

often a voluntary private union that does not need the sanction of religion or law. Never is it the bourgeois institution that Engels condemned as an "official cloak of prostitution" and Morris denigrated as an arrangement designed to protect individual property and to resist such external forces as fellowship.²⁰

Since love is not tied to property and women ideally are not tokens of exchange, "free unions" among lovers meet with approval. In a conventional Victorian novel, the love of Ralph and the Lady of Abundance would be treated as adultery; in the terms established in a Morrisian romance, the relationship is acceptable because it is loving. Birdalone and Arthur simply make love to "wed" each other, while the nature of the union of Osberne and Elfhild, in *The Sundering Flood*, is never even discussed. Lovers love and unite and for Morris that union is enough.

In effect, Morris's last romances simply and undidactically praise lovers, workers, outlaws, and all who practice association and equality. Without overtly preaching, these works clearly proclaim the worth of joyful labor, cooperation, and mutual aid, and the possibility of harmonizing personal and communal needs. At the same time, they repudiate capitalist ideology and the literary form that bears it. Like the works of literature Morris praised in his lecture on "The Society of the Future," his final prose fictions "tell their tales to our senses and leave them alone to moralize the tale so told."²¹ Through their internalized Marxism and direct sensory appeal, they constitute a new literary genre, the socialist romance.

Ralph's brother, Hugh, himself a failure, snobbishly questions Ursula's background and is soundly reprimanded.

20. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: International, n.d.), 35; Bax and Morris, *Socialism*, 3.

21. *Political Writings of William Morris*, 200.

CHRISTOPHER WATERS

Morris's "Chants" and the Problems of Socialist Culture

In January 1878, Henry Broadhurst, the "Lib-Lab" secretary of the Labour Representation League, organized a "Workmen's Neutrality Demonstration." It was sponsored by the Eastern Question Association, of which William Morris was the treasurer. The event took place in the Exeter Hall in London, and it demonstrated the strength of opposition to British involvement in the Near East. Morris had been persuaded to write a song for the occasion, to be performed by a working-class choir as a prelude to the main address. The five verses of the work, sung to the tune of "The Hardy Norseman's Home of Yore," called on workers to voice their displeasure at government intervention in the crisis:

Wake, London Lads, wake, bold and free!
Arise and fall to work,
Lest England's glory come to be
Bond servant to the Turk!

In his autobiography, Broadhurst commented on the success of Morris's contribution, and on the importance of song in the work of political propaganda in general. He also claimed that "this was the first occasion on which music and singing were introduced to while away the time of waiting at a political meeting," and that "since then the practice has grown rapidly into favour, until it has now become practically universal."¹ Broadhurst was mistaken when he suggested that the use of Morris's rousing song by the Eastern Question Association was the "first occasion" on which song had been used to generate enthusiasm at a political meeting: Owenites and Chartists had realized just how effective song could be in their own propaganda work earlier in the century. Nonetheless, by

1. Henry Broadhurst, *The Story of His Life from a Stonemason's Bench to the Treasury* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1901), 83. For Morris and the Eastern Question Association, see E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 2d ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1976), esp. 214-19.

1878 most of their songs had been forgotten, although in the following decade—in part due to the efforts of William Morris—the socialist movement would become interested in them once again. Despite Broadhurst's ignorance of earlier radical song traditions, however, the late 1870s did mark a revival of interest in the relationship between music and politics. It also marked a period when Morris began to realize that his own literary skills could be valuable in the work of political propaganda.

It was through his connection with the Eastern Question Association that Morris began to become involved in various political crusades. In the 1880s, after severing his ties with the Liberal Party, Morris joined H. M. Hyndman's Democratic Federation—later the Social Democratic Federation (SDF)—which he soon left in order to establish the Socialist League. From the mid-1880s to the early 1890s he also wrote a number of “chants” for the movement to which he now devoted his energies. Rather than refer to his contributions as “songs,” he preferred to speak of his “chants,” hoping they would be recited, rather than sung, to the accompaniment of a harp or a lute, as was the case with the works of medieval minstrels. The earliest of the chants appeared in the SDF's weekly, *Justice*, in 1884. Some were published in the journal of the Socialist League, *Commonweal*, and a good number of them were issued by the league in pamphlet form as *Chants for Socialists*. Most of them were later collected and published in *Poems By the Way* (1896), *Pilgrims of Hope and Chants for Socialists* (1915), and in Morris's *Collected Works*, edited by his daughter, May.²

Little has been written about Morris's chants and the role they played in the socialist movement. E. P. Thompson, who devoted a few pages to them in his biography of Morris, suggested that they were largely ephemeral, written for the day-to-day needs of the movement. Thompson also claimed they were popular insofar as they relied on familiar symbols, metaphors, and images that had been cultivated by the romantic movement. Because of these specific intellectual debts, Thompson concluded, the chants cannot be viewed as representative of a poetry of “revolutionary realism.”³ Indeed, Morris's chants were similar to the songs of the Chartists, which were also indebted to the poetry of the romantic movement for their models, particularly to the work of Byron and Shelley. Another critic, however, has suggested that while the earlier romantic radicals addressed their work to the working class, the hero of Morris's chants was the working class itself. Because of this their success was guaranteed, and they “directly influenced the labour movement of his day. . . .”⁴ But how wide-

2. For the publication history of the *Chants*, see the appendix to this chapter. See also Eugene D. Le Mire, “The Socialist League Leaflets and Manifestoes: An Annotated Checklist,” *International Review of Social History* 22 (1977): 26–27.

3. Thompson, *William Morris*, 637–39.

4. Jessie Kocmanova, *The Poetic Maturing of William Morris* (Prague: Státní Pedagogické Nakladatelství, 1964), 188–94. See also John Miller, “Songs of the British Radical and Labour Movement,” *Marxism Today* 7 (June 1963): 180–86.



CHANTS FOR SOCIALISTS

BY

WILLIAM MORRIS.

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LONDON:

Socialist League Office,
18 FARRINGTON ROAD, HOLBORN VIADUCT, E.C.

1885.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

Title page, *Chants for Socialists*, by William Morris (London: Socialist League, 1885).

spread was that influence, and to what extent can we refer to the chants as part of an alternative, socialist culture that Morris and his comrades were attempting to establish in Britain?

Socialism and Song

Many Victorian social critics considered music to be of central importance in their various programs of moral reform, and the role played by music in the socialist movement can only be understood in this context. In 1871, seven years before Broadhurst's "Workmen's Neutrality Demonstration," the High Church theologian Hugh Haweis published his influential book, *Music and Morals*. In its twentieth edition by 1903, the work soon became a key text for those who believed that music could be used in the struggle to reform working-class morals. Moreover, Haweis's book was also mentioned by socialists when they discussed the relationship between music, politics, and social change.

Born in 1838, Haweis later recalled how he had become interested in the "elevating" power of music while working in the slums of Bethnal Green. After noting that most slum dwellers "were leading dull lives . . . with little refreshment or variety," he decided "to try the effect of music, and good music, upon their narrow, busy, overburdened lives."⁵ Enthusiastic about the results, he wrote about the relationship between musical harmony and social harmony in *Music and Morals*, and managed to convince various philanthropists to sponsor free concerts where workers might develop a taste for edifying music. His thoughts on the subject of music and social reform influenced the development of numerous organizations, such as the Kyrle Society, the People's Entertainment Society, and the People's Concert Society, as well as the movement to provide workers with temperance music halls. Taken together, such organizations were dedicated to conferring a "great good" on the population by destroying workers' ties to "lower forms of amusement" and by training them to a "very high standard of taste." The result of such efforts, claimed one reformer, would be a strengthening of working-class commitment to the dominant social order.⁶

Music played a prominent role in the various attempts to promote what was known as "rational recreation" because, as one historian has noted, it touched the emotions as well as the intellect; while rational, it was also inspirational.⁷ This fact was not wasted on activists in the socialist movement; they also recognized that music could generate strong emotional responses among those who heard it. Herbert Burrows, for example, a member of the SDF and one of

5. H. R. Haweis, *My Musical Life*, 2d ed. (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1886), 116–18.

6. Florence A. Marshall, "The People's Concert Society," *Macmillan's Magazine* 43 (April 1881): 437.

7. Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 102–4.

the organizers of the match girls' strike, once recounted the visit by a group of poor street musicians to a London slum:

The music died out in soft sweetness,
Entwined with a pathos of pain,
And the struggle for crust and for garret
Claimed the lives of the toilers again.
But their hearts had been softened and strengthened.⁸

The key to Burrows's own song is its emphasis on the extent to which the "toilers" had been "softened and strengthened" by the music of these street performers. By temporarily releasing them from the hardships of daily life, music had strengthened their resolve to struggle for a better world in which such suffering would not exist. For Burrows, music could transport the listener to an imaginary realm of beauty, which, when contrasted with present miseries, would intensify the resolve to struggle for the advent of a new, socialist society.

Socialists like Burrows seemed to be interested in music because of all the arts it appeared to them to be the least corrupted by capitalism. As Morris noted on numerous occasions, paintings and works of literature had become mere commodities, sold in the market like any other goods. But despite the growing prevalence of music-hall fare, music remained relatively immune from intensive commercial exploitation and could be practiced and enjoyed by all, including those without any formal training. Moreover, music had strong roots in working-class life, and for centuries it had been an important part of a genuinely popular, working-class culture. While most workers did not write poetry or paint, they could—and often did—sing. In particular, music played a major role in the lives of workers from nonconformist backgrounds, and socialists hoped to harness this form of popular creativity for their own movement. Thus they encouraged the use of music at political rallies. As one correspondent claimed in *Justice*: "The one reproach to our movement is that we neglect music. Apart from the pleasure and refining influence of music, it is generally admitted that it would be, if practiced, a great aid to us in our propagandist work."⁹

Of all the late Victorian socialists to write about music, John Bruce Glasier was perhaps the most important. A disciple of Morris and the author of an "appreciation" of Morris's *Chants*, Glasier believed that poetry and song could play a major role in the struggle for socialism. According to Glasier, while various "popular leisure-hour attractions" only reached the "emotional centres" of the "weaklings of the nation," music was "a purer and more imaginative" art which could exert a "potent and lasting influence" on the populace. Like other

8. Reproduced in James Leatham, *Songs for Socialists*, 3d ed. (Aberdeen: James Leatham, 1890), 19.

9. *Justice*, 25 June 1910, 3.

socialists, Glasier believed that the first stirring of idealism and enthusiasm that had so influenced the socialist movement came from Blake, Burns, Keats, Ruskin, Shelley, Whitman, and Wordsworth. Together, he wrote, their poems “still bear our souls company, keeping glorious our thoughts and inspiring our youth with a mystic urge towards all that makes for the redress and nobler achievement of mankind.”¹⁰ Not only did Glasier wish to harness the work of these poets to the socialist cause, but he also wanted socialists to follow in their footsteps. He wrote several socialist songs of his own, including the anarchist-inspired pieces, “When the Revolution Comes” and “We’ll Turn Things Upside Down.”

Unfortunately, Morris seldom wrote about the relationship between his poetry and the socialist movement, and he rarely commented on the uses the movement made of his own chants. But the purpose of the Socialist League—indeed, Morris’s lifelong goal—was “to make more socialists,” and this entailed a process of conversion in which music, given the nineteenth-century emphasis on its social utility, could play an important role. Morris was friendly with several musicians and composers, including Gustav Holst, and he valued their commitment to the socialist cause. Moreover, as early as 1884, when the Democratic Federation established a band to perform at various open-air gatherings, Morris supported the idea and took charge of the band fund.¹¹ While others discussed the relationship between music and socialism at a more theoretical level, it was Morris who contributed some of the most important songs to the movement.

Morris and the Chants

Morris was not the only socialist to write songs for the labor movement. Edward Carpenter’s “England, Arise!” became the banner of the socialist cause, while songs by Herbert Burrows, Jim Connell, John Bruce Glasier, Fred Henderson, Tom Maguire, and a number of lesser-known figures were sung at various socialist gatherings. The importance of their songs to the movement is attested to by the number of songbooks that various socialists compiled. Some of the more prominent anthologies included Carpenter’s *Chants of Labour* (1888), the work that served as a model for later works; *The Labour Songbook* (1888?), published by the Bristol Socialist Society; the *Socialist Songs* (1889) of the Aberdeen Branch of Morris’s Socialist League; *Songs for Socialists* (3d edition, 1890), compiled by Morris’s colleague, James Leatham; John Trevor’s *Labour Church Hymnbook* (1892); Glasier’s *Socialist Songs* (1893); Robert Blatchford’s

10. J. Bruce Glasier, *Socialism in Song: An Appreciation of William Morris’s “Chants for Socialists”* (Manchester: National Labour Press Ltd., 1919), vii-viii. Glasier’s sister made similar claims about her brother’s poetry. See Elizabeth Glasier Foster, *Bruce Glasier and His Poetry* (privately printed, n.d.), esp. 42.

11. “Music for the People,” *Justice*, 24 May 1884, 1.

Clarion Songbook (1906); *The SDF Songbook* (1910?); and the Fabian Society’s *Songs for Socialists* (1912).

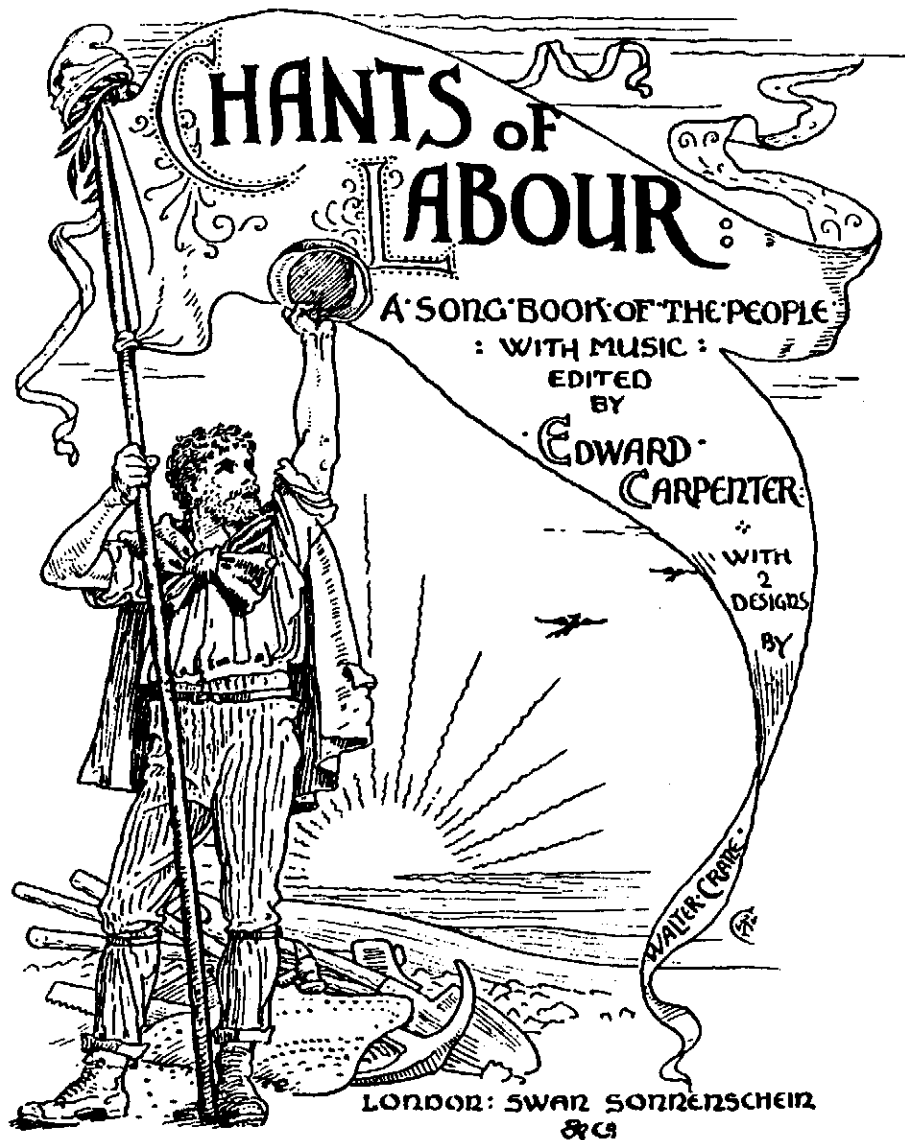
These songbooks shared the goal of fashioning a literary and musical culture for the socialist movement. While each collection had its own particular emphasis, overall they were similar both in their contents and in the themes they stressed. It is important to note that the songbooks did not merely consist of material written by late nineteenth-century socialists, for all of them acknowledged the importance of earlier romantic and radical traditions for the socialist cause. The compilers of the Fabian anthology, for example, claimed that their work was not solely a “lyrical expression of Fabian Socialism” (at which point one reviewer caustically remarked: “We should think not—and what the ‘lyrical expression of Fabian Socialism’ would be like is truly tantalizing to the imagination”).¹² Rather, the editors appropriated material from earlier intellectual traditions that could be used both in constructing and in legitimating a new, socialist culture.

Of the 532 titles in the nine songbooks just cited, 15 percent were songs written by the prominent romantic poets (almost 29 percent in the Fabian anthology). Indeed, works by Blake, Burns, Kingsley, Lowell, Shelley, Whitman, and Whittier were pervasive in the anthologies. Apart from Carpenter’s “England Arise!,” Lowell’s “True Freedom” was the only work to appear in all nine anthologies. But most of all it was Shelley who remained of paramount importance for late Victorian socialists. Several of them wrote pamphlets suggesting the enormous debt they owed to him, while Shelley’s poem, “Men of England,” appeared in two-thirds of the songbooks. Moreover, the songbooks also included a number of pieces written by various Chartists. These included the vaguely utopian pieces, “Sons of Labour” by John Mackay Peacock and “Truth is Growing” by Thomas Cooper, as well as the more explicitly radical poem by Ernest Jones, “The Song of the Lower Classes.”

Despite the prominence of such pieces, some 40 percent of all the songs that appeared in these anthologies were written by activists in the late nineteenth-century socialist and labor movements. And of the writers of those songs, William Morris stands out as the most prominent—and the most prolific. Responsible for some 8 percent of the titles in these collections, Morris towered above his comrades as a poet of socialism. Virtually all the songbooks included at least one piece by Morris, and most of them included several. “The March of the Workers,” written for *Commonweal* in 1885, appeared in eight of the books; “The Voice of Toil,” written for *Justice* in 1884, appeared in seven; “All for the Cause,” also written for *Justice*, appeared in six, as did his “Come, Comrades, Come.”

What strikes one in reading these works is Morris’s lack of originality in terms

12. *Daily Herald*, 26 August 1912, 4.



Title page, *Chants of Labour*, edited by Edward Carpenter with two designs by Walter Crane (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1905).



Illustration by Walter Crane from Carpenter's *Chants*.

of the themes and imagery he chose to develop, but just as apparent is his ability to work with this material in a more sophisticated manner than most of his contemporaries. Morris succeeded, where many of his comrades failed, in developing a powerful mode of expression that stayed clear of the sentimentalism that characterized a large number of socialist songs. Take, for example, "The Day is Coming." Hardly original in its content, it is merely one example of a whole genre of optimistic, "coming day" songs that were popular with socialists. Charles Mackay, the editor of the *Illustrated London News*, had written a similar song in the 1850s, an enormously popular work that sold more than 400,000 copies. It was reprinted in several socialist anthologies because it appealed to those who sensed the importance of utopian imagery and optimistic sentiment in converting workers to their cause:

There's a good time coming, boys,
A good time coming;
We may not live to see the day,
But earth shall glisten in the ray
Of the good time coming.¹³

Mackay's poem lacks any clear understanding of the forces that prevented the "good time" about which he wrote from being realized. Nonetheless, it foreshadowed a whole genre of socialist songs that also spoke of the ideal society of the future. Utopian sentiment in the socialist movement was widespread, and it was cultivated because it was supposed to generate the desire for a new society. According to one writer, that desire could be stimulated by expressing utopian sentiments through music and song. "Music," he wrote, "must represent an aspiration after the ideal beauty, an attempt to express in a tone-picture something beyond the rays of verbal description or realistic experience."¹⁴

Like Mackay's poem, Morris's chant, "The Day is Coming," offers a vision of well-being in the society of the future:

Come hither lads, and hearken, for a tale there is to tell,
Of the wonderful days a-coming when all shall be better than
well.

But unlike Mackay's work—and unlike similar pieces written by other socialists (such as Montague Blatchford's "Hark! A New Song Ringing," H. H. Sparling's "When the People Have Their Own Again," and W. D. Tait's "The Time is Coming")—Morris's picture of the socialist millennium is full of concrete

13. Reproduced in *The Labour Church Hymnbook* (Manchester: Labour Church Institute, 1892), 47.

14. "How Commercialism Affects Our Music," *Justice*, 26 October 1895, 2.

details of the socialist future. It is full of references to better housing and the joys of work, leisure, shared wealth, security, and communal well-being. In fact, "The Day is Coming" is a poetic synopsis of the vision of the future that Morris would elaborate several years later in *News from Nowhere*.

"The Day is Coming" also stands apart from other works of the genre because in it Morris makes an attempt to contrast his vision of an idyllic future with his understanding of the dismal realities of the present. This is what differentiates the piece more than anything else from works that, at least superficially, share a similar theme:

Ah! Such are the days that shall be! But what
are the deeds of to-day,
In the days of the years we dwell in, that wear
our lives away?

For Morris, a vision of the future was worth cultivating because it could breed working-class discontent with the present and thus inspire the struggle for the socialist society of the future. He thus took great pains in his poetry to juxtapose past and present in order to encourage the kind of activity that would bring about "the change" he so ardently longed for:

Oh why and for what are we waiting, while our brothers
droop and die,
And on every wind of the heavens a wasted life goes by?
How long shall they reproach us where crowd on crowd they
dwell,
Poor ghosts of the wicked city, the gold-crushed hungry hell?
Through squalid life they laboured, in sordid grief they died,
Those sons of a mighty mother, those props of England's pride.

According to Glasier, "The Day is Coming" was "almost the most beautiful socialist utterance," condensing the essence of the "whole call" of socialism.¹⁵ To be more specific, the chant transcends the vague utopian yearning that characterizes the majority of the songs of the "coming day" genre by offering an analysis of oppression and a corresponding call for revolutionary action.

"All for the Cause" is another of Morris's chants that depicts the socialist society of the future. More than "The Day is Coming," it focuses on the struggle that will be necessary to bring that society about. Glasier referred to it as a socialist communion hymn: "Here we feel in full glow that inner sense of benediction—of worship . . . which is the final assurance and strength of all self-

15. Glasier, *Socialism in Song*, 8.

renunciation for human weal. . . .”¹⁶ According to Morris, it was through self-renunciation for the Cause that true comradeship was born. “All for the Cause” called on individuals to march forward with the banner of socialism, to experience new forms of intense comradeship, and to identify with those who had already suffered in the battle:

Hear a word, a word in season, for the day is drawing nigh,
When the Cause shall call upon us, some to live, and
some to die!

While “All for the Cause” speaks of sacrifice, it also speaks of courage. Indeed, it is from those who have sacrificed themselves in the past that socialists can gain the courage and strength that will assist them in their present struggle:

Mourn not therefore, nor lament it that the world
outlives their life;
Voice and vision yet they give us, making strong
our hands for strife.

The theme of martyrdom also characterizes Morris’s “A Death Song,” written in December 1887 for the funeral of Alfred Linnell, the agitator who had died from injuries inflicted by the police at the Trafalgar Square demonstration on “Bloody Sunday,” November 13.¹⁷ Police brutality on that occasion outraged Morris, and the funeral of Linnell was an extraordinary event which hardened the conviction and resolve of socialists:

What cometh here from west to east awending?
And who are these, the marchers stern and slow?
We bear the message that the rich are sending
Aback to those who bade them wake and know.
*Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.*

Not only does the song develop an image of working-class unity and determination in the wake of Linnell’s death, but it also depicts Morris’s own bitterness at the refusal of the ruling class to listen to the arguments workers like Linnell had been making:

They will not learn; they have no ears to hearken.
They turn their faces from the eyes of fate;

16. *Ibid.*, see 17–20.

17. William Morris, *Alfred Linnell. A Death Song* (London, 1887). The song was written too late in Morris’s career to appear in the various editions of the *Chants* published by the Socialist League.

SOLD FOR THE BENEFIT OF LINNELL'S ORPHANS.

ALFRED LINNELL



Killed in Trafalgar Square,

NOVEMBER 20, 1887.

A DEATH SONG,

BY MR. W. MORRIS.

Memorial Design by Mr. Walter Crane.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

Title page, William Morris, *Alfred Linnell. A Death Song* (1887). Illustration by Walter Crane.

Their gay-lit halls shut out the skies that darken.
 But, lo, this dead man knocking at the gate.
Not one, not one. . . .

If "A Death Song" represents Morris at his most pessimistic, "The Voice of Toil" encourages workers to gain strength from martyrs like Linnell. Pessimism is discouraged:

I heard men saying, leave hope and praying,
 All days shall be as all have been;
 To-day and to-morrow bring fear and sorrow,
 The never-ending toil between.

At the same time, workers are told to pay attention to the history of popular struggles, to learn from them and gain sustenance from them:

When Earth was younger 'midst toil and hunger
 In hope we strove, and our hands were strong;
 Then great men led us, with words they fed us,
 And bade us right the earthly wrong.
 Go read in story their deeds and glory,
 Their names amidst the nameless dead;
 Turn then from lying to us slow dying
 In that good world to which they led.

The heroes Morris refers to in "The Voice of Toil"—Glasier claimed he meant them to be Wat Tyler and John Ball¹⁸—were invoked to give strength to those engaged in the current struggle by indicating the continuities between the popular movements of the past and the present. But most of all it was the promise of victory that charged the movement with the energy necessary to sustain it, hence the popularity of Morris's "March of the Workers." Published in virtually all of the anthologies, it was perhaps the most frequently sung of the chants, and along with Carpenter's "England, Arise!" became one of the principal marching songs of the movement. Not only does it speak of the "good time coming," but it also holds out the promise of that good time to everybody—even the rich are invited to share in its joys: "Then be ye of us, let your hope be our desire." More than this, victory is also guaranteed because of the devotion and commitment of the people to the struggle:

What is this the sound and rumour? What is this
 that all men hear,
 Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm

18. Glasier, *Socialism in Song*, see 12–14.

is drawing near,
 Like the rolling on of ocean in the eventide of fear?
 'Tis the people marching on.

The Chants and Socialist Culture

Despite the familiar romantic imagery that permeates Morris's chants, the abstractions which characterize many of the works of the romantic movement and which socialists reproduced are largely absent. While Morris's earlier works often spoke in general terms of "anguish," "tyranny," and "slavery," and while they also spoke of the desire for a world of "freedom" and "justice," in his later works Morris abandoned many of these abstractions. In their place he substituted an emphasis on the importance of the concrete struggles of real people. The stress Morris placed on *activity* in his chants differentiates them from many of the romantic antecedents to which he was indebted. As Glasier wrote, Morris's songs spoke "of the people" not "to or in behalf of the people." For example, Shelley, in "Men of England," directed his thoughts to the oppressed: "The seed ye sow, another reaps." By contrast, Morris, in "All for the Cause," speaks as *one* of the oppressed: "We who were once fools and dreamers, then shall be the brave and wise." This, Glasier believed, is what distinguished Morris's chants from the work of Burns and Shelley in particular.¹⁹

It also differentiates them from many of the songs written by other socialists at the end of the century, writers who persisted in using vague generalities rather than speaking in a language of a shared and popular struggle. Morris attempted to break with the past, and by making use of the first person plural he tried to voice the aspirations of the people. One critic has suggested that the use of "we" in such works is an "empty dramatic device" that too often masquerades a lack of real identification between the poet and his or her audience.²⁰ Nonetheless, Morris used it with some success, generating a sense of common purpose and shared identity among those who sang his songs. In "No Master," for example, Morris asks:

And we, shall we too, crouch and quail,
 Ashamed, afraid of strife,
 And lest our lives ultimately fail
 Embrace the Death in Life?

19. *Ibid.*, 5.

20. Ian Watson, *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 41. For the role played by Chartism in shifting the content of radical poetry away from a vague, romantic idealism, see Horst Roessler and Ian Watson, "In Defence of Ernest Jones," *Gulliver: Deutsche Englische Jahrbücher* 12 (1983): 136.

For many of those who were familiar with Morris's songs, the answer was a resounding no, and it was this sense of camaraderie between those who struggled together, captured in such songs as "No Master," that made Morris's chants appealing to so many socialists.

The extent of that appeal is often hard to measure, but it can be gauged from several impressionistic sources, such as this description of the activities of the Bristol Socialist Society:

It still lingers in my memory as some Enchanted Hall of Dreams. There was music and song and dance. . . . Night after night bands of socialists, young and old, would meet for study and debate, and terribly practical work, too, for the unemployed and unskilled workers. . . . Never did our meetings break up without our singing one of Morris's songs to a crooning Irish melody—I think "The Message of the March Wind" to the tune of "Teddy O'Neil" was the favourite.²¹

The chants were also popular with individuals who did not belong to Morris's Socialist League or related bodies such as the Bristol Socialist Society. Christian Socialists, for example, often extolled the virtues of the chants. In the early 1880s, the *Christian Socialist* urged its readers to acquire a copy of "The Day is Coming," claiming that "it ought to stir the blood of any Englishman that hears it."²² In the United States, Morris's chants also accompanied the struggle for socialism. In Omaha, Nebraska, the Women's Socialist Union opened its meetings with the singing of a socialist song, often one written by Morris. Likewise, Morris's "March of the Workers" was especially popular with the Knights of Labour, and at one time or another most of the chants appeared in the newspapers published by radical and socialist organizations in the United States, including the *Workmen's Advocate*, *People*, *The Coming Nation*, and *The Appeal to Reason*. They were also published by Charles Kerr, the influential Chicago socialist who established a press that made available the works of many British and continental socialists to the American public.²³

Despite the widespread popularity of Morris's chants among those already converted to the cause of socialism, the attempt made by Morris and his contemporaries to write songs for the socialist movement was fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, socialists—Morris in particular—wanted to see the revival of popular artistic creativity. But, on the other hand, they offered their own songs to the very people whose creativity they wished to encourage.

21. Samson Bryher, *An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol* (Bristol: Bristol Labour Weekly, 1931), 22.

22. *Christian Socialist*, October 1883, 66.

23. Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 111; Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 289, 294, 321–23.

Montague Blatchford was one individual who, while praising Morris's chants, also encouraged the re-emergence of a genuinely "popular" popular culture. Blatchford was founder of the Clarion Vocal Union, a radical working-class choral organization associated with the readers of a widely read socialist weekly, *The Clarion*, for whose pages he once wrote, "formal classical coldness . . . and involved metaphysical art" were of no use to the working class. Instead, workers required "an art of their own, art that is built upon their lives."²⁴

Blatchford was not alone in this belief. Edgar Bainton, a socialist, a composer, and a professor of composition in Newcastle Upon Tyne, once delivered a lecture to the local branch of the Independent Labour Party in which he discussed the relationship between music and socialism. Echoing Morris's writings on art, Bainton claimed that music had once been an expression of the aspirations of the people, but in the late middle ages wandering minstrels began to professionalize musical production; in so doing, they undermined the importance of music created by the people themselves. As was the case in so much of the cultural criticism developed by late Victorian socialists, the robust popular culture of an earlier Merrie England was contrasted with the barrenness of its nineteenth-century counterpart. For Bainton, the solution to the problem was to be found in returning music to the people, encouraging people to make their own music again.²⁵

But what did it mean to call on the "people" to create their own music, holding up to them a picture of their musical creativity in the middle ages? Bainton, along with Blatchford and many of the socialists who compiled various anthologies of socialist songs, often spoke of the need for the people to make their own culture. Nonetheless, underneath the rhetoric many of the socialists seemed to think they knew best what the workers really desired. Some of them were even under the illusion that the material in their socialist anthologies was representative of a genuinely popular culture. As Carpenter claimed in the preface to his own collection, the works he had selected were for, and mostly by, "the people." But in making this suggestion Carpenter merely romanticized "the people" and confused a tradition that developed from the people with one manufactured for them by middle-class socialists.

Other activists were slightly more aware of the problem. For example, H. W. Hobart, a member of the Social Democratic Federation and a writer on cultural affairs for *Justice*, reviewed Carpenter's anthology: "Few people can decide better what the workers want in the way of labour chants . . . than the toilers themselves," but he added, somewhat parenthetically, "or, at any rate, those who have an affinity with the working classes."²⁶ On many occasions, Morris

24. "Old English Music," *Clarion*, 7 July 1905, 3.

25. Edgar L. Bainton, *Music and Socialism* (Manchester: Fellowship Press, 1910?).

26. *Justice*, 19 May 1888, 2.

himself felt the kind of affinity with the working class that Hobart spoke of, despite his own middle-class background. But there were times when he didn't. Referring to a talk he gave in Stepney in 1885, he once said, "I don't seem to have got at them yet—you see this great class gulf lies between us."²⁷

When Edgar Bainton called on the "people" to make their own art, he had taken his cue from Morris, who was appalled at the extent to which capitalism had robbed workers of their creativity. But despite Morris's call for a revival of popular art, his chants were anything but popular in his sense of the term. Although they often made use of the first person plural, thus giving the appearance of emanating from the working class, they were quite distinct from forms of working-class cultural production. As A. L. Lloyd, the historian of the folk song movement, has suggested, the songs of the Chartist and socialist movements "had little influence on the sort of thing the singing miners, mill hands and foundry workers made for themselves."²⁸

Industrial folk songs were part of a culture of the people—the kind of culture that Morris himself called for, but could not, of course, provide. They were also expressions of local occupational experience, rooted in the work places and communities in which they were written. Socialist songs needed to transcend these geographical boundaries in order to assist in the construction of a national—even international—movement, a movement with a culture that could bind together the diverse social groups that were attracted to socialism. This they achieved by keeping alive the aspirations of the romantic movement, wedded, in the case of Morris's chants, to a more radical analysis of capitalist exploitation. They were manufactured and imposed from above, but the best of them—particularly those written by Morris—could help inspire the struggle for the new society socialists desired.

If the society Morris dreamed of is ever realized, then a genuinely popular culture might flourish once again. In the meantime, both industrial folk songs written by workers and songs written by middle-class socialists might work together, inspiring the movement to which Morris devoted a good deal of energy. It is interesting to note that many of the varied traditions socialists drew upon when compiling their songbooks a century ago are still being invoked in popular struggles today. Following the miners' strike of 1984–1985, workers in the coal fields of the North East recorded an album, "Which Side Are You On?"²⁹ Not only does it include songs of struggle written by miners themselves—songs that represent a "flowering of creativity amongst the mining communities," as the album put it—but it offers the listener a number of nineteenth-century ballads

27. Quoted in J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London: Longmans, 1899), 2:153.

28. A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), 318.

29. "Which Side Are You On?" (Music for the miners from the North East.) Available from Which Side Records, 23 Brighton Grove, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE4 5N5, England.

and pieces written for workers by more recent middle-class sympathizers such as Bertolt Brecht. No doubt William Morris would heartily approve of such a combination, for he never intended his own chants to become detached from the very real struggles for which they were written.

Appendix: Morris's Socialist Songs—Publication History

Abbreviations Used in the Listings

Song sources

Chants #1: Chants for Socialists [1 song] (London: Reeves, 1884).

Chants #2: Chants for Socialists [6 songs] (London: Socialist League, February-May 1885).

Chants #3: Chants for Socialists [7 songs] (London: Socialist League, 1885 and 1892).

Poems: William Morris, *Poems By the Way and Love is Enough* (London: Longmans, 1896).

Pilgrims: William Morris, *Pilgrims of Hope and Chants for Socialists* (London: Longmans, 1915).

CW: *The Collected Works of William Morris*, introduced by May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, 1910–1915).

Peck: *Chants for Socialists*, introduced by Walter Edwin Peck [*Library of Social Justice #1*] (New York: New Horizon Press, 1935).

Selected socialist songbooks in which Morris's songs appeared

EC: Edward Carpenter, *Chants of Labour* (1888).

BSS: Bristol Socialist Society, *The Labour Songbook* (1888?).

SLA: Socialist League (Aberdeen), *Socialist Songs* (1889).

JL: James Leatham, *Songs for Socialists* (1890).

JBG: John Bruce Glasier, *Socialist Songs* (1893).

GP: Georgia Pearce, *The Clarion Songbook* (1906).

SDF: *The SDF Songbook* (1910?).

FS: Fabian Society, *Songs for Socialists* (1912).

"ALL FOR THE CAUSE"

Justice, 19 April 1884; *Chants #2 & #3*; *Poems*; *Pilgrims*;

CW, vol. 9; Peck; EC; SLA; JL; JBG; SDF; FS.

"THE DAY IS COMING"

Justice, 29 March 1884; *Chants #1, #2 and #3*; *Poems*; *Pilgrims*; *CW*, vol. 9; Peck; BSS;

SLA; JL; JBG.