistically, was Communist; and it was the only word he was comfortable with" (Shaw, Morris, p. 11.).

<sup>23</sup> Morris. *William Morris*, p. 500.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Morris also warned against having too much leisure time, with idleness and aimlessness from a lack of direction being a very real danger. A work claim would therefore follow a leisure claim. (Morris, *Signs of Change*, p. 26).

<sup>27</sup> Morris stated the issue in the following manner:

"The one reality of modern society is industrial slavery, far-reaching and intimate, supreme over every man's life, dominating every action of it from the greatest to the least: no man and no set of men can do anything that does not tend towards the support of this slavery unless they act as conscious rebels against it. Men living under such conditions cannot produce social art or architecture . . . or even desire to do so; they have lost all understanding of what it is; . . . (Morris and Bax, *Socialism*, p. 17.)

<sup>28</sup> Kirchoff, Frederick. (1979). *William Morris*. Boston: Twayne Publisher, p. 114.

<sup>29</sup> von Helmholtz-Phelan, Anna. (1927). *The social philosophy of William Morris*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> Morris. *William Morris*, p. 496.

<sup>31</sup> Morris, William. (1882) *The lesser arts. Hopes and fears for art*. London: Ellis and White, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Morris. *The art of the people. Hopes and fears*, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Morris, *Signs of change*, p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Townshend. (1912). *William Morris and the Communist ideal*. London: Fabian Tract No. 167, The Fabian Society, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Morris. Education for tomorrow. *William Morris: selected writings and designs*, p. 148. In his lecture on communism, Morris fielded the same sentiments concerning the education of the working class in the ideas of socialism. Prior to the revolution, the working class had to be educated to know what equality meant, thereby knowing what to strive for:

"Equality will speedily make itself felt by the consciousness of its necessity being impressed upon the working people, and that they will consciously and not blindly strive for its realization. That in fact is what we mean by the education into Socialism of the working classes." (Morris. *Communism. The collected works of William Morris*. 24 Vols. Intro. Morris, May. (1915). Vol. 23: *Signs of Change, Lectures on socialism*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915, p. 268.

<sup>38</sup> Morris' *News from nowhere* was published in 1890 and is regarded as the central work of Morris' career.

<sup>39</sup> Lloyd, Trevor. (1975, Summer). How to write a Utopia: William Morris' Medieval interests and *News from nowhere*. *Historical Reflections*. 2, p. 106.

<sup>40</sup> Thompson, E.P. (1977). *William Morris: Romantic to revolutionary*. New York: Pantheon Books p. 697.

<sup>41</sup> Calhoun, Blue. (1975). *The Pastoral vision of William Morris: The earthly paradise*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Morris, William. *News from nowhere. Collected Works. 16: News from nowhere, A dream of John Ball, A king's lesson*, p. 29.

- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 30. The Learning of a foreign language by such a method obviously had its advantages, according to Morris. "Rubbing speech into one another" is a novel way of describing the process of second-language acquisition.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. Morris's aversion to books for children probably stemmed from the fact that his early life was relatively free of the tyranny of enforced learning. Rousseau may have further strengthened his resolve on this point. Paradoxically, Morris — as an adult — loved books: he read, wrote and printed them with the greatest enjoyment. But for a child, texts were obviously a different matter.
- <sup>47</sup> Laslett, Peter. (1965). *The world we have lost*. London: Methuen and Company Ltd.
- <sup>48</sup> Morris. *News from nowhere*. p. 64. At question here is the validity of monolithic schooling for children. What were its real purposes? Why did it function in the mode it did? Was it of practical use to youngsters, or of greater use to industrial society? What rewards did the average child receive from Board schooling, apart from being exited as a quasi-literate. Morris, finding few positive answers for true education in his educational claim, obviously turned away from traditional schooling, with its regimentation, narrow curriculum and constrictive socio-economic value system. Emile may well have provided an alternative to the "unnatural" education he saw being perpetrated upon children.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 64.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid. The notion of "real" education, through natural growth and inclination, is evident here. Morris' conception of school as being an unpleasant place for any real learning to occur was reinforced by his occasional forays into Board and denominational schools. He was singularly unimpressed with what was being enacted in the name of education. The effects of Robert Lowe's "payment by results" colored the nature of English schooling to the end of the century, the period in which Morris witnessed the resultant negative, "unnatural" education.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Morris, William. How I became a socialist. *William Morris: Selected writings and designs*. pp. 33-34.
- <sup>55</sup> "The dream of John Ball" is an idealized account of the peasant's revolt of 1381. Ball was a wandering priest who preached social equity, demanding a better life for the oppressed lower orders of medieval society. It is not hard to see the parallels between Ball and Morris: Morris did much the same as Ball, even to the point of leading a "revolt." Also, Ball, being a socialist from the Middle Ages, held great appeal for Morris, who thought that civilization had taken a wrong turn after the fourteenth century. Morris therefore described a utopia set in 1381 — the medieval equivalent of his twenty-first century *News from nowhere*.
- <sup>56</sup> Morris, William. The beauty of life. *On art and socialism*, intro. by Holbrook Jackson. London: John Lehmann Ltd., 1947, p. 67. In Morris's own words: When some changes have come to pass, that perhaps will be speedier than most people think, doubtless education will both grow in quality and quantity; so that it may be, that as the nineteenth century may be called the Century of Commerce, the twentieth may be called the Century of Education. (ibid.)
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.