Edward Burne-Jones aged 41.
A Friendship from Heaven:
Burne-Jones and William Morris
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With hindsight it is remarkable that Morris and Burne-Jones ever met, let alone enjoyed a friendship that lasted 43 years. Even more unlikely is that this friendship survived the changes that saw a provincial lad from Birmingham elevated to the baronetcy, and the eldest son of a wealthy stockbroker from Essex reviled as a revolutionary socialist.

Edward Coley Burne Jones was born on 28 August 1833 at 11 Bennett's Hill — a respectable house-cum-workshop — in Birmingham, where his father, Edward Richard Jones, made a modest living as a carver and gilder. His parents’ first child — a daughter — had died in infancy and Burne-Jones’s mother, Elizabeth, only survived the birth of her son by a few days. The loss of his wife and daughter haunted Edward Jones, and one of his son’s first memories was being taken to visit their grave. In later life Burne-Jones, who inherited his father’s sense of pathos, looked back on his childhood with little enthusiasm: ‘O what a sad little home ours was and how I used to be glad to get away from it’. No doubt these sentiments were exaggerated, as holidays in Blackpool, summers with his farming cousins in Warwickshire, and expeditions to visit his aunt and uncle Catherwood in Camberwell, hardly indicate a life of unmitigated misery. He was also popular at King Edward’s School, which he attended from 1844, where his circle of friends included Cornelius Price, Richard Watson Dixon, William Fulford, and Harry Macdonald.

William Morris’s background could hardly have been more different. His father was already senior partner in Sanderson & Co., a successful stockbroking company in London, when he was born on 24 March 1834. In 1840 the Morris family moved to Woodford Hall in Essex, an impressive Palladian brick mansion set in a fifty acre park on the edge of Epping Forest. William Morris Snr’s fortunes prospered when he, and his brother Thomas, acquired 304 of the 1,024 shares in the highly successful Devonshire Great Consolidated Copper Mining Co. Morris, as the eldest of nine surviving children, was sent to Marlborough College shortly after his father’s death in 1847. He left the school in November 1851, and subsequently completed his education as a private pupil of the Rev F. B. Guy, an assistant master at the Forest School in Walthamstow.

The two young men did, however, share an evangelical background and an attraction to Anglo-Catholicism. They were also both determined to enter the Church. Thus it came about that on 1 June 1852 they came up to Oxford to attend matriculation. Although they didn’t meet, Burne-Jones noticed that the student at the adjacent table — when he had finished his Horace paper — had written upon it ‘William Morris’. Six months later, in January 1853, they arrived at Exeter College, Oxford, both burning with religious zeal. Within a week they were inseparable, and early in 1854 Burne-Jones was to write: ‘[Morris] has tinge...
being with the beauty of his own, and I know not a single gift for which I owe such gratitude to Heaven as his friendship'.

Their friendship at Oxford blossomed amidst the shared experiences of young undergraduates. Mackail, in the notes he prepared for his biography of Morris, recorded that their ‘expenses [were] about £40 a term or say £130 a year, incl. subscriptions to boat and cricket clubs’. They also took instruction in single-stick at MacLaren’s gymnasium. This exercise was particularly beneficial for the sickly lad from Birmingham. Burne-Jones wrote to his father on 27 April 1853: ‘I continue my fencing lessons &c. and feel almost unutterable benefit from them; my strength grows perceptibly and Maclaren promises to send me forth a very different object to what I was when I entered’. The friends also ‘went to St Thomas’s (the church near the station) for early service and plain song; this they practised once a week in [the] Music-room in Holywell College Library’.

However, they were disappointed with their choice of college. Mackail claimed that the ‘coarseness of manners and morals’ at Exeter College was ‘distressing in the highest degree’ to them both. Their religious idealism also set them apart from their fellow students. When William Richmond visited his elder brother at Exeter College he wrote: ‘my brother did not belong to the aesthetic set . . . two of [whom] were pointed out to me as special oddities . . . These were William Morris and Edward Jones’. Luckily, the previous year Burne-Jones’s schoolfriend, Richard Watson Dixon, had taken up residence at Pembroke College where with William Fulford and Charles Faulkner he formed what became known as the ‘Set’. Burne-Jones soon introduced Morris to his Birmingham friends, and by the end of February 1853 he told Cormell Price that they were ‘almost always at Pembroke’.

The two men’s time at Oxford was to be of importance in two ways: their loss of faith, and their dedication to art. Burne-Jones had arrived at Oxford determined to found a ‘monastic brotherhood’ and launch a ‘crusade and Holy Warfare against the age’. Morris was his first convert. On 1 May 1853 Burne-Jones wrote eagerly to Cormell Price: ‘Learn Sir Galahad by heart. He is to be the patron of our Order. I have enlisted one [Morris] in the project up here, heart and soul’. Plans for this brotherhood dominated their early months at Oxford. As late as 16 October 1854 Burne-Jones wrote to Cormell Price: ‘The Monastery, Crom, stands a fairer chance than ever of being founded – and I know that it will be some day’. Yet at some point between this time and the spring of 1855 religious doubts appear to have afflicted both friends. In May 1855 Cormell Price was to write: ‘Our Monastery will come to nought I’m afraid . . . Morris has become questionable on doctrinal points and Ted is too Catholic to be ordained. He and Morris diverge more and more in views though not in friendship.’ Burne-Jones was later to tell his cousin, Maria Choyce, that he and Morris had given up the idea of being ordained as the reading of French and German philosophy had ‘shivered’ his beliefs and ‘palsied’ those of Morris.

As their religious faith diminished it was replaced by a growing devotion to art and literature. Many lively hours were spent with the Set reading aloud from Shakespeare, Keats, Tennyson, Dickens and Ruskin. Ruskin’s influence was to be decisive. His Edinburgh Lectures introduced them to Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites. Fired with enthusiasm they went to view Millais’s The Return of the Dove to the Ark when it was exhibited at Wyatt’s in the High Street in 1854, and
later Mr Windus's collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings which included Ford Madox Brown's The Last of England. When Morris came of age in March 1855, and came into a substantial inheritance, plans were made to publish the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine on lines similar to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's journal The Germ. Before this appeared, however, the two friends – accompanied by Fulford – went on a tour of the cathedrals of Northern France. It was at Le Havre on 2 August 1855 that they made a momentous decision. According to Burne-Jones 'it was while walking on the quay at night that we resolved definitely that we would begin a life of art, and put off our decision no longer – he [Morris] should be an architect and I a painter'.

In furtherance of this Morris, after taking a pass degree, articled himself to the architect G. E. Street in Oxford. However, it was Burne-Jones who was to change the course of their lives when he obtained an introduction to Rossetti early in 1856. Rossetti, as it turned out, had already heard of the two young men as he had read the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine and greatly admired their work for the journal. By Easter 1856 Burne-Jones had already begun painting under Rossetti's instruction. Morris was introduced to Rossetti soon after this, for in July 1856 he was to write to Cormell Price that Rossetti had urged him to 'paint' adding 'he says I shall be able; now as he is a very great man, and speaks with authority and not as the scribes, I must try'. However, Morris did not immediately abandon architecture. Instead, he accompanied Street to London when the latter moved his practice from Oxford in August 1856.

In November 1856 the two friends moved to three unfurnished rooms – previously occupied by Rossetti and Deverell – on the first floor of 17 Red Lion Square. Here, inspired by medieval craftsmanship, they transformed the unpromising accommodation. Burne-Jones wrote to Miss Sampson that 'Topsy has had some furniture (chairs and table) made after his own design; they are as beautiful as medieval work, and when we have painted designs of knights and ladies upon them they will be perfect marvels'. Needless to say Rossetti was invited to help. He told William Allingham in December that Morris 'and I have painted the back of a chair with figures and inscriptions in gules and vert and azure, and we are all three going to cover a cabinet with pictures'. When George Boyce visited the rooms in May 1858 he noted in his Diary the 'very interesting drawings, tapestries and furniture, the latter gorgeously painted in subjects by Jones and Morris and Rossetti'. No doubt the success of this project, along with the fact that he had realised he was not a natural draughtsman, determined Morris to abandon architecture for good at the end of 1856.

A more ambitious artistic project was begun the following summer. Rossetti had obtained, under somewhat mysterious circumstances, the commission to decorate the new Debating Hall at the Oxford Union buildings. He decided to paint a series of 'frescoes' inspired by scenes from Morte d'Arthur along the walls of the gallery. Morris and Burne-Jones were among the group of enthusiastic young artists he recruited to undertake this work. They and Rossetti took lodgings at 87 High Street where they spent the next few months living a life of bohemian high-spirits. Work on the frescoes was often interrupted by jokes, soda-water fights and general mayhem. Unfortunately, as an artistic experiment it was a failure, as the frescoes were painted directly onto an unprepared surface. Rossetti, who probably realised
this, took the opportunity of Lizzie Siddal’s illness to abandon the project in November 1857, although Burne-Jones worked on until February 1858. When William Bell Scott visited the Union building in June 1858 he found that the frescoes had already begun to fade, and that all that remained of Morris’s picture was Tristram’s head over a row of sunflowers.

The abandonment of the frescoes marked the end of the two friends’ bachelor days. In the autumn of 1857 Morris had met Jane Burden, the daughter of an Oxford stablehand, and fallen in love. He therefore decided to remain in Oxford rather than return to Red Lion Square with Burne-Jones. Burne-Jones fell ill in the summer of 1858, and was eventually whisked off by the indomitable Mrs Princep to recuperate at Little Holland House. The two friends saw very little of each other during this period. This might explain why Charles Faulkner, rather than Burne-Jones, was best man when Morris married Jane at St Michael’s Church, Ship Street, Oxford, on 26 April 1859. Burne-Jones did, however, present the couple with a painted cabinet depicting the story of Hugh of Lincoln from Chaucer’s ‘Prioress’s Tale’. Shortly after this Burne-Jones, who had been engaged to Georgiana Macdonald since 1856, eventually married her in Manchester on 9 June 1860.

Prior to his marriage Morris had commissioned Philip Webb to draw up plans for a house to be built near the hamlet of Upton in Kent. The ‘Red House’ was completed in the early summer of 1860 and the Morrises took up residence in June. Old friendships were resumed when the Burne-Joneses paid the first of many happy visits to the house in the autumn. According to Georgiana Burne-Jones ‘it was by no means on a holiday that Edward had come down, nor only to enjoy the company of his friend again, but that they might consult together about the decoration of the house’. This involved painting the walls and ceilings with their own designs, decorating the furniture, and embroidering hangings for the rooms. All the old high spirits returned. Games of hide-and-seek were arranged, fights took place using apples from the nearly orchard, and the evenings were spent listening to old English songs ‘and the inexhaustible Echos du Temps Passé’. On one occasion Jane laughed so much that, according to Burne-Jones, ‘like Guinevere, she fell under the table’. This was one of the happiest times in the friendship of the two men, and they were always to remember the years at the Red House with great affection.

One result of Morris’s problems in finding suitable furnishings for the Red House was the founding of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (the ‘Firm’). Rossetti first mentioned the project in a letter to William Allingham written in January 1861: ‘We are organising ... a company for the production of furniture and decoration of all kinds, for the sale of which we are going to open an actual shop!’ On 25 March 1861 premises were taken at 8 Red Lion Square. The first floor was used as a showroom and office, the third to house workshops, and a small kiln was installed in the basement to fire tiles. The Firm opened for business on 11 April 1861 with each of the partners – Morris, Burne-Jones, Webb, Faulkner, Hughes (who withdrew soon after), Rossetti, Madox Brown and P. P. Marshall – each putting up £1 as collateral. The main capital of £100 was loaned by Morris’s mother Emma.

The importance of the Firm cannot be underestimated in the context of the
friendship between Morris and Burne-Jones. Throughout the remainder of their lives, whatever personal problems placed strain on their relationship, the day-to-day process of designing and manufacturing stained glass, tiles, wallpaper, fabrics and furniture had to be conducted in a business-like fashion at Red Lion Square, or at the Sunday morning meetings held at the Grange in Fulham where the Burne-Joneses moved in 1867. The commissions Burne-Jones undertook for the Firm, particularly in the early years, provided him with a regular income. One can only speculate whether his subsequent career as a painter would have been possible without this security. The Firm was also to become of increasing significance to Morris when the income from his Devon Great Consul shares began to decline in the 1870s.

At one point it seemed that the dream of 'A Palace of Art' might be realised in Kent. In 1864 Morris, who was finding the daily journey from Upton to London increasingly tiresome, considered moving the Firm from Red Lion Square to the Red House. As part of this scheme he proposed to build a new wing to house Burne-Jones and his family. No doubt these plans were discussed when the Burne-Joneses stayed at Red House in May, and when the two families – now both with young children – enjoyed a three week holiday in Littlehampton in September. Unfortunately, this holiday was to be the prelude to a period of domestic drama. Burne-Jones, writing to William Allingham in early December 1864, recalled the events that followed their return to London: 'Two months ago, Pip fell ill of the scarlet fever, and then Georgie was prematurely confined and immediately seized with the fever so that for eight days her life was in danger, then when she rallied a fortnight ago her own little child died'.

Exactly why Burne-Jones decided to abandon the idea of joining the Morrises at the Red House will never be known, as the letter he wrote to Morris has not survived. However, Morris's reply, written in a shaky hand from his bed where he was confined with an attack of rheumatism, still exists. It is one of the most poignant of his early letters and reveals just how much the scheme had meant to him: 'As to our palace of Art, I confess your letter was a blow to me – in short I cried; but I have got over it now'. He went on: 'Suppose in all these troubles you had given us the slip what the devil should I have done? I am sure I couldn't have had the heart to have gone on with the firm: all our jolly subjects would have gone to pot – it frightens me to think of, Ned'. Instead of joining the Morrises at the Red House the Burne-Joneses moved to 41 Kensington Square where the magnanimous Morris gave them a Persian prayer-carpet for one of the rooms. A disappointed Morris and his family left the Red House in November 1865 to live at the Firm’s new headquarters at 26 Queen Square. Morris was never again to return to the house.

Soon after the Red House was sold marital problems were to test the friendship of the two men. In 1867 Burne-Jones began a tempestuous affair with a Greek beauty called Mary Zambaco. In January 1869 this culminated in a dreadful scene by the side of the Regent's Canal near Browning’s house at 19 Warwick Crescent. According to Rossetti, in a letter he wrote to Madox Brown, Mary Zambaco 'provided herself with laudanum for two at least, and insisted on their winding up matters in Lord Holland's Lane. Ned didn't see it, when she tried to drown herself in the water in front of Browning's house &c. – bobbies collared Ned who was
rolling with her on the stones to prevent it, and God knows what else'.

Needless to say Burne-Jones turned immediately to Morris for help. In the same letter Rossetti wrote: 'Ned . . . and Topsy, after the most dreadful to-do started for Rome suddenly, leaving the Greek damsel beating up the quarters of all his friends for him, and howling like Cassandra. Georgie has stayed behind. I hear to-day, however, that Top and Ned got no further than Dover'.

All this put an additional strain on Morris who was suffering from his own marital problems at the time. In 1867 or 1868 Jane Morris had begun an affair with Rossetti which was carried on quite openly. William Bell Scott wrote of a party held in 1868: 'Gabriel sat by Jeanie (sic) and I must say acts like a perfect fool if he wants to conceal his attachment, doing nothing but attend to her, sitting side-ways towards her, that sort of thing'.

Morris was devastated by Rossetti's betrayal of trust, although outwardly he chose to allow the affair to take its course. When he and Rossetti took the joint tenancy of Kelmscott Manor in 1871 he even travelled to Iceland so that the lovers could be alone for the summer. Perhaps he thought that Rossetti, a notorious womaniser, would soon tire of his wife.

As victims of unfaithfulness, Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones were inevitably drawn together. The exact nature of their relationship is difficult to establish. They had first met at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1855. A year later Morris had come up from Oxford to present Georgiana with a copy of Turner's *Rivers of France* as an engagement gift. Georgiana, referring to this meeting in the *Memorials*, wrote enigmatically that 'we were not much the nearer for this meeting' but 'my eyes were holden that I could not yet see'.

A month later, on 31 July 1856, Georgiana's mother recorded in her *Diary* that Morris had come to tea and 'sat with Georgie on the balcony till 11 o'clock'.

Philip Henderson has pointed out that many of the poems in *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70) are addressed to Georgiana. I suspect that at one point she and Morris were deeply in love. However, Georgiana's sense of duty, and Morris's frankness and honesty, would never have allowed them to betray their partners. Nevertheless, in 1870 Morris expressed his deep regard for Georgiana by laboriously writing out and illuminating *A Book of Verse* which he gave her for her birthday. For the rest of his life she was to remain his trusted confidant.

During the early 1870s some stability returned to both men's lives. With hindsight the events of 1872 were to prove crucial in this respect. In June Rossetti attempted to commit suicide by taking an overdose of laudanum. For two days he remained in a coma at the house of Dr Gordon Hake before recovering sufficiently to be taken to recuperate in Perthshire. Following this his health went into decline, and although his affair with Jane was to continue, he decided to give up the joint-tenancy of Kelmscott Manor in 1874. Meanwhile Mary Zambaco was taken seriously ill in the autumn of 1872. Morris wrote to Aglaia Coronio on 25 November 1872: 'I suppose you will have heard . . . how very ill she has been; though I hope it will all come right now. I did not see Ned for a fortnight, and Georgie scarcely: it was a dismal time for all of us'.

When she recovered Mary Zambaco decided to return to Paris, thus removing one temptation from Burne-Jones. Almost as a symbolic celebration of Burne-Jones's liberation, he and Morris spent the spring of 1873 touring Italy.

Their friendship restored, Morris relied on Burne-Jones in the delicate business
of turning the Firm over to his sole ownership. Burne-Jones, who always disliked committees, attended the important meetings held during the winter of 1874 to dissolve the company. He, along with Faulkner and Webb, waived their claims to compensation. The other three partners – Brown, Marshall and Rossetti – agreed, after some delay, to be compensated for their loss of interest at £1,000 each. Rossetti, in a characteristically insensitive gesture, turned over his share in trust to Jane Morris. The Firm was reconstituted as Morris & Co., although a circular issued on 31 March 1875 reassured customers that Burne-Jones and Webb would continue to provide designs for stained glass and furniture.

The following year the two men were drawn further together by their public opposition to Disraeli’s foreign policy. On 23 June 1876 the Daily News carried a graphic account of a massacre carried out by the Turks against the Bulgarian Christians. This atrocity outraged many Liberals who demanded action be taken against Turkey. Disraeli, who feared that the massacre might give the Russians an excuse to declare war on Turkey and thus jeopardise the route to India, decided to back the Turks. This lead Gladstone to come out of retirement and publish a pamphlet on The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East. In this he opposed British support for the Turks, and demanded the latter’s withdrawal from the whole Bulgarian province.

Morris and Burne-Jones immediately rallied to Gladstone’s support. Although Burne-Jones was too ill to attend the meeting held at St James’s Hall on 8 December 1876 to form the Eastern Question Association, Morris – who was there – was elected Treasurer. However, they were both present at the Workmen’s Neutrality Demonstration held at Exeter Hall on 16 January 1878 at the height of the agitation. This meeting was opened by the singing of Morris’s song ‘Wake London Lads’ by a choir from the stonemasons’ trade union. However, by this time Russia had already declared war on Turkey, and a wave of pro-war jingoism had begun to sweep the country. As a result Gladstone, conscious of the forthcoming General Election, cynically distanced both himself and the Liberal Party from the anti-war agitation.

Gladstone’s betrayal was to have unexpected repercussions for the friendship between Morris and Burne-Jones. For Burne-Jones the whole experience was deeply disillusioning and he never again placed any faith in the political system. Instead he retreated to his studio and rededicated his life to art. Morris, on the other hand, although equally disillusioned by conventional politics, had been deeply impressed by the strength of the working-class support for the agitation. He began to realise that by organising the workers the capitalist system could be overthrown from without. During the next few years he gradually drifted to the left, passing through the ranks of the National Liberal League and the Radical Union, before ultimately turning to socialism, and joining Hyndman’s Democratic Federation in January 1883. This was to be the start of seven years of total commitment to the socialist cause: first with the Democratic Federation and later with his own Socialist League.

Burne-Jones never came to terms with Morris’s socialism. His studio assistant, Thomas Rooke, recalled him saying: ‘Such a pity he ever took that up. What wouldn’t I give that he should never have been in with it all . . . How I hated his being in such company’. No doubt part of the reason for this was that the traditional Sunday morning meetings at the Grange were no longer the happy
affairs they had been. Morris, as was the case with all his many enthusiasms, could think of little else than the subject at hand, and often left the house early in order to speak at open-air meetings in Hammersmith. Burne-Jones bemoaned his loss. In April 1885 he wrote to George Howard: ‘I am . . . heartily sorry for Morris— . . . and I wish for ancient times— sigh heavily for them’.32 Despite his liberalism Burne-Jones never was, or could be, a revolutionary. He particularly disliked the Commonweal, the paper Morris published and edited on behalf of the Socialist League. He told Rooke that there were ‘numbers of that Commonweal that are most deplorable’.33 Georgiana even had to write to the ‘editor’ of the paper requesting that in future it be addressed ‘to Mrs Burne-Jones, not to Mr’.34 There was also the fact— rarely acknowledged — that during the 1880s Morris was a social embarrassment to Burne-Jones. Morris’s dubious socialist acquaintances, his militant street-preaching, and his occasional brushes with the law, were far from attractive to an artist beginning to make his mark in the highest social circles.

No one was more relieved than Burne-Jones when Morris lost control of Commonweal and the Socialist League in 1890. Although Morris immediately founded the Hammersmith Socialist Society— and was never to lose his belief in socialism — he effectively relinquished his role as one of the foremost propagandists for the socialist cause. In any case it is unlikely that he would have been able to have kept up his punishing schedule of open-air speaking and lecture tours due to his own ill-health. In February 1891 his daughter Jenny had suffered a severe attack of meningitis. Morris’s own health collapsed soon after. On 13 April 1891 Jane wrote to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: ‘My husband has been very ill, the shock of Jenny’s illness was too much for him, and he broke down entirely a few days afterwards— he is much better, but not nearly recovered’.35 Indeed, Morris was never to entirely regain his health following this illness.

For both men it was as if life had gone full-circle. The old Sunday breakfasts at the Grange were resumed and once again the conversation was on the less controversial topics of art, stained glass and tapestry. Shortly before his split with the Socialist League Morris had decided to set up his own private press to print books using type he had designed on medieval principles. These plans came to fruition when he established the Kelmscott Press in a cottage at 16 Upper Mall near Kelmscott House in January 1891. Naturally Burne-Jones was approached to provide illustrations for the volumes to be published by the press. Strangely, although this collaboration brought the men closer together, it also revealed their now divergent artistic sensibilities. When Morris asked Burne-Jones to design thirty illustrations for a proposed edition of Sigurd the Volsung, Burne-Jones dutifully took the work down to his holiday home at Rottingdean but found himself entirely out of sympathy with the subject. Similarly, differences of opinion occurred over the Kelmscott Press’s most ambitious project— an illustrated edition of Chaucer. Burne-Jones, despite repeated requests from Morris, could never bring himself to illustrate ‘The Miller’s Tale’.

The only serious disagreement Morris and Burne-Jones had during the last years of their friendship was over Burne-Jones’s decision to accept a baronetcy from Gladstone in January 1894. His close friends believed that he accepted the title in order to further his son Philip’s social ambitions. Jane Morris wrote to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt in March 1894 that ‘it seems that Phil was the chief culprit— I did
hear that Sir George Lewis started the idea - in case his daughter wanted to marry Phil, so that he may be their *equal in rank*. However, this is surely only part of the truth. Millais and Leighton had already accepted titles, and Burne-Jones, no doubt recalling his upbringing as the son of an impoverished Birmingham gilder, must have been flattered by this formal acknowledgement of his standing as an artist. He accepted the honour despite considerable opposition from Georgie. Thomas Rooke recorded in his *Diary* that the ‘one person in the house who distinctly disliked it was the mistress’. Burne-Jones was well aware of this. He wrote to Mrs Gaskell: ‘I scarcely dare tell Georgie, so profound is her scorn – and I half like it and half don’t care 2d’. There was never any doubt about Morris’s view of the matter. Burne-Jones was too terrified to tell him in person so he learnt the news by reading the morning papers. According to Jane he at first ‘refused to believe it’ but then said ‘Well a man can be an ass for the sake of his children’. Burne-Jones remained nervous of Morris’s reaction. When the documents relating to the baronetcy arrived at the Grange, he smuggled them upstairs so that Morris – who was in the house – wouldn’t see them and give his forthright opinion on the prospect of a ‘Sir Ned’.

The last two years of their friendship was dominated by their work on the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. Morris was busy designing borders, initials and frames for the illustrations while Burne-Jones struggled to complete his woodcut illustrations. Everything that was produced had to be mutually approved. The printing of the book was finally finished on 8 May 1896. It contained 87 woodcuts by Burne-Jones, a woodcut title, 14 large borders, 18 different frames for the illustrations and 26 large initial words designed by Morris. The first two copies came back from the binders on 2 June 1896. Burne-Jones gave his copy to his daughter Margaret as a birthday present. Georgie recalled that he packed ‘up the big volume in a parcel of shape so disguised that no one could guess its contents’. Both friends were delighted with the book. Burne-Jones wrote: ‘When Morris and I were little chaps in Oxford, if such a book had come out then we should have just gone off our heads, but we have made at the end of our days the very thing we would have made then if we could’.

But darkness was now descending. Morris’s health had begun to deteriorate quite noticeably at the end of 1895 and his *Diary* is full of terse comments such as ‘Seedy, did nothing all day’. The seriousness of this illness seems to have come as something of a surprise to Burne-Jones. He wrote to Mary Gaskell in February 1896: ‘Yesterday was dreadfully unhappy for I was not on my guard about Morris, and had lulled myself – one should never lull oneself, or even be off guard in this world’. On 22 February Burne-Jones took Morris to see the eminent physician, Sir William Broadbent. Broadbent diagnosed diabetes, which in the days before the discovery of insulin, was a serious – often fatal - condition. The following day Georgie recorded in her *Diary*: ‘No Morris to breakfast’. This was to be the end of the regular Sunday morning visits to the Grange. The Burne-Joneses now braced themselves for the inevitable. In mid-August Morris returned from an ill-advised voyage to Norway greatly weakened in spirit. Soon after he wrote his final letter to Georgie: ‘Come soon. I want a sight of your dear face’. Burne-Jones saw his old friend for the last time during the afternoon of 2 October when he found Morris’s ‘weakness was pitiful’. The following morning Georgie was present
when Morris died 'as gently, as quietly as a babe who is satisfied drops from its mother's breast'.

Despite the loss of their closest friend both Burne-Jones and Georgie were stoical in their grief. Georgie wrote: 'It is no shock – for we have watched it drawing near for a long time – but we know that the conditions of life are changed for us now. We are not broken, either in body or spirit, by the death of our beloved friend'.

Burne-Jones told Thomas Rooke: 'I am sorry for the world and the years of splendid work it has lost – he could well do without it, but the world's the loser. And now I must go on with my work; things must be done and the living have to live'. As if to strengthen this resolve Burne-Jones returned from Morris's funeral – 'the worst day I ever had in my life' – and the following day 'with great energy ... did two entire cartoons'. But Morris remained, like a ghost, beside him as he worked at the many unfinished pictures that littered his studio at the Grange. Burne-Jones outlived his great friend by less than two years, dying of a heart attack in the early hours of 17 June 1898.

NOTES
3 ibid., p. 8.
7 ibid., p. 26.
10 ibid., I, p. 102.
12 Edward Burne-Jones, op. cit., p. 38.
17 The William Morris Chronology, op. cit., p. 17.
19 ibid., I, p. 212.
20 Edward Burne-Jones, op. cit., p. 74.
21 Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, op. cit., p. 252.
22 Edward Burne-Jones, op. cit., p. 94.
24 ibid., p. 39.
25 *Edward Burne-Jones*, op. cit., p. 120.
26 ibid., p. 120.
31 *Burne-Jones Talking*, op. cit., p. 92.
32 ibid., p. 93.
33 ibid., p. 92.
36 ibid., p. 85.
38 ibid., p. 251.
41 ibid., II, p. 278.
43 *Burne-Jones Talking*, op. cit., p. 95.
48 ibid., II, pp. 288–289.
49 *Burne-Jones Talking*, op. cit., p. 115.
50 ibid., p. 116.