The Serialisation of
The Pilgrims of Hope
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Apart from the ‘Chants for Socialists’ – and two short poems published in Justice to
celebrate May Day in 1892 and 1894 – Morris’s only important socialist poem was
The Pilgrims of Hope. This was serialised in thirteen instalments in Commonweal
between March 1885 and 3 July 1886. The poem’s composition was never planned,
and its development was unusual to say the least. Section 1, ‘The Message of the
March Wind’, was clearly intended to be a further addition to the earlier songs, and
appeared as such in the first edition of the ‘Chants for Socialists’ published by the
Socialist League (SL) in 1885. Exactly what prompted Morris to use it as the basis
of a longer narrative poem is uncertain; the preface to the second instalment of the
re-styled The Pilgrims of Hope simply informed the reader that it was ‘the intention
of the author to follow the fortunes of the lovers who in the “Message of the March
Wind” were already touched by the cause of the people.’

The poem’s subsequent development reflected the circumstances under which it
was composed. The months following Morris’s split with the Social Democratic
Federation (SDF) in December 1884, and the publication of the first edition of
Commonweal in February 1885, were a period of intense activity: not least of his
problems being the printing and editing of the new paper. His editorial responsibilities
were nevertheless exciting, and he determined right from the start that poetry should
be encouraged in a more forthright manner than it had been in the SDF’s paper, Justice. To expect poetic contributions from his ‘comrades’ at such short notice was,
however, impracticable, so he accepted the responsibility himself, his verse being
written, as May Morris recalled, ‘after he had returned home ... from poor quarters
full of sights and stories which had wrung his heart by their sordidness and dull
endurance; it was written in sorrow and anger, in revolt at the things he saw and the
things he divined’.

The sheer pressure of work on Morris at this time meant that he derived most of
the ideas and incidents for the early part of the poem from his experiences in the
socialist movement. The Pilgrims of Hope begins, as mentioned above, with the
moving lyric ‘The Message of the March Wind’, which J. W. Mackail described as
having ‘touches ... of the natural magic which had filled his early poetry’. It is clearly
autobiographical, and takes as its theme the soul-searching that Morris experienced
before dedicating himself to the socialist movement. Many of the images in the poem
are echoes of those he used in a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones written from
Kelmscott amidst such musings in 1879: ‘I am sitting now ... in the tapestry-room,
the moon rising red through the east-wind haze, and a cow lowing over the fields. I
have been feeling chastened by many thoughts, and the beauty and quietness of the
surroundings, which latter, as I hinted, I am, as it were, beginning to take leave of.
That leave-taking will, I confess, though you may think it fantastic, seem a long step
towards saying good-night to the world....’

The image of the March wind serves a similar purpose for both Morris and the
Pilgrims. On a personal level it carries the reality of social deprivation into the sphere of artistic escape. It forces the artist to make the choice that Morris had made at the time he joined the socialist movement: either dedicate oneself to the literature of escape composed in creative isolation or face the reality of society and try to change it. The same is true for the Pilgrims. They live in a world of love, beauty and pastoral calm in contrast to commercial London with its poverty, toil and misery. Their choice is similarly disconcerting. They can either enjoy peace and personal fulfilment, or pursue action for the future communal good. If they accept the former course, they must live with the guilt of complicity, yet by dedicating themselves to the latter they will have to sacrifice their own happiness. They, like Morris, choose to abandon individual fulfilment in favour of social action.

The high poetic quality of 'The Message of the March Wind' was only occasionally repeated in later sections of The Pilgrims of Hope. Although Morris was used to producing verse at great speed, his poetry for Commonweal was composed to meet strict deadlines which allowed him little opportunity for revision. Section 2 of The Pilgrims of Hope, 'The Bridge and the Street', was the first part of the poem to be written in this way and has many technical failings. It is unpoetic in nature, full of inappropriate redundancies and archaisms, and makes blatant use of unnecessary prosaic passages in order to fit the requirements of the metre or to match the rhyme. Such weaknesses also extend to its content. There is no attempt to describe the reality of London; there is no characterisation; there are no references to give the reader some idea of when the action is taking place; and, most important of all, there is no action likely to capture the imagination of a working-class audience.

Morris was probably aware of these weaknesses because the third section of the poem shows a change in approach. For 'Sending to the War' he abandoned the earlier metre of 'The Message of the March Wind' and 'The Bridge and the Street' in favour of the one he had used successfully in Sigurd the Volsung. He also made the poem more topical. 'Sending to the War' describes the Pilgrims' feelings as they watch a military parade in London before the soldiers set off to take part in one of Britain's numerous imperialistic wars. This theme was of personal interest to Morris and immensely topical. His antipathy to Jingoism had dated from his involvement in the Eastern Question Association, and had found eloquent expression in his lecture 'Our Country Right or Wrong' where he had railed against the futility of war and the stupidity of what he termed contemptuously, 'National Vain-glory'.

The portrayal of the parade in The Pilgrims of Hope was inspired by a campaign which the SL was pursuing with great enthusiasm at the time. In February 1885 Khartoum had fallen and news of the death of General Gordon had reached England. Cries for revenge were soon appearing in the national press. Amidst great patriotic fervour a massive military parade was held in London later in the same month to honour the Grenadier Guards before they embarked for Africa. The Provisional Council of the SL immediately threw itself into the campaign against the war, distributing a thousand copies of its anti-war Manifesto, and publishing a series of articles on the subject in Commonweal written by E. Belfort Bax. Morris himself became involved in the agitation when he moved a rider to a resolution passed at an anti-war meeting held at St James's Hall on 2 April 1885: 'that this meeting believes that the invasion of the Soudan has been prompted solely by the desire to exploit the country in the interests of capitalists and stock-jobbers; and warns the working classes
that such wars will always take place until they (the workers) unite throughout the civilised world, and take their affairs into their own hands'.

Morris wrote 'Sending to the War' soon after the St James's Hall meeting, for it appeared with his own report of the latter in the May 1885 edition of *Commonweal*. However, unlike the League's anti-war propaganda which concentrated on the economic exploitation of imperialism, 'Sending to the War' shows how appeals to patriotism were used by the bourgeoisie to distract attention from the class war at home. The hero moves from the passive indoctrination of his rural village where the 'papers gave us our wisdom', to an awareness of the class divisions in the metropolis, and then bitterness as he realises that these divisions are maintained by false appeals to patriotism. The fact that the 'hopeless, shameless, angerless' workers acquiesce in their own exploitation would appear on the face of it to be disillusioning, but through the medium of dream the soldiers are transformed in the hero's mind into a workers' army marching 'shoulder to shoulder' to 'the people's war'.

Morris also used topical events in the other sections of the poem published in *Commonweal* during the course of 1885. The first of these, 'Mother and Son', is a monologue spoken by the hero's wife to her new-born son, and was one of the sections of the poem which Morris revised for inclusion in *Poems By the Way*. As such it was one of the best received poems in the volume. Oliver Elton claimed that the piece was 'perhaps the strongest Mr. Morris has written' and that within it were 'strokes with a fearless ring that remind us strongly of Rossetti's “Jenny”.' This section of the poem is still admired today. Peter Faulkner has praised 'its sympathy for the woman's position in nineteenth century society' and suggested that it shows Morris to have been 'a bold and unorthodox thinker'.

Whether 'Mother and Son' does reveal Morris to have been 'a bold and unorthodox thinker' on the subject of women's role in society is a matter of opinion. His views on the subject were complex and ambiguous as they were derived from insights borrowed from two different sources: Pre-Raphaelitism and socialism. The Pre-Raphaelites, through their idealisation of the concept of 'love', envisaged women as the 'soul' of man and in need of protection from the mundane cares and realities of life. Yet they also had a genuine desire for a full and equal relationship between the sexes. These two views were combined to create an ideal of womanhood, Morris's vision of which appeared in his unfinished novel of the 1870s: 'Her face, like her figure, had something strong and massive amidst its delicacy... [She had] dark brown abundant silky hair, a firm clear cut somewhat square jaw, and round well developed lips ... and to light all this up, large grey eyes set wide apart'.

Morris's sympathy with these romantic ideas tempered the insights into the position of women he gained from socialism. He found it difficult to advocate theoretical standards of equality between sexes which he considered to be fundamentally different. When he wrote *The Manifesto of the Socialist League* early in 1885, he stated vaguely that under a future state of society: 'our modern bourgeois property-marriage, maintained as it is by its necessary complement, universal venal prostitution, would give place to kindly and human relations between the sexes'. George Bernard Shaw responded to this by submitting to *Commonweal* a 'very clever paper' on the subject of wedlock. Morris rejected it as, in his own words, he found it difficult to 'pluck up heart to explain the ambiguities of [the] ... sentence in the Manifesto'.
However, what made the position of women topical to the readership of *Commonweal* in 1885 was W. T. Stead’s sensational revelations about child prostitution in London. He had launched his campaign in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 4 July 1885 announcing that ‘All those who are squeamish and all those who are prudish, and all those who prefer to live in a fool’s paradise of imaginary innocence and purity, selfishly oblivious of the horrible realities which torment those whose lives are passed in the London Inferno’ should read no further. Then, in a series of articles with provocative titles like ‘The Violation of Virgins’, ‘Strapping Girls Down’ and ‘Procuration in the West-end’, he went on to detail the plight of girls in the metropolis: ‘This very night in London, and every night, year in and year out, not seven maidens only, but many times seven, selected almost as much by chance as those who in the Athenian market-place drew lots as to which should be flung into the Cretan labyrinth, will be offered up as the Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’. The SL immediately gave its support to the campaign, and Morris spoke on the subject at a meeting held at Farringdon Hall on 5 August 1885. Here he deplored ‘the causes that drive girls and women into the streets to sell their love, not to give it’, and borrowing Stead’s metaphor, concluded that the ‘real Minotaur is Capital – not one man, but the whole system is guilty’.

The thwarting of ‘true love’ between the sexes which resulted from bourgeois property-marriage is the theme of ‘Mother and Son’. Morris believed capitalism forced women to sacrifice their bodies, their love and their personal feelings in search of security. Marriages were arranged for personal gain rather than mutual love. For the middle-class woman her choice of partner was influenced not by love but by one of three practical considerations: prudence (‘Good is a housekeeper’s life./So shall I sell my body that I may be matron and wife’), hatred (in the case of the woman unable for economic reasons to marry the man she loved) or greed (‘I am fair and hard of heart, and riches shall be my lot’). For the working-class woman, however, there was not even the hope of security. Her fate – if she was fortunate enough to avoid the snare of prostitution – was to ‘breed the fools of earth, and the dregs of the city sty’ and to rear ‘those that are born of despair’.

Yet despite this sympathetic treatment of the degradation of women under capitalism, Morris was unable to escape his romantic background. The pastoral idyll in which the Pilgrims’ love had blossomed in the first two sections of the poem can hardly be said to be representative of late nineteenth-century country life. Indeed, throughout *The Pilgrims of Hope* ruralism – like the medievalism of *A Dream of John Ball* and the utopianism of *News from Nowhere* – is used as a model with which to contrast the horrors of capitalism. This leads to the idealisation of the heroine in the same way as Will Green’s daughter in *A Dream of John Ball* and Ellen in *News from Nowhere*: all three being embodiments of the attributes Morris most desired in a woman. It is not the heroine speaking when she addresses her child, but the Morris of *The Earthly Paradise* days: she is, she tells us, ‘fair ... in the guise of the country maidens who play in the sun and the air’; her eyes ‘seem for men’s beguiling fulfilled with the dreams of the wise’; and her lips ‘look as though my soul had learned, Deep things I have never heard of’. This idealisation of the heroine appears even less convincing when placed alongside the realistic portrayal of her husband’s conversion to socialism in the following section of the poem entitled ‘New Birth’. Richard’s first lessons in revolutionary politics come
from a Frenchman he befriends in his home village. Such refugees were a common feature of British life in the latter part of the nineteenth-century; the country providing a retreat for those fleeing persecution in Russia, the break-up of the Commune and the anti-socialist laws in Germany. However, the somewhat shaky chronology which underlies *The Pilgrims of Hope* suggests that the Frenchman was a victim of the crushing of the 1848 revolutions. Whatever his origins his message is stated simply as the ‘battle of grief and hope with riches and folly and wrong’. It has a profound effect on the hero, Richard, and is responsible for his decision to go to London.

In London Richard attends a meeting at one of the radical clubs which were so familiar to the readers of *Commonweal*. Morris’s description of this meeting skilfully captures the sordid dullness of such venues and his own experience of just how dedicated a speaker had to be to overcome the apathy of a typical audience. Morris was always honest in his accounts of these meetings, and in his *Socialist Diary* of 1887 recounted his experience of the audience’s reaction to a speech he made at the Chiswick Club: ‘My Socialism was gravely listened to by the audience but taken with no enthusiasm; and however simply one puts the case for Socialism one always rather puzzles an audience’. Under such circumstances a single recruit of the calibre of the hero of *The Pilgrims of Hope* was a considerable achievement.

Richard’s education in the techniques of socialist propaganda, and his subsequent persecution for his communist beliefs, is the theme of the next section of the poem, ‘The New Proletarian’. Again Morris drew extensively on his own experiences to add realism to this section. In ‘Art and the People’ he had argued that it was the duty of every new convert to the cause to ‘learn from books and from living people who are willing … to teach them, in as much detail as possible what are the ends and hopes of Social Revolution’, and once this was accomplished, ‘to give expression to that discontent and hope, and to teach people the details of the aim of Constructive Revolution’. He considered the best means of doing this was by holding open-air meetings. Richard embodies these ideals, and his example was clearly intended to serve as encouragement to the members of the SL engaged in the extensive outdoor speaking campaign in the metropolis during 1885.

Often these working-class propagandists – once they were recognised as such – suffered persecution from their employers. Morris was well aware of such tactics. Soon after his arrival in London, Richard loses the security of his private income as a result of the corrupt actions of a lawyer. In his subsequent reduction to the status of a wage-slave, Morris placed great emphasis on the fear of unemployment that haunted all those workers who had nothing to sell but their own labour. As a wage-slave the agitator is powerless in the work place and must, like Richard, expect to be humiliated by his employer, jeered at for his views or even dismissed for his activities.

As the SL’s open-air propaganda campaign continued through 1885 it soon became apparent that its speakers were faced with a greater threat than unemployment, that of arrest and imprisonment. The next section of the poem, ‘New Birth’, was written at a time when Morris had become personally involved in the free-speech campaign. Following the imprisonment of John Williams, one of the SDF’s activists, for obstruction, the SL had joined forces with the SDF, the Fabian Society and the Radical Clubs to protest at his imprisonment. On Sunday, 20 September, a large crowd was addressed by Hyndman and John Mathias in Dod Street and a resolution moved against his sentence. The police maintained a low profile during the meeting itself,
but as it was dispersing waded into the crowd arresting two banner-bearers and various other participants.

The arrested men – who included Mowbray, Kitz, Mahon and Lewis Lyons – appeared the following day at the Thames Police Court in front of Mr Saunders, the same magistrate who had sentenced John Williams. Morris was amongst the spectators who witnessed Saunders’ vindictive summing-up, which was followed by sentences of two months hard labour being passed on Lyons and one month each upon the others. The spectators, including Morris, immediately set up a chorus of ‘shame’ against the decision, and according to Aveling’s account published in the October edition of Commonweal, the police ‘commenced an assault upon all and sundry’. He went on to add: ‘William Morris, remonstrating at the hustling and thumping, became at once the chief thumpee. There has rarely been seen anything more brutal than the way in which two or three able-bodied young men fell upon the author of what one of the newspapers called the “Paradise League”.’

Morris himself was arrested for alleged disorderly conduct and appeared before the same magistrate two hours later. The charge was clearly trumped-up and he was acquitted amongst some embarrassment. According to a report in the Daily News, Morris ‘on getting into the street was loudly cheered by the crowd who had gathered there’.

The Dad Street affair, and Morris’s acquittal, marked something of a victory for the socialists in the free-speech campaign, mainly because it mobilised the powerful radical groups and led to a joint Vigilance Committee being formed to co-ordinate activities. The Sunday following the arrests in Dod Street a massive combined meeting of socialists and radicals was assembled which marched on Dod Street and then proceeded to the open-space in front of the West India Dock gate where the crowd of some thirty to fifty thousand were addressed by John Burns, George Bernard Shaw and Hyndman. The meeting dispersed after a resolution had been passed condemning ‘the arbitrary action of the police in endeavouring to suppress the right of open-air speaking in public places’ and demanding that ‘steps be taken to prosecute the police as soon as possible for their gross perjury in the cases of Samuel King, Waters, Hunter Watts, Morris, and Lyons’. Morris, himself, was sanguine about the victory. In an article entitled ‘Free Speech and the Police’ published in the November 1885 edition of Commonweal, he wrote: ‘The right of open-air meeting has for the present been vindicated by the energetic efforts of those who had the most to lose by its suppression – the Socialists and Radicals... It is not likely that this will be the last attempt at suppression of “dangerous doctrines”, and we must be prepared to do as well in the future as we have in the past’.

Morris drew on his own experiences of the Dod Street campaign for inclusion in Section 7 of The Pilgrims of Hope which significantly appeared alongside his article on ‘Free Speech and the Police’. Entitled ‘In Prison – And At Home’ this section of the poem would have been topical for the readers of Commonweal, detailing as it does the arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Richard for open-air speaking. The court scene is clearly based on that of Lewis Lyons at the Thames Police Court on 21 September 1885. Mr Saunders, the magistrate, is easily identifiable as ‘the white-haired fool on the bench’, while the manner in which he ‘swept the case away’ clearly refers to the unsympathetic hearing he gave to witnesses such as Aveling who were brought forward by the defence. The sentence of two months Richard receives, and
the patronising homily he is obliged to endure from the magistrate, both correspond to those given by Saunders to Lewis Lyons.

However, by having this section of the poem narrated by Richard's wife, Morris decided to avoid commenting on the realities of imprisonment. This was not done through ignorance, for he was very much aware of the hardship that working men endured in prison. In Commonweal, when discussing the imprisonment of John Williams, he wrote: 'It is clear that the idea of our English Prisons is to inflict torture on the prisoners: a man in for a month is treated worse than one in for two, and he again worse than if the sentence were six months: the meaning of which is that the shorter-termed prisoners can bear more torture than the longer, and therefore shall have it'. But this knowledge only compounded his own feeling of guilt. 'The free speech contests were perhaps the worst worries which Socialism brought on Morris', wrote George Bernard Shaw, 'the burden to such a character of feeling, whenever a poor man went to prison, was that he should have gone instead'.

Morris seems to have been uncertain about how to proceed with the poem after completing 'In Prison - And At Home'. Sections three to seven had been relevant to the readers of Commonweal - to whom, after all, the poem was aimed - because the events they described had been familiar and topical. The fear of unemployment and poverty, the nature of the propaganda work of the SL, the press revelations concerning prostitution, the campaign for free-speech, and even the brutality of the police and the imprisonment of their comrades, were all essential features of their lives as socialists. Morris could certainly have continued the poem in this vein, for although the free speech issue fell out of the public eye to an extent during the cold mid-winter months, the General Election of December 1885 offered a newsworthy item worthy of exploitation in the poem.

The reason why Morris decided to ignore the election was probably strategic. In November 1885 he had issued a leaflet - 'For Whom Shall We Vote?' - in which he had reiterated the anti-parliamentary stance of the SL and urged working men: 'DO NOT VOTE AT ALL!' In the Commonweal of the same month he wrote: 'If we ally ourselves to any of the present parties they will only use us as a cat's paw; and on the other hand, if by any chance a Socialist candidate slips through into Parliament, he will only do so at the expense of leaving his principles behind him; he will certainly not be returned as a Socialist, but as something else: what else is hard to say'. In the event the SDF did put two candidates forward at the election who polled less than sixty votes between them. Furthermore, the SDF admitted their candidates had been funded by 'Tory gold'. Hyndman had accepted the money in an attempt to persuade Joseph Chamberlain to support the Eight Hour Bill. The event nearly precipitated a damaging split between the SL and the SDF, with Scheu convinced that Hyndman was 'a paid agent of the Tories ... for the purpose of bringing Socialism into discredit with the masses', and Bax drafting a resolution against the SDF. Morris as usual assumed his role as mediator - probably against his own inclinations - and managed to keep damaging comment on the issue to a minimum in Commonweal.

Whether or not Morris consciously decided to avoid this and other contentious issues, he certainly abandoned the use of topical realism in The Pilgrims of Hope. Instead, the second half of the poem is devoted to the psychology of human relationships played off against the background of the Paris Commune of 1871. Section 8, 'The Half of Life Gone', has Richard return to the idealised pastoral setting
of ‘The Message of the March Wind’ after the death of his wife, and thus provides
the necessary link between the two parts. In a sense it concludes the clockwise cyclical
movement of the first part of the poem and introduces the anti-clockwise cycle of the
second half. Yet it remains only vaguely relevant to both. The self-contained nature
of ‘The Half of Life Gone’ explains why Morris chose to revise it for inclusion in
Poems By the Way, and why it was one of the few socialist inspired poems in that
volume to be appreciated by contemporary critics.

It is not surprising that Morris chose the Commune as the historical event on which
to base the remainder of the poem. The SL was always prominent in the annual
celebrations of the Commune in March (the same month, incidently, that the theme
is introduced in The Pilgrims of Hope), and his own interest had been aroused by his
collaboration with Belfort Bax and Victor Dave on the League’s pamphlet, ‘A Short
Account of the Commune of Paris’. Yet the introduction of the Commune does little
to help the structure of The Pilgrims of Hope. No regular reader of Commonweal
could have failed to notice that for the chronology of the poem to have remained
consistent the events described in the early sections of the poem would have had to
have taken place in 1870/71. They would also have needed to accept the existence
of an indigenous Marxist organisation - capable of sending lecturers to Radical Clubs
in the late 1860s – in order to explain Arthur’s conversion.

Another problem was that Morris had no first-hand experience of the Commune
or of its effects on the radical movement in Britain. Although E. P. Thompson is
incorrect in his statement that Morris made ‘no contemporary reference ... to the
Paris Commune’34 – he did in fact make two, one in a letter to Jane written on 11
August 1871 and another in a notebook entry written at Thingvellir on 27 August
1871 – he was at the time looking northwards to Iceland, and the importance of the
event to radical working-class politics would have been far from his mind. Instead,
his knowledge was derivative. It was gleaned from the reminiscences of refugees from
the Commune he had met, from articles published in Commonweal such as ‘Vive La
Commune’ by Edward Vaillant, and from the growing number of books published
on the subject.

As far as the latter were concerned, Morris was able to exploit a body of socialist
writing which had already succeeded in reinterpreting the events of the Commune.
The great architect of this reappraisal was, of course, Karl Marx. Although the latter
had originally viewed the events in Paris as a straightforward revolutionary uprising
with little chance of long-term success – a view he returned to in later years – after
1871 his attitude had changed and he sought to exploit them for his own dialectic
purposes. The result was his book The Civil War in France in which he portrayed
the Commune as a great socialist uprising, and the French working-classes as the
harbingers of an irrepressible proletarian revolution destined to gather pace across
Europe. His praise was uncharacteristically fulsome, and led to some inspired
descriptions such as the following of the Commune’s historical importance: ‘Working,
thinking, fighting, bleeding Paris – almost forgetful, in its incubation of a new society,
of the cannibals at its gates – radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative’.35

In The Pilgrims of Hope Morris borrowed heavily from the arguments developed
in The Civil War in France. All Marx’s central conclusions are duplicated in the poem:
the emphasis on the socialist and proletarian nature of the uprising; the communal
organisation of Paris based on the merging of ‘all the healthy elements of French
society';

the international flavour of the Commune with its admittance of ‘all foreigners to the honour of dying for an immortal cause’; its relevance as a model for the future organisation of society once the wider social revolution occurred; and its historical significance as the first stage in the general revolutionary process (‘That first fight of the uttermost battle whither all nations wend’). Morris's account differs from that of Marx only in its lack of immediacy. The Civil War in France is a journalistic tour de force in which Marx constantly interprets and assesses the day-to-day events and personalities of the Commune. In The Pilgrims of Hope, on the other hand, the Commune has no substance, it merely serves as a backcloth against which to play off the emotions of the three protagonists.

In fact it is the introduction of the theme of the two men’s love for one woman which does more than anything else to lessen the impact of the latter part of the poem. Plots - other than those borrowed from classical or Nordic literature - were always a problem for Morris, and he tended to resurrect old ideas whenever he felt uncertain how to proceed with a creative project. His interest in the theme of the ‘eternal triangle’ had been hinted at in his earliest poetry. It first emerged in a fully developed form in ‘Gertha’s Lovers’ and ‘Frank’s Sealed Letter’, two of his contributions to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine in 1836. Thereafter it appeared at frequent intervals in both his imaginative and derivative literature: it formed the theme of the unfinished novel of the early 1870s; it was central to Sigurd the Volsung; and it was used as the basis of important episodes in The Well at the World’s End and Childe Christopher and Goldilind the Fair.

Although J. M. S. Tompkins has suggested that the introduction of the ‘eternal triangle’ in The Pilgrims of Hope ‘gathered meaning against the challenging background of political confusion, bitterness, and tragic hope, as if Morris wished to show all the doubt and pain of the personal conflict held in suspense and submitted to the greater claim of an accepted service and a shared hope’, the reality is that the representation of powerful individual emotions is never fully reconciled with political commitment. Morris probably introduced the theme to emphasise the need to subordinate personal feeling and emotion to the wider interests of ‘the Cause’. Yet it is precisely because the idea of frustrated love was so important to Morris that the conflict between individual happiness and collective solidarity is never resolved. When Richard discovers the love between Arthur and his wife his feelings are of personal betrayal and alienation. However, to imply, as Morris does, that such feelings can be rationalised amidst the collective euphoria of the Commune, is to imply that human nature itself can be changed by a successful revolution. Morris clearly never believed this to be the case - one only need consider how crimes of passion still exist in Nowhere. Nevertheless, there is something deeply unsatisfactory about the way in which Morris sidesteps the implications of this conflict between personal happiness and communal aspirations, and allows the two lovers to be killed in the defence of Paris. In the end Richard never has to confront their relationship in the bitterness of defeat.

This failure to reconcile personal disappointment with social commitment is also apparent in the final section of the poem, ‘The Story’s Ending’, which appeared in the June edition of Commonweal. This section of the poem originally appeared with the appendage ‘To be Continued’ which gives the impression that Morris was keeping his options open and was not averse to continuing the poem if the opportunity arose.
The conclusion of the poem as it stands, is, however, something of an anti-climax. Richard - having left the idealised pastoral landscape of his early courtship, suffered discrimination and imprisonment in London for his socialist views, endured the sadness of the break-up of his marriage, and witnessed the defeat of the Commune and the death of his wife and best friend - is briefly portrayed returning to his birthplace and to the son he had left there before his departure for France. Although the poem ends with the reaffirmation of Richard's dedication to 'the Cause', the conclusions for the reader are far from encouraging. The latter is told that in order to further the social revolution he or she must expect to endure social ostracism and forego personal happiness. Yet even if this is done there is no certainty, or even promise, that such altruism will change the course of history.

Despite these disappointing conclusions, *The Pilgrims of Hope* has recently received a fair amount of critical acclaim. While accepting its technical limitation and structural anomalies, writers such as Florence Boos, Jesse Kocmanová, Jack Lindsay and E. P. Thompson have praised it as an honest attempt to write a modern, realistic and committed socialist poem. Lindsay has even gone so far as to call it 'the first imaginative work in English which truly breaks through the class barriers into a new level of human realisation'. Of course, there is some truth in this assessment. At its best *The Pilgrims of Hope* is inspired by a genuine vitality and successfully dramatises the contemporary campaigns undertaken by the SL in 1885. Even the idealised portrayal of the Commune - with all its faults - represents one of the first serious poetic treatments of an important historical event from a socialist viewpoint.

Unfortunately, the poem's status as a pioneering work in socialist literature has occasionally led critics to ignore its obvious weaknesses. Firstly, it was published as a serial, yet its lack of formal structure or plot, its faulty chronology, and Morris's failure to achieve even the most basic characterisation - e.g. we only learn the hero's name in Book 7 and his wife remains anonymous throughout - never involves the reader in the manner required by such a form. Secondly, the verse is inconsistent and flawed. It ranges from the delicate and genuine beauty of 'Mother and Son' to the hasty doggerel that characterises most of the realistic part of the poem. Ultimately, the problem with *The Pilgrims of Hope* was that noted by Richard Garnett, one of the original reviewers of *Poems By the Way*, who argued that valuable though Morris's socialist poems were their themes were 'better adapted for the medium of prose'.

Morris was probably aware of this criticism. When Buxton-Forman approached him with the object of reprinting *The Pilgrims of Hope* in 1886, although he did not expressly forbid its publication, he clearly had reservations. According to Buxton-Forman 'he considered it wanted more revision than he could give it at the time'. Nevertheless, there is evidence from both Buxton-Forman and Mackail that Morris considered such a revision. The former noted that Morris kept the poem 'by him to render it more perfect in form', while the latter claimed it had been Morris's intention 'to rewrite and complete the fragments of the poem'. In the event, as has already been noted, only three sections received some minor revision - almost exclusively changes in punctuation - for inclusion in *Poems By the Way*. As these sections appeared as separate poems, no contemporary critics of the book noticed that they had originally formed part of a longer narrative.

It is tempting to explain Morris's failure to revise the poem fully in terms of his own realisation that the language of romantic poetry - with all its individualistic and
escapist connotations – was not a satisfactory medium through which to express a revolutionary socialist philosophy. No reader can fail to notice the conflict which exists throughout The Pilgrims of Hope between Morris's old romantic view of the aesthetic value of poetry and his desire to portray the sordidness of nineteenth-century society. It was a conflict he failed to resolve. Where The Pilgrims of Hope succeeds as poetry – such as in 'The Message of the March Wind', 'Mother and Son' and 'The Half of Life Done' – it does so by slipping into an imaginary world of aspiration and hope untouched by reality. The more realistic sections, on the other hand, are awkward and incongruous. Perhaps if Morris could have concentrated on this problem to the exclusion of all his other activities he might have succeeded in forging a genuine revolutionary poetic. Instead, he abandoned the attempt altogether, and wisely returned to prose.

NOTES
1 Commonweal, April 1885, p. 20.
6 Commonweal, May 1885, p. 36.
8 ibid., XXIV, p. 375.
9 ibid., XXIV, p. 376.
10 Academy, February 1892, CLI, p. 197.
15 Pall Mall Gazette, 4 July 1885, p. 1.
18 ibid., XXIV, p. 380.
19 ibid., XXIV, p. 378.
20 ibid., XXIV, p. 378.
21 ibid., XXIV, p. 378.
24 Commonweal, October 1885, p. 91.
25 ibid., October 1885, p. 91.
26 Daily News, 22 September 1885, p. 3.
27 Commonweal, November 1885, p. 99.
28 ibid., November 1885, p. 100.
30 Commonweal, November 1885, p. 100.
31 Daily Chronicle, 27 April 1897.
32 Commonweal, November 1885, p. 93.
33 Andreas Scheu to H. H. Sparling (Secretary SL), 13 December 1885, SL Correspondence, International Institute of Socialist History, Amsterdam.
34 William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, op. cit., p. 196.
36 ibid., p. 526.
37 ibid., p. 526.
38 ibid., p. 526.
41 Illustrated London News, 9 January 1892, p. 50.
43 ibid., p. 10.