

## MORRIS AND COMPANY STAINED GLASS IN NORTH AMERICA

When Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company began firing glass and tiles in April at Red Lion Square in London, they were part of the growing movement of contemporary glass painters to embrace the two dimensionality of the medium.<sup>1</sup> Stained glass had begun to flourish in England as a result of the Anglo-Catholic revival with the Oxford Movement which William Morris (1834-1896) and Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-1898) were at first enchanted, then disillusioned by. In the mid-1850's stained glass design began to break away from a painterly approach towards a use of color and line that appreciated the properties of the medium.<sup>2</sup>

Morris & Company's stained glass contributed very significantly to this Victorian synthesis of religion and art; Nikolaus Pevsner termed their windows the finest of the Victorian era. Their true importance lay in moving away from the pietistic Gothic style and into a naturalistic and individualistic style whose lines were artistic rather than formally religious.<sup>3</sup> A. Charles Sewter, who spent over 35 years studying the firm, has said that "the outstanding fact about Morris' glass is that it was the product of the combination of these two attitudes: the designs not only easily surpassed in imaginative quality and originality almost everything which competitors could produce, but they were carried out in glass with a decorative craftsmanship and coloristic genius which was unique."<sup>4</sup>

However, in North America their work was not appreciated until in the 1870's and then only by a sparse few; the more opulent style of designers such as Louis Comfort Tiffany was preferred by the average diocese. The examples of Morris & Company work in North America, however, are revealing for their ties to the unique clarity of design and subject-matter that characterized their earliest and best work.

When the firm was founded, Burne-Jones, who was to design over 90% of the firm's windows, had already begun designing glass for Powell & Sons and Lavers & Barraud. At first the firm was commissioned by many Gothic Revival architects such as Scott, Bodley and Street; in these Victorian churches the early Morris & Company windows shed their subtle colors. The early designs showed a patterned linearity and often included white glass painted with silver stain. The windows in the Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, show what became a consistently used pattern of quarry backgrounds of clear glass with gold painted designs.

By the time the firm moved to 26 Queen's Square in 1865 the pattern of Burne-Jones executing the figure and William Morris in charge of the