ANY record of the life of William Morris would be indeed incomplete, unless it contained a more than passing reference to his faithful friend and sympathetic coadjutor, Edward Burne-Jones. The two were joined together by what would appear to be the strongest bond of human companionship: a community of tastes coupled with a diversity of temperament. To this union Morris furnished the masculine, and Burne-Jones the feminine element. The one was passionate—often to the degree of violence, active, self-reliant, even aggressive. The other was contemplative, endowed with a Griselda-like patience, imaginative, idealistic. By blood both were Celts, strong in racial characteristics. In thought and art both were mediaevalists, with the distinction that Morris was attracted by Anglo-Norman architecture and literature; while the ideas and expression of Burne-Jones were colored with a pronounced Italianism. For this difference the first studies of each artist were partially responsible: the college library at Marlboro and the location of the college itself providing Morris with fine and abundant material for archeological research; while Burne-Jones is known to have received the impulse toward an artistic career from a drawing of Rossetti’s, which fell into his hands during his freshman year at Oxford. In both men also the long course of years did but fulfill the initial impulse: Morris became a creator and inventor, bold, experimental, and epoch-making, like the builders of the thirteenth century, whom he acknowledged as his masters, models and guides; Burne-Jones, on the contrary, unique in genius and personality, labored in artistic solitude, caring little for the world’s applause, and remaining faithful to his early ideals with a truly feminine constancy. The joint accomplishments of the two men produced upon the art of their time an influence that is quite immeasurable, as to depth, breadth and lasting effect. Together, they
not only redeemed the English decorative arts from a decadent, denationalized state, but they carried them to a point which commanded acknowledgement and provoked imitation from France, Italy and Germany. Even in their separate, personal gifts—in Morris poetical genius, in Burne-Jones pictorial power,—they seemed to supplement, balance and support each other. They received mental impressions, the one from the other, with a rapidity and delicacy born of close companionship and the power to feel and see in common. But they advanced to this intellectual and spiritual sympathy from widely differing circumstances.

Unlike Morris, Burne-Jones contended in childhood and early youth with unfavorable surroundings. His innate faculties were tardily developed, and even when awakened, were matured only through invincible determination and patience. Three years the senior of his friend, he was born in Birmingham, in 1833, when as yet the name of this great factory-town, vulgarized into "Brummagem," stood for all that is commercially contemptible and spurious. He was the son of a small shopkeeper, and he grew up in an austere, dreary home, apart from the tender influence of woman, as his only sister, his elder by a few years, had died in her infancy, and his mother at his birth. Imaginative literature was forbidden him through the religious prejudices of his father, and the boy thus forced to a starvation whose pangs he but half realized, suffered on in silence and solitude, since he made but few acquaintances and opened his heart to none. Meanwhile his education was not neglected, as he was entered, at the age of eleven, at King Edward’s School, by his father, who hoped to make him a clergyman of the Anglican Church. During the years of preparation for his destined profession, he acquired a knowledge and love of the classics and of history, which once he had met with his friend Morris, became the basis of extended readings and of wide general culture.
At twenty, Burne-Jones passed into Exeter College, Oxford, meeting Morris on the first day of term, within a week becoming his inseparable friend, and afterward writing of him:

"From the first I knew how different he was from all the men I had ever met. He talked with vehemence, and sometimes with violence. I never knew him languid or tired."

This first appreciation continued to be the same in kind and degree. For whenever Burne-Jones wrote or spoke of his friend, it was with a half-feminine admiration for the aggressive, sturdy, path-making qualities in which he himself was altogether lacking. The undivided intimacy of the two undergraduates continued throughout their residence at Oxford, each giving and taking his share in all that made for intellectual advancement, the widening of interests and the opening of new vistas of thought and life. Burne-Jones, filled with enthusiasm for the Celtic and Scandinavian mythologies, gave the impulse which led to the greatest literary achievement of Morris. His companionship, too, did much to raise art to a place by the side of literature in the daily life of his friend, since his characteristic drawings, known as "Jones's Devils," and eagerly sought after by his fellow-students, aroused the latent manual dexterity of Morris, who shortly began to cover the margins of his books and letters with architectural motifs and floriated ornament.

The close bond between the two young men extended until it included four or five others filled with the same aspirations toward beauty and the same indefinite desires to do something for humanity; each wishing to act according to his own will and way. Thus three years passed, during which Morris developed into the most original young poet of England. At the end of this period, Burne-Jones, sensitive and susceptible, yielded to the virile personality of
Rossetti, and sank completely under his influence. Through the advice of the Pre-Raphaelite leader, the novice enthusiast began at once to paint, without academic training, or the craftsmanship necessary to an artist. Rossetti maintained that the enforced drudgery of copying from the antique would blunt, if it did not destroy, the delicate imagination of his younger friend: an opinion taken not without reason, but which strictly carried out as it was, might have led to disaster, had the strenuous later efforts of Burne-Jones not atoned for the deficiencies of his first work. Indeed, as he once remarked of himself, in the technique of his art, at twenty-five he was but fifteen, and before he could adequately express the depth of his feeling and the beauty of his conceptions, he was forced to submit himself to the ordeal of patient toil. Two years of study under the direction of Rossetti constituted his sole art-education, if we except the fertile production, the constant observation and experiment which finally rendered him the greatest self-made painter of modern times. At fifty, he had become a subtle, exquisite draughtsman, a consummate master of color, an artist of so pronounced a personality as to be recognized in the slightest sketch coming from his hand. His faults, his exaggerations, like those of Botticelli, to whom he offers many points of resemblance, seemed to proceed not from ignorance, or lack of perception, but rather from fixed principles inherent in his qualities as a great decorative painter. In some scheme known to himself alone lay, without doubt, the explanation of his peculiar treatment of the human body: the small head, the great height and slenderness, the weight thrown upon one foot, the inward arch of the stiffened leg, the contrast in curve between the supporting and the supported side, and the other points noted without explanation by the French critic, M. de la Sizeranne, who seems not to recall that precisely the same treatment prevailed among the later sculptors of Greece: a fact which, in view of the intense studiousness of Burne-
Jones, indicates that the artist followed a definite system, instead of repeating technical errors, until his senses were so perverted that he saw beauty where only ugliness existed. Another indication of an underlying system in the work of Burne-Jones is found in his 
selectiveness. His book of “studies,” or preliminary drawings, shows how carefully his first intentions were modified again and again, in order that they might fit together and become integral parts of an important picture. His was certainly a completeness laboriously acquired. He attained an expressive line, but it was not through economic draughtsmanship. He had no affinity with artists like Flaxman, Durer, Hokosai, the eighteenth century Japanese, or Forain, the modern Frenchman, in whose sketches—spontaneous and yet restrained—it would be difficult to say where each line stops and where each begins.

Consequent upon this selectiveness: that is the power to choose, absorb and assimilate, Burne-Jones offered frequently in his work suggestions of earlier artists whom he had closely, but never servilely, studied. He was no borrower or thief, but simply an honest, legitimate inheritor of the great capital and patrimony of art. His most marked preference was, of course, for Botticelli, with whom he saw and felt in common. Titian taught him much in the handling of the orchestra of color. Michelangelo’s “Slaves” wvrite on the English painter’s “Wheel of Fortune,” as they were purposed to suffer on the tomb of Pope Julius Second. Leonardo often opened to him the secret of his alluring curves. But it is simple justice to assert that, strengthened and formed by his contact with Italian and Greek art, Burne-Jones never falsified his distinctive personality. He recognized his own wherever he found it, mastered it and then displayed it without fear of question or criticism.

These unvarying methods, adopted early in life and pursued throughout an art-career of forty years, the gradual gathering of materials, the slow
evolution of a picture—which sometimes extended through a decade or more,—offer extreme contrasts with the ways of Morris, the closely allied brother-in-art of Burne-Jones. For the first named, a few months or weeks sufficed for gaining the theory and practice of any subject to which he applied himself. He labored with a "furia" worthy of Michelangelo. He produced in great quantity and at rapid rate. His devotion, absolute for the time being, was given successively to a number of interests, widely differing among themselves. He loved, accepted the gift which the thing loved had to bestow, and passed on to new conquests. He was in all things the complement and opposite of his friend, who lived apart from men and their concerns, cloistered in his art, devoutly attendant upon the Revelation of Beauty.

And thus, but for William Morris, the influence of Burne-Jones might ever have remained confined to aristocratic circles; since the possession of great examples of pictorial art is the privilege of the few and wealthy. Owing to the labors of the skilled artisan and apostle of democracy, the barriers of individual ownership were cast down, and the work of his richly endowed friend was scattered broadcast among the people through the medium of decorative design. It has been said that "it would be a serious undertaking to measure the flood of beauty poured by the two co-laborers into the world." But an idea of the greatness of their accomplishment may be formed from the statement of a trustworthy critic, who declares simply and without the emphasis that fears contradiction, that "they reformed the taste of England." The churches, the colleges, the municipal museums and the homes of their own country bear witness to their genius which, exercised as if sent forth from a single brain, glorified and transfigured everything that it touched; so that the arts and crafts of the Middle Ages rose again, and the workshop was restored to the high place which it occupied in the times when
Florence and Nuremberg and the cathedral cities of France teemed with simple, sturdy burghers, whose first care was to preserve, through common effort and organization, the traditions of their skill, and whose lives were consecrated to the religion of beauty.

Consequent upon the decorative reform in England, the Applied Arts have risen from their decadence in France and have become firmly established in the United States among a people most ready of all to receive the lessons of a true aestheticism. And thus the chance meeting of two youths, a half-century since, on the benches of an Oxford College, led to the opening of a vista into the past, wherein we see the ancestors of the modern nations building and carving, painting and spinning, throwing into their work their strength, their love and very souls. And the lesson to be learned from the vision is that a real art, created by the people for the people, is able not only to beautify, but also to simplify life, to unify the interests of all sorts and conditions of men, and finally to realize the meaning of the word commonwealth.
When the change comes, it will embrace the whole of society, and there will be no discontented class left to form the elements of a fresh revolution. It is necessary that the movement should not be ignorant, but intelligent. What I should like to have now more than anything else, would be a body of able, high-minded, competent men, who should act as instructors. I should look to those men to preach what Socialism really is—not a change for the sake of change, but a change involving the very noblest ideal of human life and duty: a life in which every human being should find unrestricted scope for his best powers and faculties.

WILLIAM MORRIS:
First public utterance, after becoming member of Socialistic League.

Education is the prime necessity, and it is hopeless to attempt to reconstruct society without the existing materials.

WILLIAM MORRIS:
Letter to Lady Burne-Jones, September, 1883.

I could never forget that in spite of all drawbacks, my work is little less than pleasure to me; that under no conceivable circumstances would I give it up, even if I could. Over and over again, I have asked myself why should not my lot be the common lot. My work is simple work enough; much of it, nor that the least pleasant, any man of decent intelligence could do, if he could but get to care about the work and its results. Indeed, I have been ashamed when I have thought of the contrast between my happy working hours and the unpraised, unrewarded, monotonous drudgery which most men are condemned to. Nothing shall convince me that such labour as this is good or necessary to civilization.

WILLIAM MORRIS:
Lecture: "Art, Wealth and Riches;" given at Manchester Royal Institution, March 6, 1883.