

CARNEGIE BIBLIOTHEK
Coates
Versameling
U.S.

"THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE"

Poem by William Morris.

William Morris (according to Lafcadio Hearn, who wrote the poem of Guenevere, was one of the largest figures among the romantic. He was the great spirit of pre-Raphaelite coterie- and the most prolific poet of the Century. William Morris was in all respect the nearest in his talents and sentiments to Sir Walter Scott. He was born in 1834, and died in 1896, so that he is very recent in his relation to English poetry. After leaving Oxford University, Morris devoted his life to art and literature, becoming equally well known as a painter and a poet.

His artistic interests led him to study printing, stained glass, decoration and furniture; the latter undertaking proved so successful it changed the whole fashion of English house furnishing.

The whole of Morris's various undertakings happened to be influenced by exactly the same spirit and motive - the artistic feeling of the middle ages. Whatever he did, he had one will - to reproduce the strange poetry of the middle ages. To find his quality in production we must go back to the poetry of the romantic middle age, which he so much loved, back to the poets who wrote vast epics or romances in thirty or forty thousand lines. Eleven volumes of verse, and fifteen volumes of prose represent Morris's production, and the extraordinary thing is that all his production is good.

He dedicated his poem, "The Defence of Guenevere", to Rosetti.

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Music by Albert Coates

The psychological quality of the "Defence of Guenevere" inspired Dr. Coates. He felt the simplicity and the startling truth of the chief character, the moments of pain, terror, heroic effort, and fervour. He scored it for dramatic voice and large orchestra. It requires the full resources of a fine singer with high dramatic qualities.

In the FIRST MOVEMENT we visualize Queen Guenevere standing in the great hall of judgment, before her accusers, King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

The poem is as follows:- "It chanced upon a day
..... I speak truth saying that you lie".

In the SECOND MOVEMENT the Queen describes the Fight between Mellyagraunce and Lancelot. Lancelot fighting for the honour of the Queen.

The poem is: - "Did you see Mellyagraunce
..... for Mellyagraunce had fought against the Lord".

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The THIRD MOVEMENT is an Intermezzo for orchestra alone, the Meditation of Guenevere's love for Lancelot. The composer endeavours to portray the following part of the poem in his music:-

"Day by day it grew, as if one should

"Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and even,

"Down to a cool sea on a summer day;

"Yet still in slipping there was some small leaven

"Of stretched hands catching small stones by the way,

"Until one surely reached the sea at last,

"And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay

"Back, with the hair like sea-weed; yet all past

"Sweat of the forehead, dryness of the lips,

"Washed utterly out by the dear waves o'ercast.

"In the lone sea, far off from any ships!

In the FOURTH MOVEMENT, the most dramatic of the Symphony Guenevere portrays her great love for Lancelot.

The poem is, "Oh truest steel
..... by Christ's dear tears".

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