

# Jane Morris and her male correspondents<sup>1</sup>

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## I

In recent years, feminist scholars have valuably drawn attention to the supportive role played by exchanges of letters by groups of women in the Victorian period (and after). Because my interest in Jane Morris came about through editing her letters to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, now known to have been her second lover, I thought it might be appropriate to discuss Jane Morris in relation to the *men* with whom she corresponded. Although Frank Sharp and Jan Marsh point out in their splendid edition of Jane's letters from which this series of lectures derives, that the range of her correspondents was limited compared with that of, say, Georgiana Burne-Jones, especially after the onset of Jenny's epilepsy from 1876,<sup>2</sup> it nevertheless includes a number of highly intelligent men. The most important of these, in the order in which she met them, and in which they will be considered, are Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Cormell Price, Philip Webb, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and Sydney Cockerell.

## II

Rossetti was born in 1828, eleven years before Jane. At the theatre in Oxford in October 1857, Rossetti and Burne-Jones spotted a 'stunner' and invited her to sit for them. Through them, she came to know Morris, who fell in love with her, painted her as *La Belle Iseult*, and married her in April 1859; Rossetti was married to Elizabeth Siddal from 1860 to 1862, when she died. The intimate relationship between Rossetti and Jane seems to have begun around 1865, when the Morrises had given up Red House and moved to Queen Square, and Rossetti was living in Cheyne Walk. Rossetti arranged for her to be photographed by J.R. Parsons, and she became his favourite model. The details of their relationship remain unknow-

able, but there seems no doubt of the strength of their mutual attraction.

In his young manhood, Rossetti was evidently a most attractive person, as seen in the impact he made on Morris, Burne-Jones and many others, and in the vivacity of his early letters, especially those to Ford Madox Brown. Neat word-play often occurs, as in his letter to Morris in May 1857 about Burne-Jones's physique: 'You know no doubt of Ned's ups and downs. I hope he's getting round – not in the wombat sense however – that seems far off indeed'. The vocabulary is full of slang: he asks Allingham, of the first section of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* which had just been published in the *Cornhill* in July 1860, 'Who *could* read it, or anything about such bosh?', while an invitation to a friend in November 1861 ends: 'Two or three blokes & a cove are coming here on Friday evening at 8 or so ... Nothing but oysters & of course the seediest of clothes'. As their editor William Fredeman wrote, these early letters show a man 'impelled by enthusiasm, curiosity and an innate *joie de vivre*, and, most important of all, as yet unburdened by responsibilities and guilt, and blessedly unaware of the physical and psychological maladies that would beset him in the inexorable march of time'.<sup>3</sup>

As is known, Morris and Rossetti took the joint tenancy of Kelmescott Manor in the summer of 1871, and Rossetti wrote a number of letters to his family and friends expressing his pleasure in the place. He told his mother on 17 July:

This house and its surroundings are the loveliest 'haunt of ancient peace' that can well be imagined - the house purely Elizabethan in character though it may probably not be as old as that, but in this dozy neighbourhood that style of building seems to have obtained for long after changes in fashion had occurred elsewhere. It has a quantity of farm buildings of the thatched squatted order, which look settled down into a purring state of comfort, but seem (as Janey said the other day) as if, were you to stroke them, they wd move.<sup>4</sup>

Here Rossetti wrote some thirty sonnets for his 'House of Life' sequence, in a group discussed by J.R. Wahl in 1954 as the 'Kelmescott Love Sonnets'.<sup>5</sup> These show Rossetti at his most romantic and tender, as he places the relationship within the landscape. Rossetti sent a copy of 'The Lovers' Walk' to William Bell Scott in August 1871; it runs:

Sweet twining hedgeflowers wind-stirred in no wise  
 On this June day; and hand that clings to hand:-  
 Still glades; and meeting faces scarcely fann'd: --  
 An osier-coloured stream that draws the skies

Deep to its heart; and mirrored eyes in eyes:--  
 Fresh hourly wonder o'er the Summer land

Of light and cloud; and two souls softly spann'd  
 With one o'erarching heaven of smiles and sighs: --

Even such their path, whose bodies lean unto  
 Each other's visible sweetness amorously, --  
 Whose passionate hearts lean by Love's high decree  
 Together on his heart for ever true,  
 As the cloud-foaming firmamental blue  
 Rests on the blue line of a foamless sea.<sup>6</sup>

Rossetti succeeds in conveying the mutuality of the love between the 'two souls' by using a number of plurals – two hands, 'meeting faces', 'bodies', 'passionate hearts' – while the concluding simile suggests equality – sky and sea are equally significant and equally blue. There is no way in which we can know whether Jane shared the depth of feeling evidenced by the poet, but I for one would like to think so. Poems like these were to be the focus of attack in *The Fleshly School of Poetry*.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship survived Rossetti's breakdown in 1872, and Jane sat again for him later in that year and in 1873 and 1875. However, by 1876 she had distanced herself from him, disturbed by his dependence on chloral hydrate, although she remained friendly with him to the end, sitting for him in 1878 and 1881, the year in which he died. Some of Rossetti's later poems and letters inevitably convey a more troubled sense of the relationship, but also on occasion assert the depth of his feeling for her, notably on 31 May 1878, when he proclaimed that he had felt for her 'a feeling far deeper (though I know you have never believed me) than I have ever entertained towards any other living creature at any time of my life'. He was still capable of entertaining vivacity, as when he advised the young Hall Caine in March 1880 to avoid words of fashionable jargon such as 'mythopoeic' and 'anthropomorphism': 'I do not find life long enough to know in the least what they mean. They are both very long and very ugly indeed - the latter only suggesting to me a Vampire or a Somnambulant Cannibal'. He continued to write affectionately to Jane, showing respect for her intelligence, as on 4 February 1880: 'I suppose you have read [Keats's] *Endymion*, - if not, it is worth your while, though not the easiest possible reading'. Jane's last letter to Rossetti, probably in October 1881, refers to the publication of his *Ballads and Sonnets*: 'you spoke of sending me the book last week, it has not reached me yet, I mention this fearing some miscarriage, but perhaps you put off sending it till you return to town'.<sup>8</sup> (Rossetti was in the Lake District at the time).

Rossetti died on 9 April 1882 at Birchington-on-Sea. Jane wrote to Cornell Price on 28 April saying that she had not seen Rossetti since the previous August, but had had letters from him that had given the impression he was in normal

health; thus ‘The effect on me of the sudden news of Gabriel’s death was quite unlooked for’. She had ‘mourned him as one dead 6 or 7 years ago when I gave up seeing much of him owing to chloral drinking’, but found that the unexpected news of his death had come as a great shock to her, especially on a day when Jenny had also been ill.<sup>9</sup>

### III

The next two men to be discussed, with whom her relationships were without the passion of that with Rossetti, were both slightly nearer to Jane in age. Cornell Price was born in 1835, and so was four years older than Jane. He was at King Edward’s School in Birmingham with Burne-Jones, and went on to Brasenose College, Oxford, where he became one of Morris’s closest friends. Kelvin remarks that, although Morris and Price were lifelong friends, ‘the surviving letters are an unsatisfactory record of the fact. Price’s diaries attest to regular and frequent meetings through the years’.<sup>10</sup> After graduating, Price studied for eighteen months at the Radcliffe Infirmary, but found the operating theatre disturbing and abandoned medicine. In 1860 he became tutor to the son of a Russian Count, with whom he spent three years travelling in Europe and then in Russia. He returned to England in 1863, and began teaching at Haileybury College – a public school catering for the sons of service officers – where he became Head of the Modern Side. In 1874, Price became the first headmaster of the United Services College in the newly established Devon town of Westward Ho!<sup>11</sup> The College catered mainly for the sons of families from the colonies, and prepared them for the Army Entrance Examinations. Its most famous pupil was Rudyard Kipling, the nephew of Burne-Jones. The second chapter of Kipling’s autobiographical *Something of Myself* deals with the years 1878 to 1882:

Then came school at the far end of England [from South Kensington]. The Head of it was a lean, slow-spoken, bearded, Arab-complexioned man whom till then I had known as one of my Deputy-Uncles at The Grange - Cornell Price, otherwise ‘Uncle Crom’.

The description of the school is distinctly unglamorous:

The United Services College was in the nature of a company promoted by poor officers and the like for the cheap education of their sons ... Even by the standards of those days it was primitive in its appointments, and our food would now raise a mutiny in Dartmoor [presumably the prison]. I remember no time, after home-tips had been spent, when we would not eat dry bread if we could steal it from the trays in the basement before tea.

Nevertheless, there was little illness, and less ‘perversion’, perhaps thanks to the Head’s policy, by which the boys were allowed to participate in ‘incessant riots and wars between the Houses’ so that they were ‘dead tired’ before going to bed. Kipling found his first term ‘horrible’ and his first year and a half ‘not pleasant’, but bullying ceased when he developed in strength in his fourteenth year, and he made two very close friends, with whom he advanced up the school in what he calls a Triple Alliance. Encouraged by his English and Classics master, Kipling began reading poetry, and writing. In later discussions, he discovered that Price had kept a close eye on him and his behaviour. He remarks: ‘Many of us loved the Head for what he had done for us, but I owed him more than all of them put together; and I think I loved him even more than they did’. It was Price who told him in the summer of 1882 that at the end of the holidays he would be going back to India to work on a paper in Lahore. Price also remarked, when awarding a prize to Kipling for a poem he had written, that ‘if I went on I might be heard of again’.<sup>12</sup>

Back in England in the spring of 1896, the Kipling family took a house in Torquay. One of their visitors was Price – ‘now turned into “Uncle Crom” or just “Crommy”’. Not surprisingly, they discussed Kipling’s schooldays:

... I reviled him for the badness of our food at Westward Ho! To which he replied: ‘We-el! For one thing, we were all as poor as church mice. Can you remember anyone who had as much as a bob a week for pocket money? I can’t ...’ Speaking of sickness and epidemics, which were unknown to us, he said: ‘I expect you were healthy because you lived in the open almost as much as Dartmoor ponies’.

It was at this time that Kipling had the idea of writing ‘some tracts or parables on the education of the young. These, for reasons honestly beyond my control, turned themselves into a series of tales called *Stalky and Co*’.<sup>13</sup> The book, relating activities of three boys, Stalky, M’Turk and Beetle, was published in 1908, and dedicated to Price. An attractive account is given in it of the Head’s study, which Beetle is allowed to use when editing the college magazine; it is hard not to feel that Kipling is remembering his own experience:

[The Head] gave Beetle the run of his brown-bound, tobacco-scented library; prohibiting nothing, recommending nothing. There Beetle found a fat armchair, a silver inkstand, and unlimited pens and paper. There were scores and scores of ancient dramatists ... *The Earthly Paradise*; *Atalanta in Calydon*; and Rossetti - to name only a few ... the Head, drifting in ... would read here a verse and here another of these poets; opening up avenues. And, slow breathing, with half-shut eyes above his cigar, would he speak of great men living, and journals, long dead,

founded in their riotous youth, of years when all the planets were little new-lit stars trying to find their places in the uncaring void, and he, the Head, knew them as young men know one another.<sup>14</sup>

Jane will have met Price in Oxford, but the first letter in the correspondence does not appear until late February 1877. He is addressed in it as ‘My dearest Brother’, and the tone is very relaxed. Jane sympathises with him over ‘the absence of Valentines’, adding ‘I never get them and never think of sending any until too late, but you no doubt have had them in shoals all your life’. Price rented a folly called Broadway Tower in Gloucestershire from 1866 to 1878, used for holidays to which many friends were invited. A letter of Jane’s in the summer 1877 concludes, after making some sensible suggestions as to how a family visit to the Tower might be managed, with a reference to May, who was fifteen at the time: ‘May’s excitement is tremendous at the coming expedition, she wants to sleep in the top of the Tower’. A following letter conveys the pleasure Jane and May felt in their holiday visit.<sup>15</sup>

Although Price gave up the Tower in 1878, and retired from the College in 1894 – soon after which he married and moved to London – his friendship with Jane lasted. It was to him that she wrote about her shock on hearing the news of the death of Rossetti on 9 April 1882, as we have seen. Price did not follow Morris into Socialism; his diary for 1 January 1885 records a conversation with Burne-Jones about ‘W.M.’s new departure, which both of us regret, especially as it will lead to worry and perhaps broken health, and certainly neglect of art’. A later letter from Jane, of 2 September 1888, makes a strange reference to herself and to politics: ‘When shall we see you here? Don’t quite forget your poor old, bald, toothless, broken backed friend ... I have a new disease called “Socialism on the brain”. I forget if I acquainted you with the fact before - if so pray forgive me, as loss of memory is but another symptom of the same malady’.<sup>16</sup>

Price was on good terms with May, who noted in her Introduction to the *Collected Works of William Morris*, Vol. XVIII, that ‘In later years Cormell Price came with his family to live at Minster Lovel, his companionship a lasting solace when everything was changed’. But the Prices were to move on; in October 1908, Jane asked Blunt if he knew of ‘a cottage of a very small kind’ to let in the locality: ‘I ask because a very old friend of ours, Cormell Price, is wanting to live near Horsham, as his boy is going to the school “Blue-Coats” there’. In August 1909 Jane told Cockerell that ‘Mr. Price is coming here for the day’; subsequent letters show her great sadness at the news of Price’s throat-cancer – ‘So it has come to this Dear Crom! it is heartbreaking’ – and his death in April 1910. She wrote to Blunt: ‘Our dear old friend Cormell Price has died at Rottingdean, May is going to his funeral tomorrow, it was a great grief to me that I could not go to him during illness’.<sup>17</sup>

## IV

Our next correspondent, Philip Webb, met Morris when both were working in G.E. Street's architect practice in Oxford in 1856, and they soon became close friends. Webb was born in 1831 in Oxford, the son of a doctor, and so was eight years older than Jane. Morris commissioned Webb to design Red House in 1859, and so Jane will have come to know him in those early years. In the earliest letter we have from Jane to him, in the summer of 1871, he is addressed as 'Dear Webb', which is surprising in its singularity – he is the only man addressed in this way. Webb's letter of reply addresses her as 'Dear Janey' and responds seriously to her enquiries about Lechlade church, Shelley's 'A Summer Evening Churchyard', reputedly written there, and Goethe's strange novel *Elective Affinities*. He treats her as an intellectual equal, which is all the more striking in the context of his remark earlier in the letter that 'I had not forgotten that you were gone from these parts', suggesting his awareness of her early life. The relationship also had a practical side; on 25 July 1871 she wrote to thank Webb for sending an 'elaborate' and 'beautiful' design for embroidery, which she would work 'carefully in fine wool on blue serge I think, taking care to get different shades of blue for the flowers'.<sup>18</sup>

In fact Jane had written notes to Webb two years earlier, from Bad-Ems, when Morris took her to the spa for the sake of her health. His own letter of 15 August 1869 had ended by telling Webb that Jane was asleep, but would add 'a line or two' when she woke up. She evidently did so, as the letter goes on:

My finger-tips are sound as you see by this - and fit for much more hard labour - I feel that I have not much else about me that is good for anything, but I have a sort of presentiment (though of course you don't believe in such things) that I may make a rapid turn - and feel myself well all of a sudden - and then I have another presentiment that should this change come - all those I now call my Friends would also change - and would not be able to stand me.

Apart from the reference to Webb's lack of belief in presentiments – he was well known for his down-to-earthness – it is difficult to know what to make of this remark, but it suggests some lack of confidence on Jane's part. At the end of the letter of 20 August Jane added, less mysteriously:

P.S. I have picked you up two tunes - one called 'The Last Rose of Summer' and the other the 'Mabel Walzes'. Seriously I have heard but one fine piece all this time.

This suggests that she and Webb shared some musical tastes. On 27 August Jane added a 'word or two' to Morris's letter: 'I am sorry to hear you have not got rid of those rheumatic pains. I laughed at your joke about them if I did not understand

it, but I won't say I did not'. Morris's letter on 3 September, when the pair were about to leave Bad-Elms, ends 'Love from Janey'.<sup>19</sup>

In her illuminating recent study *Jane Morris. The Burden of History*, Wendy Parkins discusses two letters Webb wrote to Jane in September 1872, after Rossetti's breakdown and the beginning of his recovery, but before his return to the Manor, a difficult time in Jane's life. Parkins suggests that the letters show increasing intimacy in the relationship. In the first, on the 7 September, Webb wrote:

I was very glad to have your letter because it was written without my asking for it - and I very much wish to have your confidence in my sympathy (if you think it would be worth anything) ... Of course I know the strength of resource in despair, well enough. That is, the risk of cutting oneself off from the help of any one, so as to avoid the risk of being deserted by them ...

In the later letter, on 12 September, Webb told her:

I have always taken a great interest in you, and none the less that time has tossed us all about, and made us play other parts than we were set upon. I see that you play yours, well & truly under the changes, and I feel deeply sympathetic on that account.

But Webb seems to shy away from greater intimacy, adding: 'Please believe that I in no way wish to penetrate into sorrows wh I can in no way relieve'.<sup>20</sup>

However, Webb was always one of Jane's most sympathetic friends. In September 1898, Mackail – at work on his biography of Morris – was surprised and upset to find that Jane objected to the projected inclusion in the book of a drawing by E.H. New of 'a bit of old Oxford (off Holywell St) in which she lived before her marriage'; Burne-Jones had approved, as had Webb. But when Jane wrote to Webb explaining her reason for objecting to the inclusion of what Webb called 'the little Holywell print', he wrote to apologise, and gave her his strong support:

My dear Janey,  
Your tenderly kind letter is very comforting to me, and I am almost glad I unwittingly gave you some pain, by urging the putting into the book of the little Oxford picture, now that you have opened to me the real reason for objecting to its use there. Of course now I would be as much against putting it in as I was for it: Now that you have so lovingly written to me of your motive I think you will really like me the better for having so wished it before?

The letter giving Jane's 'real reason' has not been found, but there can be no doubt of the depth of the emotion stirred in Webb, who went on to explain that he had always regarded the fact that they were both born in Oxford as a 'kindly tie' between them, and that he had like to think of her 'as a child spending the

unconscious part of your life in and about that region of the beautiful place'.<sup>21</sup>

Webb never married. In her fine biography of Webb, Sheila Kirk suggests that he saw marriage as likely to interfere with the work of a serious artist like himself, and that he was well aware of the unhappiness of the marriages of some of his best friends; but he placed the highest value on friendship. His integrity impressed all who knew him. Sydney Cockerell recorded that Morris said that Webb was 'the best man he had ever known', to which Cockerell added 'there are very few of those privileged to know him who would not say the same'. This does not mean that he was over-solemn – he was a popular dinner-guest at small parties, though he disliked large ones – and enjoyed what he considered the finest things in life. He told a friend, after describing a visit to Mount Grace Priory, that he found the idea of the monastic life attractive, but preferred Gray's Inn, where he could read Dumas and Carlyle, 'laugh very loud over Mrs Gamp', or try to sing 'snatches of Don Giovanni'.<sup>22</sup>

When he decided to retire from his architectural practice in 1899, Webb's extreme probity meant that he had saved little money. Fortunately, in May 1900, Webb visited Blunt at his Sussex estate with Sydney Cockerell, who had recently become Blunt's secretary, when the problem was discussed. Blunt generously offered to let Webb have the sixteenth-century yeoman's house, Caxtons, which he had been planning for his own use. The rent was £15 a year, and Webb spent his last 'fourteen peaceful, contented and, in general, very happy years at Worth'.<sup>23</sup>

Jane's relationship with Webb continued, with Webb always it would seem available to undertake any practical task and to offer friendly support whenever it was needed. Thus it was to Webb that Jane turned when she decided to erect a memorial to her husband in the village of Kelmscott in the form of two cottages. W.R. Lethaby calls them 'a pair of cottages, stout and trim', adding that 'Mr. Jack looked after the building of them and carved a delightful relief panel of Morris looking up at a tree full of birds, from a sketch by Webb - it was suggested by Morris's words, "the town of the tree"'. Jane kept in touch with Webb after his retirement to Sussex; in August 1909 she told Cockerell: 'I go to Crabbet on Friday where I shall be able to see Mr Webb'. She was visited there by Webb – 'We had a pleasant time together, he seems extremely well and looked better than I have seen him for many years', and in December of the same year we find her writing to Cockerell and expressing her concern about Webb's finances. Webb died on 17 April 1915. Cockerell was present, and saw the event as natural and undisturbing, since Webb had lived eighty-four happy and contented years, and had lived them 'manfully and finished his work'.<sup>24</sup>

## V

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt was born on 17 August 1840, and so was just ten months younger than Jane. He was born into a landowning family in Sussex, with its seat at Crabbet Park, and – as a result of his mother’s conversion to Roman Catholicism – educated at Stonyhurst College and St. Mary’s College, Oscott, although he never held an orthodox religious position in later life. On leaving Oscott, he went into the Diplomatic Service, his early postings including Athens and Madrid. He lived an adventurous life, described by his biographer Lady Longford as *A Pilgrimage of Passion*. He certainly had many love affairs, including an early one with ‘the most famous courtesan of the late Victorian age, Catherine Walters - the inimitable Skittles’. However, he also engaged with a more conventional relationship, marrying Lady Annabella King-Noel, the only daughter of Byron’s daughter Ada Lovelace, who was slightly older than Blunt. The wedding took place at St George’s, Hanover Square – ‘the smartest church in London’ – on 8 June 1869, when Blunt was 28.<sup>25</sup> He left the Diplomatic Service in 1869 and devoted his energies to travel, love-affairs, literature and politics. His first book of autobiographical and romantic poetry, *Songs and Sonnets by Proteus*, was published in 1875, to be followed by *Love Sonnets of Proteus* in 1881.

He developed an interest in the Arab world, and set off for Arabia in 1880. He wrote in his diary in June 1880: ‘If I can introduce a pure Arabian breed of horses into England and help to see Arabia free of the Turks, I shall not have lived in vain’.<sup>26</sup> He acquired an estate near Cairo, and spent winters there, dressing in Arab fashion and involving himself in local politics, opposing the policies of the British government. He published a book on *The Future of Islam* in 1882, and the polemical poem *The Wind and the Whirlwind* in 1883. In this he describes recent events in Egypt including the rebellion led by Arabi Pasha (whom he supported) and Arabi’s defeat by the British at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. He returned to the topic in the 1914 ‘Quatrains for Life’, which ends powerfully by contrasting the two armies on the night before the battle:

Here lay the camps. The sound from one rose clear,  
A single voice through the thrilled listening air.  
“There is no God but God”, it cried aloud.  
“Arise, ye faithful, ‘tis your hour of prayer.”

And from the other? Hark the ignoble chorus,  
Strains of the music halls, the slums before us.  
Let our last thought be as our lives were there,  
Drink and debauchery! The drabs adore us.

And these were proved the victors on that morrow,  
 And those the vanquished, fools, beneath war's harrow.  
 And the world laughed applauding what was done.  
 And if the angels wept none heard their sorrow.<sup>27</sup>

Blunt and Jane first met in August 1883 at Naworth Castle in Cumbria, the home of George and Rosalind Howard, when they were both on their early forties. In his diaries, Blunt wrote: 'I met Mrs. Morris at Naworth, having been invited specially for the purpose by Mrs. Howard (Lady Carlisle), and we spent a week in her company, and made friends'. In view of the way this friendship was to develop, it is interesting to find Jane writing to Price on 10 September:

Many thanks for your kind dear old affectionate letter received at Naworth. May and I had a nice three weeks visit there, which cheered me and set me up as to spirits, there were wild expeditions into the wildest loveliest country [compared no doubt to Kelmscott], temperance gatherings at the Castle, political talk and flirtation. The last I need not say, I had no part in.

Rossetti had died in 1882, and this may have left a void in Jane's emotional life. Her first letter to Blunt began unromantically by asking him to write an article on Egypt for 'the Socialistic Magazine "Today"', but concluded by asking 'When are you coming to see me again?' Later in July, after visiting Crabbet, she thanked Blunt for his hospitality – 'I should like to come again if you will have me' – and invited him to Hammersmith to meet her husband. Although we do not have Blunt's side of the correspondence, he kept a diary which often contains relevant information. In this case he referred to Morris as 'a democratic Socialist' and commented that although Morris's 'scheme of the universe' did not correspond with his, they agreed on many points, as that 'Gladstone is a confirmed Tory, too old to change'.<sup>28</sup>

Blunt's opposition to British imperialism led him to take an increasing interest in Irish affairs, which he later wrote about in *The Land War in Ireland* (1912). In October 1887 he was arrested at an anti-eviction meeting in Galway, and sentenced by the local magistrates to two months' imprisonment. He was released on bail, having lodged an appeal. However, in January 1888 he was sentenced to two months' hard labour, which he served in Galway and Kilmainham gaols. Jane wrote admiringly to him several times about these events, and when Blunt published a series of poems about his prison experience, *In Vinculis*, in 1889, she designed the book-cover, featuring a shamrock, although on 13 December 1888 she wrote to say that she had received the proofs but that 'I fear it is not very like a shamrock'.<sup>29</sup>

How soon Jane and Blunt became lovers is not clear, but her letters show the development of their intimacy, although her tone is rarely emotional and he is

addressed as 'Dear Mr. Blunt'. Blunt's attitude, too, often lacked emotion. On 29 Jan. 1885 he noted: 'To Mrs Morris to wish her good bye. She is going to Italy for a couple of months. There are moments when she is still a beautiful woman and I wish I had known her in old days'. Jane's letters to Blunt are among her fullest and most lively, and cover a good deal of ground, including politics and literature as well as domestic life. In 1889 Blunt recorded that 'I found with Mrs Morris a quiet resting place of affection ... It was at this time that I first became intimate with Morris ...'. In his unpublished notebooks Blunt wrote, after a visit to the Manor:

Kelmescott was a romantic but most uncomfortable house with all the rooms opening off each other and difficult to be alone in ... Mrs Morris slept alone at the end of a short passage at the head of the staircase to the right. All was uncarpeted with floors that creaked ... To me such midnight perils have always been attractive. Rossetti seemed a constant presence there, for it was there that he and Janey had had their time of love some 14 years before - and I came to identify myself with him as his admirer and successor.

He also recorded that Morris was for him 'a loveable man', though one thing he did not know about was 'the love of women'.<sup>30</sup>

Blunt several times questioned Jane about her relations with Rossetti. In August 1892 'she told me things about the past which explain much in regard to Rossetti. "I never quite gave myself", she said, "as I do now". Perhaps, if she had, he might not have perished in the way he did'. The correspondence continued. In October 1890 had Blunt recorded: 'we went over to see Burne-Jones and talk over a design for the tapestry Morris is to make for me'. This was a replica of 'The Adoration of the Magi' in the chapel at Exeter College, to which Blunt wanted an Arab horse and a camel to be added. This was done - Morris & Co. was, after all, a business. Blunt also asked Morris to produce a volume of his poems at the Kelmescott Press. *The Love Lyrics and Songs of Proteus* was the third book from the Press, appearing in January 1892; Jane 'looked it over' as the proofs came in, adding that 'my husband says the printers find it takes twice as long to print in the two colours, and it will cost nearly twice as much in consequence'. Reflecting on his relationship with Jane in May 1891, Blunt wrote that although it might seem 'curious' to others, 'The result is in any case a very excellent and worthy friendship, unbroken by a single unkind or impatient word'. He visited Kelmescott Manor in October 1893, and noted that 'Anne [his wife] and Mrs Morris made great friends'. In August 1895 Blunt recorded 'much interesting talk with Morris' at the Manor, and he later went to Merton Abbey to see another tapestry that he had commissioned, based on Botticelli's *Primavera*. He noted: 'I doubt its being equal to The Adoration of the Magi'.<sup>31</sup> Later critics have shared this view.

The year 1896 was obviously a sad one, and Blunt was often at Kelmescott

House. He spoke to Jane after her husband's death, when she told him: 'I am not unhappy ... though it is a terrible thing, for I have been with him since I first knew anything. I was 18 when I married - but I never loved him'. Blunt invited her and May to come to his Egyptian estate to recuperate. This did not work out as well as he hoped:

*Nov. 29.* Mrs Morris's visit has been rather a disappointment - her daughter May is an obstinately silent woman and Judith [Blunt's daughter] is bored by her and I fear they are likely to be bored by us. Neither of them ride, not even donkies, though Mrs Morris has made an attempt, and life without riding here is impossible. ... I am at my wit's end how to amuse them for I cannot make love to either of them and what else is there to be to be done.

However, things seem to have improved by the time that the Morrises left on 5 April, as on 8 May Jane wrote to thank him, saying that 'nothing else would have done half so well toward setting me up generally'. Jane's letter to 'My dear Lady Anne' in September 1897, with which she sent as a gift a 48-page manuscript written by her husband, ends: 'How good you were to me. /Yours affectionately/ Jane Morris'.<sup>32</sup> This shows her confidence in writing to someone born into a high social class.

The correspondence between Blunt and Jane continued. On 2 August 1897 Jane offered Blunt the scrubbed oak refectory table made by Webb that she now found too large for the Manor. He accepted, and wrote an inscription for it:

At this fair oaken table sat  
Whilom he our Laureate,  
William Morris, whose art's plan  
Laid its lines in ample span ...<sup>33</sup>

In 1898 Blunt wrote an acrostic sonnet to Madeline Wyndham, 'In Memoriam W.M. & E.B.J.', and another addressed to Sydney Cockerell, whom Jane had recommended to Blunt when he was looking for a secretary. The undistinguished sonnet is entitled 'To a Disciple of William Morris'.<sup>34</sup>

Blunt continued to criticise British imperialism, and in 1899 he published his remarkable poem *Satan Absolved: A Victorian Mystery*, of which Jane read the proofs, admiringly. In one passage, Satan tells God that the Anglo-Saxon races have pillaged the earth in the name of Christianity; in an anti-Kipling rhyme, he deplored

Their poets who write big of the "White Burden." Trash!  
The White Man's Burden, Lord, is the burden of his cash.

As we have seen, Blunt was later to find a home on his estate for Philip Webb and was consulted about 'Crom' Price. It was to Blunt that Jane wrote on 23

December 1908 to thank him for sending a brace of pheasants and remarking: 'I have been thinking of writing a little book of reminiscences (not for publication) but just to beguile the weary hours', and asking him to return some letters from Rossetti that she had entrusted to him.<sup>35</sup> He returned the letters, but there is no evidence that she wrote any reminiscences. Blunt died in 1922, having published his Diaries in two volumes. In preparing the Diaries, he was helped by the last of our selected correspondents, Sydney Cockerell.

## VI

Sydney Carlyle Cockerell (1867-1962) was younger than Jane by nearly thirty years. His family were coal merchants; he began work in the family business, but found this uncongenial, his interests being architectural and scholarly. He met Ruskin in 1888, and made a good impression; he became a member of the committee of the SPAB in 1890. He survived long enough to become President of the William Morris Society, and to see the first issue of *The Journal of the William Morris Society* in late 1961. He contributed some introductory words of reminiscence:

I first set eyes on William Morris in 1885. A year later he came, with Emery Walker, to a meal at my mother's house in Bedford Park before delivering a lecture in the club-house. Thus our friendship started and was continued in 1890 when I was elected to the committee of the S.P.A.B. After its meetings some of the members adjourned to Gatti's in the Strand (then a modest eating house) for a simple meal. My diaries show that I shared this meal with William Morris on one hundred and twenty five occasions. I remember these gatherings as among the happiest and merriest in my long life, during each year of which his greatness has appeared to me to be steadily on the increase.<sup>36</sup>

From 1891 Morris employed Cockerell to catalogue his library, and he then went on to become involved with the work of the Kelmscott Press. He showed himself to be a diligent and scholarly worker, and Morris came to rely on him.

Their relationship became more personal, and Cockerell was invited to Kelmscott Manor in August 1892. He took careful notes on this and subsequent visits, which have proved extremely useful to later students of Morris. It would seem that Morris found the young man congenial as well as useful, as is suggested by the tone of a short letter from Kelmscott dated August 20 [1892]:

I send enclosed with. This is my 2nd day of this time. Beautiful day today my laziness extreme. I could just manage to spoil one 'bloomer' - that was all.

Kelvin notes that on the holograph of this letter Cockerell annotated 'bloomer' as a 'Design for Kelmscott Press initial', possibly for *The Golden Legend*. On 23 December 1892, Morris wrote a reference for Cockerell when the post of curator of the Soanes Museum became vacant. Cockerell annotated the letter: 'Morris and others wrote testimonials, but it went no further as I learn that only architects were eligible'. Kelvin's note to Morris's testimonial tells us that Cockerell stated that 'I haven't a spark of imagination, and am only good for dry-as-dust cataloguing', but that friends like F. S. Ellis remarked on his possessing to a remarkable degree 'the excellent organ of orderliness'. After Morris's death, Cockerell supervised, with Emery Walker's help, the production of the last few books of the Kelmscott Press, which closed in 1898. The last was the characteristically scholarly *A Note by William Morris on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press, Together with a Short Description of the Press by S. C. Cockerell & and an Annotated List of the Books Printed Thereat*, issued in March 1898.<sup>37</sup> As we have seen, after Morris's death, Cockerell became secretary to Blunt, and helped him to prepare his Diaries for publication.

Cockerell was an obvious choice to be a trustee of Morris's estate, and in that capacity he advised Jane on her financial affairs. In 1908 he became Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, where he confirmed his reputation for scholarship and powers of organisation. He came to know and correspond with many public figures, including Thomas Hardy, and a selection from his correspondence was published in 1956 and formed the basis of Hugh Whitmore's play *Best of Friends*.<sup>38</sup>

Most of Jane's letters to him concern matters of business, and he is addressed as 'Dear Mr. Cockerell'. In August 1897, Jane asked him to arrange to send 'the old piano in the Lecture Hall' at Kelmscott House, and possibly too 'the big old backgammon board', to Kelmscott, as she was hoping to start a reading room in the village. In September 1898 she was keen for him to make a visit to see 'my cottage', the planned memorial to her husband. In August 1907 Jane wrote to congratulate Cockerell on his engagement to Florence Kate Kingsford (1871-1949), a distinguished illuminator. At the same time she wrote to Blunt expressing her surprise that someone of Cockerell's age, forty, who had 'got through the stormy season of youth without entanglements ... should want to marry late on after witnessing so many bitter failures ... I hope most sincerely that all will go well with them'. (The marriage was to produce three children, but not to be a happy one; Cockerell was no family man, and Kate, diagnosed with disseminated sclerosis in 1916, was for many years an invalid). When Cockerell was appointed to the Fitzwilliam in 1908, Jane wrote to say: 'I am delighted at your news and feel sure somehow that you will find the position an agreeable one' – which indeed he did. In June 1909 she was hoping to meet Cockerell in Oxford for a quiet lunch: 'Boffin High St. used to be good. Where do you go?'<sup>39</sup>

Cockerell played an important part in the creation of Morris's *Collected Works*, an idea suggested to him as a trustee by the publisher Charles Longman in May 1909. The trustees saw that an editor would be needed, and Cockerell wrote to Hornby in August:

I think May Morris would make a good editor if she would undertake it – Mac-kail is the best alternative. If you approve I will write to her. There would be no reason why she should not be paid liberally for the proofs, general supervision – or, if necessary, a little introduction to each volume - What would you suggest? 15 guineas a volume? They will be fat volumes.

On Hornby's agreeing, Cockerell wrote to May via Jane. May agreed immediately, although she was about to leave for a lecture tour in America. Jane thought the edition 'a delightful plan'. Perhaps neither she nor May realised how much work would be involved. Cockerell was to give May a great deal of encouragement and advice as the project proceeded from 1910 to 1915. It was he who reassured her when she wrote on 30 June 1910: 'I am wondering if it is not a little beyond my powers'. When she wrote her Introductions, she asked Cockerell to read them through before they were set up in type. When she had difficulties with the ageing, sick and demanding Eiríkr Magnússon over the Icelandic translations, it was Cockerell who wrote to Magnússon to try to sort it out. A letter of 6 July 1911 shows Cockerell again at the task of encouraging co-operation, in this case between May and Longman:

It is obvious that you cannot do more than your best to see them out without avoidable delay - on the other hand the publishers do not seem to me unreasonable in asking for all the information you can give them as to the possible dates of issue.

It is agreeable to find that when publication of the edition was finally completed in 1915, Longman wrote to Cockerell that it seemed to him 'a most satisfactory set of volumes' and that 'Miss Morris's work as editor has been performed with extraordinary care and accuracy'.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, Jane continued to write to Cockerell, in terms of increasing intimacy. Her letter of 20 October 1912 was addressed for the first time to 'Dear Sydney', thanking him for a box of sweets that had caused 'so much fun'. In 1913 there was discussion of the possible purchase of Kelmscott Manor from Mr Hobbs, which was completed in September with Cockerell's help. Jane's last surviving letter, dated 16 January 1914 from Bath, was to Cockerell, thanking him for a book he had sent, which she would 'read with pleasure'. She died ten days later. Cockerell's career would continue for many years, and he was knighted in 1934. In 1951 he wrote a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement* criticizing Oswald Doughty for being too concerned in his biography of Rossetti with 'Rossetti's weaknesses and

the elaboration of scandal' – though he did not name the scandal – and describing Jane as 'one of my heroines'.<sup>41</sup>

## VII

One other correspondent whom we might have considered is Jane's husband, William Morris, but that would be the subject of another article. For the present it is enough to remark that to have corresponded on equal terms with an outstanding poet-painter, a successful headmaster, a distinguished Arts & Crafts practitioner, a courageous anti-imperialist and a leading gallery-curator was a remarkable achievement for a woman who spent the early part of her life in one of the least affluent or romantic parts of Oxford.

## NOTES

1. This is a revised version of the lecture given at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow to the Friends of the WMG on Sunday 27 January 2014.
2. Frank C. Sharp & Jan Marsh, eds, *The Collected Letters of Jane Morris*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2012, p. 9. Subsequently *JM Letters*.
3. William Fredeman *et al.*, eds, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 9 vols., 2002-2010, Vol. II, pp. 180, 306, 417; Vol. I, p. xxvii. Afterwards *DGR Letters*.
4. *DGR Letters*, Vol. V, pp. 78-79.
5. J.R. Wahl, *The Kelmscott Love Sonnets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Cape Town: Balkema, 1954, 40 pp.
6. William M. Rossetti, ed, *The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, one-volume edition, London: Ellis, 1910, p. 182.
7. Robert Buchanan's pseudonymously delivered attack on the sensuality of the poetry of Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris, which had a serious impact on Rossetti's self-confidence, leading up to his suicide attempt in June 1872. See Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 431 ff.
8. *DGR Letters*, Vol. VIII, pp. 99-100; IX, pp. 90-94, 38; *JM Letters*, p. 120.
9. *JM Letters*, p. 122.
10. Norman Kelvin, ed, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 4 vols in 5. 1984-1996; Vol. I (1984), p. 10, Note 1. Subsequently Kelvin.
11. I am grateful to Price's granddaughter, Lorraine Bowsher, for information

- about her grandfather's life and for permission to quote from his unpublished Diary.
12. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*; London: Macmillan, 1937, pp. 21, 22-23, 24, 25, 26ff., 37. Subsequently Kipling, *Myself*.
  13. Kipling, *Myself*, pp. 135, 134-135.
  14. Rudyard Kipling, *Stalky and Co.*, 1908; London: Macmillan's Pocket Kipling, 1919, p. 218. The continuing friendship between Kipling and Price is amply shown in Thomas Pinney, ed, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 6 vols., 1990-2004.
  15. *JM Letters*, pp. 62, 64, 65.
  16. Price's Diary, quoted by permission of Lorraine Bowsher; *JM Letters*, p.149. Jane's political outlook is discussed by Sharp & Marsh (*JM Letters*, pp. 100-101).
  17. May Morris, ed, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols., London: Longmans & Co., 1910 - 1915, Vol. XVIII (1913), p. xxvj; *JM Letters*, pp. 414, 424, 435, 439.
  18. *JM Letters*, pp. 44, 46.
  19. Kelvin, Vol. I, pp. 92, 94, 96.
  20. Wendy Parkins, *Jane Morris. The Burden of History*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 34. Subsequently Parkins.
  21. Parkins, pp. 85, 88.
  22. Sheila Kirk, *Philip Webb. Pioneer of Arts & Crafts Architecture*, Chichester: Wiley-Academic, 2005, pp. 57, 16, 59. Afterwards Kirk.
  23. Kirk, pp. 285, 286.
  24. Kirk, pp. 211-212; W.R. Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work*, London: Raven Oak Press, 1979, p. 219. The panel is illustrated in Kirk, p. 212; *JM Letters*, pp. 425, 432-433; Kirk, p. 293.
  25. Elizabeth Longford, *A Pilgrimage of Passion. The Life of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979, pp. 34ff, 34, 72. Subsequently *Pilgrimage*.
  26. *Pilgrimage*, p.168.
  27. *The Poetical Works of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, 2 Vols, London: Macmillan, 1914, Vol. I, p. 450. Subsequently Blunt, *PW*.
  28. *JM Letters*, p. 129, Note 2; pp. 129, 130, 132 and Note 1.
  29. Peter Faulkner, ed, *Jane Morris to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986, pp. 15-24 (afterwards Faulkner). See also *JM Letters*, pp.158; 165; 170; 172-173, 174; 176; the quotation is from p. 173.
  30. Faulkner, pp. 4, 29, 31.
  31. Faulkner, pp. 69, 47; *JM Letters*, p. 220; William Peterson (*A Bibliography of the Kelmscott Press*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984; 1985, p. 10) tells us that 'the decorated initials were printed in red at his [Blunt's] request', and that

Morris told Jenny that ‘it looks very gay & pretty with its red letters, but I think I prefer mine in style of printing’; Faulkner, pp. 53, 83, 95. Sharp & Marsh (*JM Letters*, p. 158, Note 2) inform us that Lady Anne’s diaries show that Jane wrote over one hundred letters to her between 1886 and 1909, although only one has survived.

32. Faulkner, pp. 106, 107; *JM Letters*, pp. 292, 299.
33. *JM Letters*, p. 295 and Note 2, Faulkner p. 110.
34. Blunt, *PW*, Vol. I, p. 360.
35. *JM Letters*, p. 331; Blunt, *PW*, Vol. II, p. 284-285; *JM Letters*, p. 416.
36. His biography, *Cockerell: Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, friend of John Ruskin and William Morris and Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964, 385 pp., is by Wilfrid Blunt; *Journal of the William Morris Society*, Vol. I, No. 1 (Winter 1961), p. 1.
37. Kelvin, Vol. III, p. 434, and Note 1, p. 435; Vol. III, p. 485, Note 2; William S. Peterson, *A Bibliography of the Kelmscott Press*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1984; 1985, pp. 139-143.
38. Kelvin, Vol. III, p. 338, Note 13. Penelope Fitzgerald wrote, somewhat severely, of ‘his two ruling passions – the arts (or rather the classification and collecting of them) and the cultivating of great men’.
39. *JM Letters*, pp. 295, 317, 405, 406, 410, 421.
40. All the material cited here referring to the *Collected Works* is in the W.H. Smith Bequest in the collection of the William Morris Society at Kelmscott House; *JM Letters*, p. 426.
41. *JM Letters*, pp. 458, 463, 466; Parkins, p. 29.