

**THE PARTING OF
THE WAYS:
AN ADDRESS**

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The parting of the ways: an address by J. W. Mackail

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Univ. of
CALIFORNIA

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MDCCCCIII

This Address was given in the William Morris
Labour Church, at Leek, the Fifth of October,
MDCCCCII.

HK246
M24

TO VIKU
LABOUR CHURCH

IN GIVING THE FIRST OF THE AN-
nual Memorial Lectures which have been
instituted to commemorate Mr. Larner Sugden
in the town where he lived and worked, it would
be proper that some portion at least of my ad-
dress should be devoted to Mr. Sugden himself.
It was chiefly through his energy and devotion
that this Church was founded six years ago,
and that it has been sustained since. His early
death must in any case have been a severe loss
for this town and neighbourhood, to the cause
of labour, to the cause of Socialism, and to the
still wider cause of justice and humanity. That
loss is however the greater, that, by what I
gather was the unanimous testimony of all who
knew him, he was a human being of rare tem-
per and accomplishment. His influence, so I ap-
prehend, survives here less in the many build-
ings with which in the exercise of his daily
work he adorned this town and district, than
in the example which he set, and continues to
set, in the minds of his friends, of a life lived
single-heartedly and courageously, pursuing
truth and right, careless of self-interest, and with
an eye always fixed upon the high ideals which
those are unhappy who have never known, and
which those who have known but failed to fol-
low are unhappier still.

But, as no doubt was known to those who asked me to give this address, I had not the privilege of your late townsman's acquaintance, and was never brought into contact with him, except for one brief exchange of correspondence some years ago. The task and the pleasure of commemorating him personally must lie with others who are qualified to do so. It is another and a greater personality with which this town is associated in my mind, that of one whom he and all of us would own as master, William Morris himself. He was the real founder of this Church, which was set up to his memory and bears his name: and it is of him that I desire to begin by speaking. By a not inappropriate coincidence, the date fixed for this annual celebration, the birthday of Mr. Sugden, is only removed by three days from the date of Morris' death; and it is very fitting that their names should be joined in one commemoration.

I do not indeed propose to sketch Morris' life or to set forth his doctrine. With his life I have dealt elsewhere, both in the detailed biography which I have written, and which I am glad to say is now issued in a form that does not remove it beyond the reach of persons of fairly moderate means; and in a summarised sketch published as a penny pamphlet by the

Independent Labour Party. To this last I would refer any one who desires to make himself familiar with the main outlines of Morris' life and the central doctrines of his belief: though with these doctrines I hope most if not all of this audience are familiar. But Morris' connection with the staple industry of Leek, a quarter of a century ago, is an episode in his life which is in itself of exceptional interest: and it so happens that the two years during which he spent weeks and months together here are also years of special importance in his whole life: for it was in those years that the change began which turned him from a poet into a preacher, and from a Radical by association and impulse into a Socialist by hardly-won and steadily-held conviction. The parting of the ways was not sudden. It cannot be fixed down to any particular date: and indeed it was not until some years after he had ceased to work here with Mr. Wardle that he turned his mind at all definitely towards what became the politics and the religion of his later life. But in the life of the individual, as in the life of the community or nation, the social revolution is not an act, but a process; a process whose roots go deep into an unseen past, and whose growth lasts as long as life itself. Nor is it a process in which

any man, or any community, can stop short somewhere and say, "I have attained the goal." The horizon recedes before our advance. The Socialist ideal will always remain an ideal; and there is a sense in which we might say that fully realised Socialism is a contradiction in terms. "My kingdom is not of this world," said the greatest of Socialists. Yet it was into the world that he charged his followers to go out and preach the Gospel of that kingdom to every creature.

The period during which Morris spent so much of his time at Leek that he might almost be called a resident here began in 1875 and went on into 1877. That he came to this rather than to any other centre of the weaving and dyeing industry was owing to the mere accident of Mr. Thomas Wardle being well known to him as the brother-in-law of his own London manager. He had found his work as a designer and manufacturer of textiles hampered from the first by the bad colours of the wool or silk in which they were executed. Not only were the colours actually in use bad, but good colours could not be got. The dyeing industry, since the introduction of the earlier anilines, had sunk to the lowest level known in history. With hardly any exceptions the colours procurable

were both crude and fugitive ; nor did it mend matters that, since the golden age of adulteration had harnessed science to the wheels of profit-making, they were also for the most part impure. More especially the art of dyeing in indigo, for which this district had been celebrated a century ago, had been completely lost. It had to be recovered through experiments made from old books and from the recollections of some of the older workmen.

During those two years Morris was more occupied with problems of indigo and madder than with social questions ; and he sought relaxation from his daily work, and exercise for the higher powers of his mind, less in politics than in poetry. The epic of " Sigurd the Volsung," his largest, and, in the opinion of some, his greatest achievement in literature, was written during that time, and great parts of it actually in this town. His Saturdays and Sundays used to be spent, according to the state of the weather or the fancy of the moment, in writing poetry (sometimes with fingers so stiff from the blue-vat that they would hardly hold the pen), or in excursions to the more romantic or historical places within reach—Lichfield, or Ashbourne, or Dovedale, and whenever the chance offered, in fishing, the one out-door or in-door