

WILLIAM MORRIS'S "EQUALITY":
A CRITICAL EDITION

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Morris delivered his talk titled "Equality" eight times between 30 September 1888 and 9 February 1890, in most cases to audiences of his fellow socialists. May Morris excerpted sections in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (2:197-203), but the essay has never been published in full, and remains in the British Library as Additional Manuscript 45,333, folios 214-32. Morris's message throughout was quite radical: only near-complete equality of condition and dispersion of power would sustain the integrity of the revolutionary ideals he and his comrades professed.

He began the essay with an admission of the impediments to progress: "There must be a long period of half formed aspirations, abortive schemes, doubtful experiments, and half measures interspersed with disappointment, reaction and apathy" (f.214). But he insisted that one such "half-formed aspiration" would have to be an earnest, unwavering desire to keep an original ideal of "fellowship" in view. For

it is not a small change in life that we advocate but a very great one. That socialism will transform our lives and habits, and leave the greater part of the political[,] social and religious controversies that we are now so hot about forgotten[,] useless and lifeless[,] like wrecks stranded on a sea shore. (f.215)

Sustenance of "a society, a community, a commonwealth" (f.218) would also have to dispense with a "cast clout of feudalism[:] the creed of the superior person" (f.216), a treacherous mirage which had its origins, Morris believed, in

the assumption of the existence of a ... God of the universe[,] the proprietor of all things and persons, to be worshipped and not questioned ... whose irresponsible authority is reflected in the world of men by certain ... [lesser]

The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, 20 (Spring 2011)