

A FRONT VIEW OF "THE VALE"
Mr. De Morgan's house, Chelsea, London

MR. DE MORGAN'S HABITS OF WORK

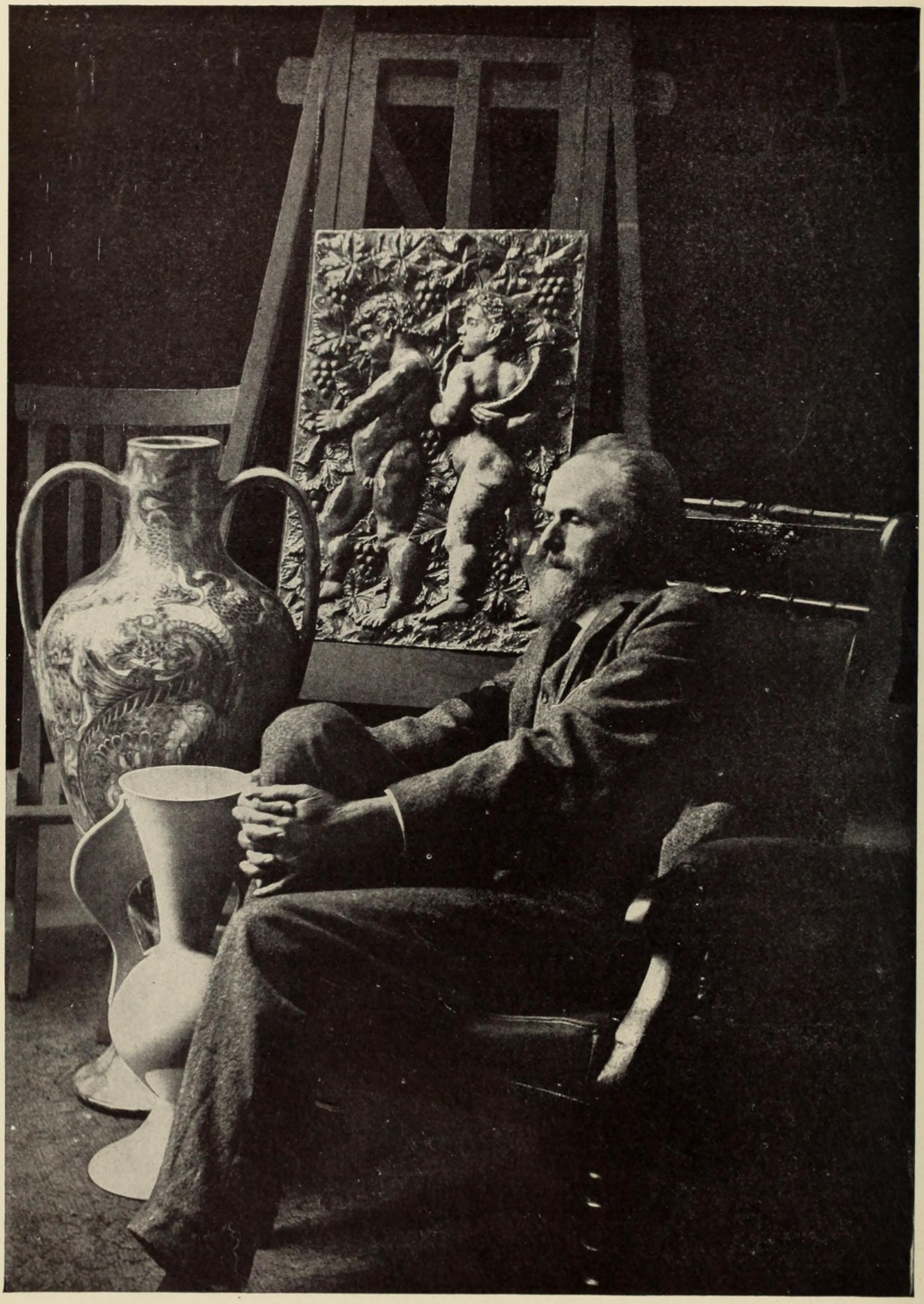
THE CAREER OF A MAN WHO BEGAN TO WRITE AFTER HE WAS SIXTY-FOUR YEARS OLD

BY

BRAM STOKER

I WAS brought to novel writing first by the desire to do a thing which I had thought I could not do. For sixty-four years of my life — so long as was possible — I waited. Then I tried. In 1904 I made the experiment with what is now the first chapter of 'Joseph Vance.' That chapter, as it now stands, is exactly as it was first written. I was diffident about it, and put it aside. Later in the year, when we were going to Florence, it came with us amongst a great mass of business papers. My wife read it in Italy, and was sufficiently pleased with it to advise me to go on. When I attempted to develop further the incipient story, I found the task a very pleasant one; and when Lossie came into it I began to get deeply interested. In this spirit I went on with the book, and finished it. I did not then think of publishing it."

"By the way, the story that got into the press here is substantially correct; that of the head of the typewriting office who complained that her girls were always reading the manuscript and weeping over it, instead of going on with their work.



MR. WILLIAM F. DE MORGAN

Author of "Joseph Vance," "Alice-For-Short," and "Somehow Good"

"The original idea of the story was that it should be a story told by an old man in a workhouse. It was to be the story of his own life, and on its bare, bald, material side was that of Joseph Vance. There was, however, no sentiment in it of any kind, no humor, no brightness anywhere. But the original conception in that form was impossible — too unutterably sad for any form of picturesque reproduction. There was in reality no such old man — except in my own imagination."

The speaker was William Frend De Morgan, the author whose first two novels, "Joseph Vance" and "Alice-for-short," achieved such instant and great popularity both in England and in America. The above enlightening statement is a memorandum made of a pleasant chat in his picturesque old home at Chelsea, England. Mr. De Morgan is extremely reticent — indeed almost shy — in speaking of himself and his work. It was only in answer to direct queries that he would unfold anything of himself or his memories. But he is a most kindly and genial man, and of very sweet and sympathetic nature, as indeed any reader of his charming work can discern for himself or herself. As we chatted in his little study looking out into a garden, large for a house so near the heart of London, his natural diffidence wore away and he revealed himself. New light came into his mind from old memories; illuminating thoughts expressed themselves in an atmosphere of color. This is natural enough in a man who had spent some forty years as a worker in picturesque designing and manufacture.

When I asked him if either of his published novels was in any way reminiscent of persons or incidents, he told me that, so far as he could recollect, the character and life of Charles Heath in "Alice-for-short" was largely reminiscent of his own life as a student. "With the exception," he added, "that Charles did more work!"

Of the characters in "Joseph Vance," he said that, when he read it over after its publication, "I found that I could pick out little bits here and there which were real and were either personal to myself or things coming within my knowledge of others." Then he made a statement, quickly but with a sincerity which there was no doubting:

"But there was no real Lossie! She came to me in the book, as though she belonged there. She really seemed to step out into my literary life, just as the girl in the story did into Joseph Vance's."

With this foothold as to the mechanism of his literary mind, I asked him if, in his work, the various combinations of characters required thought and consideration on his part, or if they in any way seemed to combine themselves. He answered at once:

"Hardly so. I had a great struggle to get 'Joseph Vance' coherent at the end. I really thought at one time that I had got into a muddle from which there could be no extrication. Happily that was not so with 'Alice-for-short.' In that case all went through very easily."

"I suppose," I ventured to suggest, "that the power of plot-making develops with exercise and experience?" He smiled as he replied:

"That is so, as far as my experience carries me. In my first book that branch of the art of novel-writing was wrought out by the sweat of my brow. I had to think of everything, consider everything, foresee everything, so far as I could. But even then there was a sad lot of loose ends and ragged edges; all of these had to be carefully labored over till some sort of unity of idea of the whole thing was achieved, in so far as it was in me to do it. When I began 'Alice-for-short' I found the value of all this labor. Things began somehow to settle themselves, and to fall into line in a natural way. It seemed to me as if the mechanical power of my mind was getting adjusted to its new work."

MR. DE MORGAN'S INHERITANCE

"Do tell me something of yourself?" I asked.

"My father, Augustus De Morgan, author of the 'Budget of Paradoxes,' was professor of mathematics at University College for forty years. All the books on this shelf were written by him." Here he opened the glass door of a bookcase standing beside the window and showed me a whole row of works whose backs and covers showed signs of time and wear. "Here is the 'Budget.' It is a record of all the circle squarers and longitude finders. A sort of history of all the scientific 'freaks' and 'cranks' and such like.

"My mother was the daughter of the Rev. William Frend, who left the Church of England to join the Unitarians. Later on he became an actuary — one of the first of that calling;

so you see that he, too, was a mathematician of no mean order. He did the actuarial work for the Rock Insurance Company. That was about two years before Waterloo. Here is a work of his, 'Evening Amusements,' written late in his life. So that, also, may be a hereditary trait in his grandson. You can guess how far back he went when I tell you that he was Second Wrangler and Smith's Prizeman nine years before the French Revolution."

"And your own education?" I queried, for it seemed that this subject should follow next in sequence.

"I went to school and college at University College, Gower Street. Then I drew at Cary's old school in Bloomsbury. This Cary was the son of Cary the translator of Dante. My schooling there was before 1859. From that I went to the Royal Academy Schools. I was then twenty years of age, having been born in November, 1839. I worked at the Academy schools up to 1863 or 1864, when I began to devote myself to stained glass and afterward to ceramics. This last was in 1872. I did not commence to write books till 1904. I could never, I should say, call myself a painter.

HIS VOCATION—CERAMICS

"The artistic work which I carried on for so many years was what is now known as the De Morgan Lustre and Persian ware. In its own way it was, I may say, quite original. But I have no right to claim invention or re-invention of lustre. The method of doing this had been rediscovered in Italy in 1856; and many pieces of this ware were exhibited in the Exhibition in Kensington in 1862. This exhibition of 1862 was a sort of echo of the Great Exhibition of 1851. It was at that time intended to have a repetition every tenth year; but in 1861 things were not quite ripe for it, and so it was postponed for a year."

"Did your plastic ability ever take any other form than that of ceramics?" I asked. He answered me with a smile.

"I have often made inventions, if that is what you mean!"

"Tell me some of them?" I asked.

HIS AVOCATION—INVENTING

"I think the most important was a new duplex gearing for a bicycle. This is actuated pneumatically. There are two independent gears, wheels, and chains. By pneumatic force one gear is changed to another, without any appreciable amount of friction being generated. This I protected; and I kept the patent alive as long as I could afford it. But after I had spent some £300 on it, I allowed it to lapse. I was surprised as well as disappointed that no manufacturer took it into use, for it is a really good idea." He took me out through the garden to a sort of lumber-room, and there showed me a bicycle geared in the way of the patent. It is a really admirable scheme, and I think it must yet come into use. This particular setting was of the earlier pattern. There is a separate gearing on each side of the frame, high on one side, low on the other; but he has since arranged both to be on the right-hand side, so that they can be enclosed in the same gear case. At the end, on each side of the handle-bar, is a rubber bag; squeezing one makes the wheel cease to be "free," the other changes the gear. When we returned I asked him:

"Have you made other inventions?"

"Oh yes, lots of them; but none commercially successful. Perhaps the most important were: First, a sieve for refining large masses of clay; this I used in the pottery work with great success. Another was a smoke-consuming firegrate. But these things I have let slide since I have devoted myself to literature as a pursuit, which I trust to follow for the remainder of my days."

"May I ask you," I suggested, thus happily recalled to the main subject of my visit, "as to your character-creation? Do your characters come from your brain full-fledged, or do they grow from small beginnings and become more and more real as the story progresses?"

"The latter altogether. So far as I can remember, for it is hard to recollect the exact beginnings of characters, the process is a sort of nebulous idea, with a concrete heart somewhere in the mist. A heart which can from the first illuminate in some degree, and which can beat in time and grow more and more and more vital, till at the last it emerges from the mist. And then, strangely enough, you are not astonished when you find that the creature which has newly declared itself is a friend of your lifetime, of your dreams. When this point is reached the characters often act and even speak for themselves. At times it seems as if one can almost hear their very words."

"Do they ever," I asked, "get away from

you at this stage; do they ever take, so to speak, the bit in their teeth and bolt?" Once again he smiled that understanding smile which is the sign of sympathy; that smile which Mrs. Riddell, author of "George Geith of Fen Court," described a generation ago as "beginning at the eyes and spreading to the rest of the face."

"I would n't undertake to say that they don't; and I must say that I don't object when they do. For this often leads to a new line of thought. It seems to me often that it is such divergences that make for the freshness of a story. After all, if the characters are true to nature, with just that touch of individuality, even if it be eccentric, which makes people interesting in real life, they can give a charm of their own in literature. And if these fictional characters have fictional life, why should they not use it fictionally in their own way? We talk, now and again, of imaginary characters as 'living.' Surely it is this quality, if any, which makes them so!"

THE MAN AND HIS HOME

Mr. De Morgan has a most interesting physical personality. He is in height about six feet, though this seems lessened somewhat by his tale of years. He is of slight build, with shoulders square. His head is well balanced on a fairly long neck; sign of high type. It is well shaped; very wide and full behind the ears, with bold forehead, wide between those ridges which phrenologists call the "bumps of imagination." These manifestations are sufficiently marked to be noteworthy. The top of the forehead rises in a steep ridge of bone, manifestly of considerable strength, for it once resisted, without evil effect collaterally, a blow from the swing-back of a heavy door which stripped away the skin. The eyebrows are fairly thick, but nothing out of the way. His hand is characteristic—the fine, dexterous, sensitive hand of an artist skilled in plastic work. He has a strange story to tell of a prediction, based on the lines of his hand, made long ago and since justified. But this he wishes to tell himself in his own way and at his own time.

He lives when in London, for he spends most of his time now in Florence, in an old-world corner of Chelsea. His home is one of the few survivals of an older period; one might almost call it the "rural" period of Chelsea. And even it is doomed, for its time is coming for alteration. "The Vale" is an eddy of the stream of the King's Road, the great East-and-West thoroughfare of that part of London. In itself it is secluded, but the roar of traffic passes over the line of houses which stretch between it and the great highway. The shriek and roar of the motors and the pounding of horses' feet on the hard asphalt come modified and almost muffled. But they come; and when such sounds are strenuous and perpetual, within their radius is no place for art. The house is a fairly old one, all ramshackle, with some queer little rooms and alcoves made in the process of "improvements" at various times. It is just such a house as should be found in a quiet suburb. Attached to it is a large studio used by Mrs. De Morgan who, in her maiden name of Evelyn Pickering, made distinguished success with her pictures, as she has done ever since. She was one of the exhibitors at the first exhibition of the "Grosvenor Gallery" in the early "eighties." She has also exhibited at the New Gallery. A year ago she had a "one-man" exhibition at Bruton Street which was criticized most favorably by the press. She also exhibited at Dresden, Cologne, and other foreign cities in turn. One of her pictures, "Life and Thought," from Tennyson's poem, "Life and Thought Have Gone Away," is in the Liverpool Art Gallery.

Here in the studio, by the half-light of the coming evening, are seen many of her pictures or easels. They represent her specially imaginative school of work. Her subjects are varied, and the names given them explain generally their meaning: "The Gilded Cage," "The Cadence of Autumn," "The Hour-Glass," "The Light Shining in the Darkness," "Port after Stormy Seas," "Eve in the Garden of Eden."

Throughout, the house is full of beautiful and interesting things. It is quite a store-house of artistic curios; among them are many of Mr. De Morgan's own ceramics, works of supreme and delicate beauty.

HIS SIMPLE METHOD

Before I came away I asked Mr. De Morgan to tell me something of his method of work. I compress his answers to my queries into a single statement. I mention this lest it should seem egotistical on his part to say so much of himself. This would be an unjust suspicion of anyone; but especially in his case, for he is the most modest of men. I look on

it as a grave courtesy on his part that he broke through his natural timidity far enough to answer so many of my seemingly impertinent questions.

"I make no scenario. I just go on finding, as one often does, such inspiration as is necessary from my pen. I find that the mere holding of a pen makes me think. The pen even seems to have some consciousness of its own. It can certainly *begin* the work. Then I forget all about it, and go on whereso-ever thought or the characters lead me. I think I work best in Florence, where it is always quiet and where there is something stimulating in the air. It is certainly stimulating to the nerves; perhaps it is to the intellect also. I work there all the winter through. My time for beginning work is after breakfast. I work all day, off and on, and sometimes a little in the evening. Weather does not affect me, as all my work is done indoors."

Having mentioned the subject of America to him, he said, and said with considerable feeling:

"It has been an extraordinary pleasure to me to find that, Britisher born and raised as I am, I can still find American readers. I assure you that the receipt of assurances to that effect from remote regions out West that were still in the wilds when I was old enough to read Fenimore Cooper and Catlin have been to me a matter of rejoicing and bewilderment. All the more, because it shows that politics and geography have completely failed in making foreigners of two halves of a divided race that speak the same language, and will do so as long as each adopts the neologisms of the other as fast as they come from the mint!"

A MODEL FOR MANY FAMOUS PAINTERS

THE CAREER OF ANTONIO CORSI, WHO HAS POSED FOR MANY OF THE MOST CELEBRATED MODERN PICTURES HERE AND ABROAD

BY

VIRGINIA CALHOUN

THERE could be no trickier register of studio temperature than an artist-model, were he so minded. He has the opportunity of seeing artists as they can never see themselves, though they studied their mirrors all day. There are models and models. Antonio Corsi is a model model. He has the *naiveté* and subtlety native to primitive beings. At the same time, he is responsive to every thought-wave that plays upon him, and reflects back that thought in facial expression, gesture, and in pose with telepathic rapidity, or sustains it for an amazing length of time.

Corsi was born at Atina in Italy. His father was a soldier of the great Garibaldi and the boy was destined for the priesthood. Poverty in the family, however, drove him to earning a living at a very early age, and with his father and brothers he took up the hazardous occupation of a wandering street-singer. Chance led them to Dover, England, where the little family of Italians never failed to gather listeners from among the tourists with whom the town is crowded.

Among the group, one day, was a man who may not have been drawn by the rhythmic beat of their music, nor to look with idle curiosity upon wayfarers with such scanty chance to earn a livelihood, nor yet perhaps with annoyance, that such nuisances were permitted, but who looked at them with the artist's eye, seeing the spirit of things. This man was Felix Moscheles. It was Antonio that Mr. Moscheles saw and watched until the little company were bidden to "move on." His face was aglow with goodness and intelligence as he spoke to Antonio in Italian:

"What is your name?"

"Antonio Corsi, sir."

"Will you come with me to my studio?"

"Ask my father, sir."

"What do you wish with my son in your studio?"

"I wish to make pictures of him. I will pay him money every time he sits to me."