

A Reminiscence of William Morris

As far as the School could have observed, there was nothing very noticeable about William Morris at Marlborough. As one tries to remember him, one recalls a lad somewhat larger than his compeers of the fifth form, with a frank pleasant countenance, thick, dark, curly hair making his forehead rather marked, and giving his face a somewhat formal as well as massive look—all very much what anyone from his last portrait would imagine him to have been. It may be accidental that some warm blue colour in his checked waistcoat forms part of the general recollection. When tidings came, how elaborate were his rooms, and how he had become a celebrity in Oxford, surprise was manifested in the School.

It is very possible, if the School reports of that time were examined, that like others who have risen to unexpected fame, it would appear that he was much better up in modern subjects than was generally the case.

That 'the boy was father of the man' will be pretty evident from this. The Captain of our Dormitory, who was much more fond of outdoor life than of study, and the dream of whose life was the life military, made great friends with Morris—not that their tastes were at all similar; but that the former having a passion for listening to tales of romance (a source of no little trouble to us in the Dormitory, whom he was for ever bothering for tales) found quite a repertoire of them in Morris. 'Such wonderful stories' he would say 'that fellow Morris is able to tell one'. But Morris was not always in such favour with his friend, for at other times the friend in the height of indignation, his own conservative instincts taking great offence, would be inveighing against the extraordinary opinions to which Morris had been giving utterance.

W.

from The Marlburian of 3 December 1898

In this Life of William Morris of 1899, J.W. Mackail quotes a little directly, and a little indirectly, from his account of Morris by a schoolfellow. What he did not quote is quite as interesting as what he did.