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William Morris: his art, his writings and his public life. A record by.

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William Morris 1834-1896 was one of the major figures of the Victorian age and his influence as a designer, artist, printer and writer endures until today. Aymer Vallance who wrote this magisterial biography was a personal friend of the artist and completed the book in 1897, the year after Morris' death. Although Vallance was at pains to say that he was not writing a biography or record of Morris' private or family affairs and tndeed specifically excludes these areas from the book, his account of Morris' artistic works and achievements is so comprehensive that there is very little omitted. Morris' main works were created within the umbrella of Morris & Co, which he founded with the help of Ford Madox Brown, Sir E Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He aimed to turn the taste and design standard of the Victorian age back to simple, natural patterns and laws. As Vallance wrote "William Morris undertook the Herculean and seemingly hopeless task of decorative reform and wrought and brought deliverance from the thraldom of the ugly, which oppressed all the so-called arts of this country". Morris & Co originally specialised in stained glass where his main achievements were to interpret Burne-Jones' paintings, those windows at Jesus College, Cambridge and Christ Church, Oxford being particularly fine. From there he developed tiles, tapestries, carpets, materials and particularly wall-paper ..."of the many industries connected with the name of Morris, none has more universal celebrity than that of wall-paper hangings; and rightly so". The other major work with which William Morris' name will remain forever associated is the work of the Kelmscott Press. The last and finest publication of the Kelmscott Press was Morris' design for the complete works of Chaucer which has become one of the most famous book of all time. It was his final achievement.

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