

**WILLIAM DE MORGAN, A
POST-VICTORIAN
REALIST. [CHICAGO-1920]**

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William de Morgan, a Post-Victorian Realist. [Chicago-1920] by Flora Warren Seymour

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FLORA WARREN SEYMOUR

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REALIST. [CHICAGO-1920]**

To
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I. AN INCIDENT

There is something of significance in the fact that *The Jungle* was the public sensation of the year of which *Joseph Vance* was the literary event. One was headstrong youth, the other calm maturity. Sinclair's flaming and passionate impatience set the world afire for a space, a very brief space; then the blaze died down, as fierce fires do. DeMorgan lighted the pleasant evening log and candle; and with the noise of the street shut out, we listened to the voice of a friend.

All this was not fifteen years ago. Sinclair is still a young man; the volcano active as ever, the eruptions as violent. But the flames fail to leap in answer; has his public grown calloused? DeMorgan has passed from us three years since; yet for evenings past and many more to come we are the richer by unforgettable tales of friends it is a joy to know.

But of all that long procession, from little *Joe* to old *Mrs. Picture*, dearest to us is the author himself. DeMorgan depicted life well because he had lived. He put real character before us because his own was sane, sincere, well-rounded. And about all the dear imaginary persons of his tales, enfolding and illuminating them, is the warm, rich, charming personality of William DeMorgan.

In one of his afterwords "to his readers only",

De Morgan protested against "the practice of ascribing views—political, religious or otherwise—expressed by characters in a book to its author." In this he was fully justified; nor will any one attempt to fasten upon him the burden of *Blind Jim's* irreligion or the *Reverend Benaiah Capstick's* virulent evangelicism. But who can read these very paragraphs of protest without feeling an actual personal acquaintance with the writer?

"Hold a writer of pure fiction answerable for the opinions of every one of his *dramatis personae*, and he will be limited in the choice of them to folk who are on all fours with every one else—conformists of a venomous type—good to be read about in bed by persons who suffer from insomnia, but good for nothing else.

"I may add that if the readers of this novel want anything altered in it, it shall be done in the second edition, provided that they are unanimous and that it will leave the text consecutive."

One may well be grateful that De Morgan did deal with others than conformists of a venomous type; but even they, under the spell of his wise and kindly humor, would probably have become good for much more than a cure for insomnia.

An incident thoroughly characteristic of the man underlies the letter reproduced as the frontispiece of this volume. An American admirer of *Joseph Vance* and his successors expressed some measure of his admiration in verses which outran by an additional quatrain the sonnet length, even as De Morgan's sto-

ries were apt to outrun the novel length decreed by present custom.

O, could I dip my pen in charity
 To write contentment on the book of years,
 Or could I win the tribute of those tears
 The loyal heart pays out so readily—
 Or might it be that men should think of me
 For one brief moment with a loving smile
 Perchance a lurking shadow to beguile
 Or help to set some bond of sorrow free.
 Thus wrought the workmen of an earlier day
 Who fashioned worlds more blessed than our own
 Where homely virtue sat upon her throne
 And ev'n affliction's creatures could be gay;
 Worlds where the weary traveler loved to stray
 To lose his trouble in another's woe
 And share another's bliss; but long ago
 The Secret with the Masters passed away.
 Till thou, DE MORGAN, with thy magic pen,
 Taught joy and simple faith to live again.

The writer of this poem is a collector of autographs as well as a lover of English prose; and in his letter sending De Morgan the tribute he intimated a willingness to have his collection worthily augmented. The response was a bit of De Morgan himself in its generosity, its individuality, its charm. Neatly squared in the center of the page, the author made this hearty acknowledgement of the compliment paid him:

Had I been told, ten years since,
 that I should live to write books
 that would find readers outside my
 own circle of friends, I should have
 been incredulous. But what should

I have said to a prediction that these books would be read in America and Australia?—and what to a forecast, strangest of all, that they should be thought worthy to be the subject of eighteen lines of verse as finished and skillful as yours just to hand? I don't know, but I thank their writer.

William De Morgan.

6-6-1910.

So far spoke De Morgan the author and artist. This alone would have been an adequate and far more than expected answer to his admirer's request. But De Morgan did not measure his giving. Turning the sheet about, he wrote this more personal message:

My dear Mr. Seymour—Your lines are charming—I need not say that in my own conceit I have done nothing to deserve such a tribute. But it is equally gratifying to have produced an impression that I have done something.

I suspect that I ought to know your name as a writer of verse. But indeed I know so little of my fellow authors.—You see, when I took to it, I had been so long outside the pale—making tiles, not tales. So forgive me!

This irregular form of epistle will leave you a nice clean autograph on an island.

Always truly and appreciatively yours,

Wm. De M.

His thought outran the page, and the final half-dozen lines were on the reverse side, still carefully kept from interfering with the more formal message,

in order to leave "a nice clean autograph on an island."

No signature would be needed for the recognition of this as a letter from William De Morgan. The keen intelligence that makes rules and the kindly heart that goes beyond rule; the artist who moulds language to his purpose and the humorist who plays with it at his whim; the sincere and unaffected modesty that small souls never know—here it all is.

And where else, in today's books, save in William De Morgan's?