

manner in which they responded to appeals for support. It is clear that the scope and strength of the protest played a significant part in the modification of opinion about the future of the Gallery. There is still a good deal to be done, but the outlook is brighter than we might at one time have dared to hope.

The next issue is due in April and the closing date for contributions is 21 March. I shall probably be away in the early part of April, so I shall have to be very firm about this deadline.

Good wishes to you all.

Peter Preston,
Hon. Secretary.

Reformism vs. "the Social-Revolution": Eight Letters from Morris to James Mavor in the University of Toronto Library

At the founding of the Socialist League on December 30th, 1884, James Mavor was one of twenty-three signatories to its manifesto and original members of its Provisional Council, despite reservations which he later expressed in an exchange of letters with William Morris. The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto contains eight letters to Mavor from Morris, along with one from Andreas Scheu, and three from May Morris. These letters record the tensions between Morris' views and those of his more conservative correspondent, and Mavor's objections inspired Morris to an eloquent and principled defense of his revolutionary beliefs.

James Mavor was born in 1854, the eldest of the nine children of Mary Bridie, a Scottish sea captain's daughter, and James Mavor senior, a schoolteacher who moved with his family from Stranraer to Glasgow when the younger James was eight. Mavor completed Glasgow High School, and studied economics at night school while he worked. He was also aroused at the plight of the urban poor, did volunteer social work as a member of the Kyrle Society, and became a founding director of the Glasgow Workingmen's Dwellings Company, editor of the Scottish Art Review, and Professor of Political Economy and statistics at St. Mungo's College in 1889. The Fisher Library's biographical summary of Mavor does not mention the Socialist League, but records that he was a member of the Glasgow Fabian Society, and stood in 1892 as a Liberal candidate for the Glasgow suburb of Tradeston. He published The Scottish Railway Strike in 1891, and emigrated in 1892 to Ontario, where he became Professor of Political Economy at the University of Toronto. In Canada, he published a series of books on British, Russian, and Canadian economic policy: The English Railway Rate Question (1894); Emigration and Immigration (1899); Report to the Board of Trade on the North West of Canada with Special Reference to Wheat Production for Export (1905); Government Telephones (1914); Economic History of Russia (1914); Niagara in Politics (1925); and The Russian Revolution (posthumously, in 1928). His autobiography, My Windows on the Street of the World, appeared in 1923, and he died in 1925 at the age of 71. Mavor seems to have shared some of Morris' other interests: for many years he campaigned for the establishment of a Toronto art gallery and museum, and among the more than eighty boxes of papers and other items donated to the library at his death is a notebook of information on Iceland.

Morris did not date all his eight letters to Mavor by year, but he seems to have written them between December, 1884 and late 1887. Morris sent his first letter from 6 Chester Street, Edinburgh on December 13th [1884, from Le Mire's chronology], and invites Mavor to meet him when he arrives in Glasgow, preferably at St. Andrews Hall; if none of the comrades can join him there, Morris adds, they should write him at St. Andrews or at the home of Professor Nichol, 14 Montgomerie Crescent, Kelvinside. In the next letter, written at Kelmscott on February 21st, 1885, Morris agrees readily to a request that he speak in Glasgow on his next

trip north, and asks Mavor to "settle with Scheu and our other Edinburgh friends as to details, and also let me know what sort of address you want from me."

Mavor clearly disliked the inaugural issue of Commonweal, and Morris politely replies:

Re the Commonweal: couldn't you kindly go a little more into detail as to the grounds of your dissatisfaction However I want on all grounds to have a frank criticism on our doings, so please be more explicit. To my mind the second number will be a strong one; but perhaps you will not agree with me. Some space we have been obliged to give to the wretched Soudan business, but Bax's article I think very good: Engels' article is a very important one; and (with excuses for mentioning myself) I think my poem the best short poem I have written.

E. B. Bax's article for the March Commonweal, on "Gordon and the Soudan," is, in fact, an uncharacteristically forceful denunciation of the British slaughter of the forces of the Soudanese Mahdi.

Gordon is killed. Who is to blame? We answer proximately Gordon himself, and ultimately the English capitalist class . . . Spartanlike bravery, truly, to slaughter ill-armed and ill-disciplined barbarians with the odds, as proved again and again, a hundred to one in favour of your coming out with a whole skin.

Engels' article on "England in 1845 and in 1885" followed the poem Morris mentions, "The Message of the March Wind," which later became the preface to his narrative poem about the Paris Commune, "The Pilgrims of Hope;" Morris' remark confirms that he wrote "The Message of the March Wind" before he later decided to use it as the first installment of the longer work.

Morris continues:

I rejoice to hear that you are doing so well in Glasgow: we ought to spare no pains in spreading the light there.

I suppose you saw the reports of our would-be leader's speech on the Thames embankment last Monday? more preposterous humbug I never heard of. However it will answer his purpose for the time and make him notorious.

In his reply Mavor seems to have complained that provincial members had not been consulted about the Council's Soudanese resolution; Morris also enclosed a copy of "the Soudan manifesto" in a letter to May Morris on March 11th, so this seems to have been an independent document.

In any case, Morris apparently responded twice to Mavor's letter. On March 23rd, he confirmed plans for his visit to Glasgow, and apologized for his failure to consult provincial

representatives: "I quite admit that you are right, and that it was an oversight not sending proofs to country members of the Council. There was however no malice prepece in it; it was because of haste. On reflection I dont see why the names should have been appended at all to it or to any documents not of the first importance." On March 26th, Morris wrote again, at the behest of the Council, to defend the substance of their resolution and concur in their views. The substance of the letter is an eloquent denunciation of British imperialism, so it is sad that the autograph is now frayed and torn, and many words are lost (passages marked with [* . . .] are my interpolations).

Morris first apologizes again for the Council's failure to consult its out-of-London members, but remarks that Mavor's objections to the style of the "Soudan Manifesto" seem in fact to an implicit objection to its content, and personally defends what has been in part his draft: "the style & matter interpenetrate as they should do in all artistic work: in short you may object to the spirit of it, but I must assert that it is very well written." He adds that

in our opinion it was quite necessary to attack the Gordon-worship which has been used as a stalking-horse for such wide-spread [. . . ssion/*remission?] of Gordon from any [*responsibility; the Council's views are based not upon inference but on] his public actions: he betrayed the trust reposed in him, and used his military and administrative capacity for the purpose of bringing the Soudanese under the subjection [of British] tyranny: to make a hero of such a man is a direct attack on public morality. . . . We do not assume any facts but draw conclusions from events which undeniably took place.

Mavor may have objected that the Mahdi, a religious as well as political leader, was not a legitimate representative of the Soudanese, for Morris answers:

We assume (as we must) that the Mahdi is the representative of his countrymen in their heroic defence of their liberties: on this assumption we may well 'approve' of him, if we are not to condemn Garibaldi or "Wallace wight". As to his fanaticism, you should remember that any [*popular] movement in the East is bound to take a religious turn; the condition of development of the Eastern peoples [*brings] this on them. Surely it must be considered an article of faith with us to [*join with] all popular revolutionary [*movements, whether or not we agree] with all the tenets of the revolutionists: e. g., we are internationalists not nationalists, yet we sympathize with the Irish revolt against English tyranny; neither does any of us withhold his sympathy from the Highland Crofters because they mingle fanaticism with a righteous resistance to oppression.

Mavor also seems to have objected to disparagement of religion (i. e., Christianity) in the Soudan or League Manifestos or in Commonweal. Two entries in the first Commonweal column "Signs of the Times" comment acerbically on "'civilizers and

Christianisers' of savage races of all times and all countries," but the Manifesto itself makes no mention of Christianity. Without access to the actual text of the Soudan resolution, one can only speculate that Mavor may have objected to a general anticlerical tone, or to the League Manifesto's closing evocation of "the religion of Socialism, the only religion which the Socialist League professes."

Morris responds in any case that

This objection is properly one against the style; but it gives one the opportunity of saying that it is not religion which we attack in [our] manifesto, but that hypocrisy which has allied itself to the exploitation of barbarous peoples, and which is at once so detestable and so mean, that it is almost necessary to use mockery as a weapon against it.

Later in the letter, Morris responds to Mavor's apparent recommendation of a treatise by the positivist Edward Beesly, perhaps his International Policy, which was reprinted in 1884.

I have not Beesleys tract by me; but I have read it; and I must say that well-meaning as it is, it seems to me a frigid performance; besides it has to a socialist the capital defect of not even alluding to that market-hunting of the capitalist, which is really the key to the whole subject. As far as I know it has had no effect at all, whereas the League manifesto [*has not been criticized] except by you and our friends [*of the S. D. F., and has evoked much support.

Morris' conclusion is a strong denunciation of imperialism and all its works:

you must forgive my saying that however you may feel the atrocity of the Soudan War, I scarcely think you realize how entirely it is part and parcel of the system of [*artificial] shortage from which we [*suffer] at home, and which it is the aim of the Socialist League to attack and destroy.

I am Dear Mr. Mavor

Yours fraternally/ William Morris

Mavor was apparently not convinced, and the remaining four letters from Morris are less personal: one concerns a proposed speaking trip north, another invites Mavor to submit material for Commonweal, and two concern possible Morris and Company commissions. An internal reference dates one letter as October 15th, 1885, and another was written July 7th, 1887; the remaining two are dated only "September 11th" and "April 16th," without year.

The October 15th, 1885 letter notes that Morris is "not very well at present," but that he hopes to improve, and "if you could rub people up a bit I think I shall be able to make a stomping tour before next summer." Mavor seems to have asked whether Morris would like to meet Adam Birkmyre, the author of Practicable Socialism (54 pages; second ed., Glasgow, 1885).

Morris is willing but reserved:

I read Birkmyres pamphlet but thought it a very weak performance, and by no means calculated to advance the cause: though doubtless well meant: it is one of these attempts which people are always at now of trying to find a 'royal road' for revolution.

Mavor still seems a member of the Glasgow branch of the Socialist League at this stage, for Morris adds an exhortatory postscript: "I think you ought to try setting up more branches in Glasgow, this winter."

In the letter dated September 11th, Morris asks Mavor to write something for Commonweal, and his brief letter from Merton Abbey, dated July 7th, 1887, thanks Mavor for an order to Morris and Co., and accepts it gladly, "if we could agree as to conditions, time & C with your friends." In the letter dated April 16th, Morris makes a more substantive response to Mavor's apparent inquiry about design of attractive, cheap furniture for workpeople.

But I rather wonder that you a socialist should have anything to do with such a humbugging business as this workman's cheap (?) furniture. I tried to knock it on the head years & years ago. Here's the point--

Whatever is cheap is made by machinery and in huge quantities. A special design for a piece of furniture means at the least trebling its cost more likely 10 folding it. The cheapest chair that we can sell cost about 7s/0 (and they are made 4 or 5 dozen at a time too) a workman can get a chair for 1s/6, and as you very well know he must buy them as cheap as he can. I beg you to dismiss from your mind the idea that the workman can afford any art of any sort whatever in the teeth of the 'Iron Law.' The workmans two rooms at Manchester (which by the by were pretty dismal), could only be attained to by a jolly workman a foreman at 5 pounds per week. So here's '3 cheers for the Social Revolution.' For till it comes art must be in the hands of the Monopolists and their parasites--whereof I am one--/Yours very truly/ William Morris.

(Which is not to say that simple mass-produced designs--to be executed by others of the "Monopolists' parasites," of course-- might not provide the rest of us with more comfortable places from which to bring forth the cheers.)

The Mavor papers also include one letter, dated April 3rd, 1885, from Andreas Scheu, the Austrian-born socialist master-joiner and author of Umsturzkeime (Seeds of Revolution), and three from May Morris. In a graceful hand on Kelmscott House stationary, Scheu begins with a request on Morris' behalf for a contribution for Commonweal ("You must, in fact, write us something"), and stoically adds that "I have neither found work (bredwinning work) nor lodgings as yet. But next week I expect to get into something./ Until then you will have to wait for a decent letter from me. At present I am not in a mood to write."

He then appeals for a Commonweal contribution from Glasier as well, then closes with "Awaiting your early reply."

May Morris' letters date from 1910-1914. The first, written March 1st, 1910 from 224 Riverside Drive, New York, confirms the time of a visit to Canada later that month, and adds that "if the Montreal people are difficult about the fee," she will speak for "\$50 or \$60," "a far lower fee than I am taking now, but it will be something of a holiday. . . ." On September 30th of the same year, she encloses a description of her edition of the Collected Works, and remarks that this "long and serious undertaking, and absorbs all my time and energy." She hopes to return to North America the next year for a holiday, but is uncertain whether she will be able to do so (and indeed, did not).

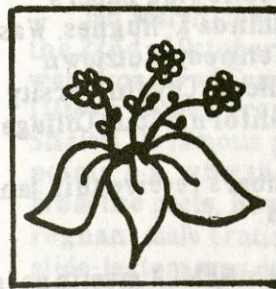
In her third letter, dated October 24th, 1914, from Kelmscott Manor, she thanks Mavor for a letter of praise for her introductions to the Collected Works, and concludes with her reactions to the two-month-old war:

In the middle of this time of disaster I have just finished the introduction to the 24th volume--and have now a moment's leisure to look back and wonder how they got done at all.

I had intended coming over in the spring for a month or two's change of scene, but one could not leave England, or 'rest' in such a mement. Right and left one is touched by deeds of great personal heroism, harrowed by unspeakable suffering borne with stoicism--touched among other things by the arrival of your Canadian troops--but all this majestic spectacle of human enthusiasm and endurance and sacrifice, what a price the whole world will have to pay for it.

Mavor never seems to have lost his qualified respect for Morris. Scribbled notes among his papers for a speech on Morris and socialism restate his reformist beliefs, but note Morris' opposition to them. According to Mavor, Morris was also not an admirer of the Scottish landscape; he "thought of Scotland as a raw-boned and artless country which men had not taken the trouble to make habitable." Curiously, Mavor assumes that Morris would have disliked the rugged and sublime scenery of the North American west; he "would have found no beauty in the limitless expanses of prairies and the inaccessible peaks of our mountains" (m. s. notebook, page 36).

And the limitless glaciers and inaccessible peaks of Iceland? Was this country not "raw-boned"--and impressive--as well? Here, as in his political exchanges, James Mavor may have simplified Morris' views and tried to smooth his rough edges; but these edges remain in the correspondence which Mavor took respectful care to preserve.



WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY

in the UNITED STATES

NEWSLETTER

January, 1988

A. ANNOUNCEMENTS

As reported in the October *Newsletter*, there will be two full sessions on William Morris at this year's Modern Language Association Convention in San Francisco. The general topic for the first session is "Morris and His Contemporaries: the Arts." At this session, Florence Boos, the University of Iowa, will speak on "Robert Browning and 'The Defence of Guenevere'"; Carole Silver, Yeshiva University, will speak on the Arthurian Woman and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle; and Jan Marsh, London, will speak on "Elizabeth Siddall, Dante Rossetti, and Morris." The general title for the second session is "Morris and His Contemporaries: Did He Make a Difference?" At this session, Gary Aho, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, will speak on "Morris, Edward Bellamy, and American Socialism"; Hartley Spatt, the Maritime College at the State University of New York, will speak on "Morris and the Movements"; and Norman Kelvin, the City University of New York, will respond to these papers, paying particular attention to letters Morris wrote to Americans in the 1880's and 1890's.

Among the hundreds of other sessions scheduled for this huge convention are several that may be of interest to Society members:

A session on "Pre-Raphaelitism: A Reevaluation" includes the following papers: "Scholarship and the Pre-Raphaelites," by W.E. Fredeman, University of British Columbia; "Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelites," by David G. Riede, Ohio State University, Columbus; "Pre-Raphaelitism, Formalism, and Postmodernism," by Dianne S. Macleod, University of California, Davis; and "Reading Pre-Raphaelite Painting," by George P. Landow, Brown University.

A session on "When Writer is Equally Artist: Blake, Rossetti, Beerbohm" includes the following papers: "Blake: The Verbal in the Visual," by Stephen Leo Carr, University of Pittsburgh; "Out-Keatsing Keats, Rossetti as Poet-Painter," by W.E. Fredeman, University of British Columbia; "One Never Knows Where One is with These Ironists: Beerbohm's Dissimilar Arts," by N. John Hall. Anne K. Mellor, University of California, Los Angeles, will be the respondent.

A session on "The Victorian Sage as a Woman" includes the following papers: "Carlyle, Nightingale, and the Female Sage," by George P. Landow, Brown University; "Ruskin and the Matriarchal Logos," by Paul L. Sawyer, Cornell University; and "Victorian Women, Wisdom, and Southeast Asia," by Susan J. Morgan, Vassar College. John R. Kucich, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, will be the respondent.

A session on "Twentieth-Century Versions of Victorian Literature: Adaptations, Limitations, Continuities, Retellings, Subversions" includes the following papers: "Inventing Victorians: Virginia Woolf's 'Memoirs of a Novelist,'" by Mary Kaiser Loges, Viterbo College; "Distortion vs. Reevaluation: Three Twentieth Century Responses," by Jerome Meckier, University of Kentucky; and "Two Readings of 'The Dover Bitch,'" by Gerhard J. Joseph, City University of New York.

A session on "Women Authors and the Victorian Publishing Industry" includes the following papers: "Publishing Victorian Womanhood: Sara Coleridge, S.T. Coleridge, and the Politics of Canonization," by Bradford K. Mudge, University of Colorado, Denver; "Making a Virtue out of Weakness: the Female Quest and the Victorian Publishing Industry," by Carol Hanbery Mackay, University of Texas, Austin; "On Becoming Beatrix Potter: Potter and Her Publishers," by Catherine Golden, Skidmore College. Patrick Brantlinger, Indiana University, Bloomington, will be the respondent.