

# Colby



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## William Morris and the Kelmscott Press

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The opening of this Kelmscott exhibition was announced at a meeting of the Colby Library Associates, held in the Women's Union, at which Professors Carr, Green, McCoy, Rush, and Weber spoke of various titles in the Kelmscott list and of specific features of the books. Some of the information given by the speakers is repeated in the following pages for the benefit of Associates and other readers unable to attend the meeting in Waterville.



### WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE KELMSCOTT PRESS

“WILLIAM MORRIS influenced the art of printing as no other man in modern times influenced it. . . . By the end of the seventeenth century . . . printing as an art had ceased to exist. Morris . . . went back to the fifteenth-century printers for his models. His . . . first book . . . was issued in 1891, and between that date and the year of his death, 1896, including the work begun by him but finished by the executors of his estate, the product of the Kelmscott Press comprised fifty-three titles. . . .

“Kelmscott volumes are highly prized by collectors, and their value rises as the available supply lessens through the continual withdrawal of copies from the market to a final haven in the public libraries.”—John C. Oswald: *A History of Printing*, 1928, pp. 218, 276.

“I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty.” So wrote William Morris in *A Note on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press*. He began with a study of types. “I wanted letters pure in form.” He chose the Roman type of Jenson, a great Venetian printer of the fifteenth century, and, using it as an example, Morris designed and cast three types for use at the Kelmscott Press. The “Golden” type, an English

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fourteen-point roman, was cut in 1890; the "Troy," a great primer eighteen-point black-letter type, was cut in 1891; and the "Chaucer," a pica twelve-point reduction of the "Troy," was cut in 1892.

On January 12, 1891, his "Golden" type being nearly ready, he took a cottage a few doors from his residence in Hammersmith, and the Kelmscott Press came into being. It was named after Kelmscott Manor, near Lechlade on the Upper Thames, where Morris had spent many happy years earlier in his life.

"The books which Morris produced have become museum pieces, their prices prohibitive to the rank and file of readers. . . . In the spirit in which he worked and the power which his ideals have had in making people conscious of their importance, William Morris's influence still lives. Only a very real influence can call forth a tribute like the following from Carl P. Rollins, addressing the Yale Library Associates at the opening of an exhibition in honor of the centenary of Morris's birth: *Those of us who lived near to the time of Morris's activity have been stimulated and excited in a way perhaps not understandable today. It has given meaning to our work. It has encouraged whatever aspirations we have towards a better world to live in.*"—Ruth S. Grannis, Librarian of The Grolier Club, "Modern Fine Printing," p. 276 in *A History of the Printed Book*, edited by Lawrence C. Wroth, 1938.

"The wonderful books that eventually came from the Kelmscott Press were necessarily so expensive that only the wealthy ever handled them. . . . But the Kelmscott Press was an immense success. The work done was magnificent of its kind; . . . and Morris's dogmatic doctrines concerning printing were spread . . . by the flock of special presses which imitated the Kelmscott. . . . No one would think to deny that Morris was one of the greatest printers in the history of the craft."—Peter Beilenson, of the Peter Pauper Press, Mt. Vernon, N. Y., pp. 262-264, in *A History of the Printed Book*, 1938.

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"[When] I took the first step towards establishing a private press in Detroit. . . . I selected for a beginning the type created by William Morris. . . . I think that William Morris may be said to have excelled all printers, both ancient and modern. . . . He gave to England first a new standard of art. . . ; but America was not slow to profit by the lesson he so ably taught, and our country today is blessed by his work and his example."—George G. Booth, *The Cranbrook Press*, 1902.

"The first Kelmscott book that Morris issued was *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, and its effect upon lovers of fine books was instantaneous. . . . Morris taught a lesson in the unity of effect in books for which the modern printer is deeply in his debt — a unity now influencing volumes very far removed from those rather precious productions in which it was first exemplified."—Daniel B. Updike, *Printing Types: their History, Forms, and Use*, Harvard University Press, 1937.



### THE KELMSCOTT INFLUENCE IN MAINE

Observations by EDWARD F. STEVENS (Colby 1889)  
gathered from various sources by the editor

“IN the early years of the last decade of the nineteenth century there came into being in Portland, Maine, a succession of periodic literary reprints exhibiting such refinement and discrimination in their choice and their production, as to draw attention to their publisher, Thomas Bird Mosher. . . . It was at the very moment when William Morris, in England, was crowning his versatile career with the Kelmscott Press<sup>1</sup> which exalted printing to a new emi-

<sup>1</sup> It is no mere chronological coincidence to which Dr. Stevens is here calling attention. In Mr. Mosher's private library there were seven Kelmscott Press books — Numbers 12, 18, 23, 26, 35, 41, and 53 in the list given in the pages that follow.—*Editor*.