‘On the Quays of Havre’
Some notes on Morris’s walking tour in France, July to August 1855

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Holidays—with the restraining influence of home temporarily set aside—may allow aspects of the personality to emerge which have been kept in check. The long slow journeys of the nineteenth century called out resources within the self, and there are many examples of travellers who found the newly discovered world outside blending with an interior landscape compounded of intense reading, unfulfilled wishes and unacknowledged desires. Such a journey might therefore precipitate a crisis, a moment of choice leading to a new way of life. In Morris’s life there are two such journeys, the walking-tour through Northern France with Burne-Jones and Fulford in 1855, and the trek across Iceland in 1871. The latter has often been discussed; it is with the former that we are concerned here.

There is an unforgettable sentence in Mackail’s biography which delineates the ‘moment of choice’:

Walking together on the quays of Havre late into the August night, Morris and Burne-Jones at last took the definite decision to be artists and to postpone everything else in this world to art.

In recent biographical accounts this has been extended in the following way:

It was at the conclusion of this holiday that, walking together on the quays at Le Havre late into the August night . . .

Philip Henderson, William Morris, Pelican p. 46

On the last night of their holiday, pacing the quays at Le Havre . . .

Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris, Heinemann, p. 6

In fact, having reached Le Havre from Rouen at the beginning of August, they were only half-way through their tour, and were waiting on the quay for the steamer which, when the tide was right, would take them across the estuary of the Seine to Caen. The mistake is understandable: people do travel back to England from Le Havre today; but Morris and his friends went on through Normandy and came home by a route from the fashionable Granville, via Jersey, to Southampton.

The publication of the first volume of the Collected Letters has helped to clarify a number of points about the French journey which were obscure. For example, the famous letter to Cornell Price of 10 August 1855, though written from Avranches, describes a much earlier part of the holiday, the cross-country road and rail excursions
From The Saturday Magazine for April 1836, No. 246, 'Nine Days in Normandy'.

from Chartres to Rouen; and though selections from them were available in the introductions to the Collected Works, it is the letters to his mother which enable us to establish the itinerary, though the times of arrival at various places are still in doubt. The following notes are offered as a provisional guide to those wishing to retrace the route in their armchairs. At a later date I hope to provide would-be voyagers with a more substantial 'companion', with references to Murray's guide-book and contemporary paintings, sketches and photographs. Besides restorations, whether well or ill-executed, the chances of war have made it difficult to recapture, in some instances, exactly what Morris and his friends saw: but much survives. The Middle Ages still call out to us from the towers and spires of the great churches of North France. While it is true that, because of more recent scholarship, we know more than Morris's generation about these Gothic churches, Morris's initial enthusiasm continues to amaze and challenge us—

we have seen nine Cathedrals, and let me see how many non-Cathedral Churches; I must count them on my fingers; there, I think I have missed some but I have made out 24 all splendid Churches; some of them surpassing first-rate English Cathedrals.

Letter to Cormell Price

In 1856 Morris published 'The Churches of North France : 1 : Shadows of Amiens' in the February number of the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. The series of articles was never completed; but it could be. I should welcome any help that members of the society are able to give me in order to put together a late, but, I hope, fitting hundred and fiftieth birthday present to William Morris.
ITINERARY

**Thur 19 July** Folkestone — Boulogne — Abbeville (arrived late evening)

**Fri 20** Abbeville (EBJ sketches) — Amiens (one hour in cathedral before dinner; then till 9)

**Sat 21** Amiens — Clermont — Beauvais (walk from Clermont)

**Sun 22** Beauvais (Sunday Mass and Vespers) — Paris

**Mon 23** Paris (16 hours sightseeing: Sainte Chapelle, Beaux Arts section of Exposition; Opera)

**Tues 24** Paris (Louvre, Hotel de Cluny, Notre Dame)

**Wed 25** Paris — Chartres (Fulford writes from Chartres)

**Thurs 26** Chartres

**Fri 27** Chartres (leaving at 6 a.m.) — Maintenon (by rail)
— Dreux (by one-horse contrivance)
— Boueill (by same method)
— Evreux (by rail)
— Louviers (by one-horse conveyance)
— Louviers St Pierre (by omnibus to station)
— Rouen (by ‘shrieking train’. Note that all this is done in one day though it fills the letter to Price written on the 10 August)

**Sat 28** Rouen

**Sun 29** Rouen (vespers on Sat and Sun)

**Mon 30** Rouen

**Tues 31** Rouen

**Wed 1 Aug** Rouen — Caudebec (walking 25 miles)

**Thurs 2** Caudebec — Yvetot (to catch train)
— Le Havre (On quay at night. The Quays were a tourist attraction recommended by Murray: or they were waiting for the steamer.)

**Fri 3** Le Havre — Caen (by steamer)

**Sat 4** Caen — Bayeux (by diligence)

**Sun 5** Bayeux (visited Cathedral which is partly closed: saw tapestry)

**Mon 6** Bayeux — St. Lo — Coutances

**Tues 7** Coutances — Avranches

**Wed 8** Coutances — Avranches

**Thurs 9** Mont St. Michel (an excursion from Avranches returning same day)

**Fri 10** Avranches (Morris’s letter to Price says that ‘we are waiting here’ which gives the impression of being there since at least Wednesday)

**Sat 11** Avranches possibly leaving late at night or early Sunday

**Sun 12** Granville, Jersey, Southampton