'A Bump of Veneration'

MAY MORRIS

From May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 2 vols (1936; reissued New York: Russell & Russell, 1966) II, 186–7. When Shaw began to frequent William Morris's house at Hammersmith in the mid-1880s, he naturally met Morris's daughter May (1862–1938). In his reminiscence 'William Morris as I knew him', prefaced to this second volume of May's memoirs of her father, he tells of an occasion when their eyes met and he 'was immediately conscious that a Mystic Betrothal was registered in heaven' (p. xxvii). Although he did nothing about it (claiming he could not afford to marry) he was stupefied when May married the less eligible Henry Sparling in 1890. However, he continues, the 'violated Betrothal' avenged itself when he stayed with the couple two years later and by his presence exposed the weakness of the marriage, which never recovered (see above, p. 55). May's only reference to their relationship is the following equivocal recollection, involving an elderly Chartist, E. T. Craig.

Craig had been a sturdy and valiant fighter; he watched the young movement with keen interest and would make speeches at our meetings in a fife-like voice which sometimes recovered its old chest register in a sort of bellow that beat upon one's ear-drums. He would come and sit in the garden at Kelmscott House and we would gather round him and hear tell of those old Co-operative days,¹ or listen to his expositions on phrenology. I remember one time when we were having our characters described by the bumps on our heads, Shaw, who was one of the company and also undergoing examination, naughtily asked if he had a bump of veneration. 'A bump?' shrieked the old gentleman, 'why, it's a 'ole there!' and struck his stick into the ground to emphasise the answer. This was one of the light moments of those hard-working days that one may be forgiven for slipping in among heavier matter.

NOTE

1. The Co-operative movement, which began in Britain in 1844, aimed for a more equitable system of 'production, distribution, education and government'. The opening of a retail shop and payment to members of a dividend from profits ensured its rapid growth.