

The second edition of the Kelmscott Press *Glittering Plain*, richly illustrated by Walter Crane.

Morris, William. *The story of the Glittering Plain, which has been also called the Land of living men or the Acre of the undying*. [Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1894]. 11 9/16 inches (300 mm), 2 pp. l., 177, [1] pp., 1 l.

As a book collector, impassioned by medieval manuscripts and early printed books, William Morris (1834–96) could not but be struck by the extraordinary ineptitude and inelegance of much 19th-century printing. The typographic dress of his own books—he was a prolific poet as well as artist—caused him much chagrin. When selecting examples of the best commercial printing of the day for the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition in 1888, Morris felt unable to recommend any of his own books. He soon set to work to put this right, at first by commissioning one of the best printers in London, C.T. Jacobi of the Chiswick Press, to produce a couple of volumes to his own specifications. Morris was so pleased with the result that he established his own Kelmscott Press, named after his two houses. Of the 52 titles published by the Press, 17 were original works by Morris and another five translations from his pen.

Morris' *The Story of the Glittering Plain* was the first Kelmscott book to be published. Morris had commissioned illustrations from Walter Crane, but was too impatient to wait for the artist's designs. The book appeared in 1891 without them. Three years later, a new edition was published (reproduced here), this time with Crane's completed illustrations. There are 23 of them, making this the most richly illustrated Kelmscott book apart from the great folio Chaucer. It is the only title to have been issued twice by the Press.

Morris designed (or adapted) his own types. The original Kelmscott printing of *The Glittering Plain* was printed in his first type, the Golden, a roman letter based on Italian Renaissance models, so named because it was intended originally for an edition of Caxton's translation of *The Golden Legend*, which in fact became the seventh book of the Press. For this second edition of *The Glittering Plain*, Morris increased the size from small to large quarto, and turned to Gothic types, to two blackletter founts that he had

designed to reflect the best qualities of 15th-century German typefaces. The larger of the two was Morris' favorite, the 18-point Troy, so called because first used in the Kelmscott edition (1892) of Caxton's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, the first book printed in English (1475). The other was a reduced 12-point version of Troy called Chaucer, cut for the Kelmscott Chaucer, which was not, however, completed until 1896.

Morris and Crane, although friends and fellow-socialists, differed sufficiently in temper for *The Glittering Plain* not to be a harmonious whole. Crane thought that even Morris' roman Golden type was too Gothic, and disliked the medieval layout favored at the Kelmscott Press. Morris, in turn, considered Crane to be too classical in his taste, "a Gothic soul with a Renaissance training," and told his secretary that he "thought this volume his one Kelmscott failure."