Reviews

Edited by Stephen Coleman

Ruth Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, Philip Allan, 1990, Pb. £10.95, Hb £35.

For those who have dared to embark upon it, the journey to utopian fulfilment has been a painfully frustrating one. The utopian place or moment or sense of being has proved to be tantalisingly elusive. If the destiny has been uncertain, the maps pointing the way have been all too frequently marked by diversionary symbols: roads to Nowhere that lead nowhere. How can we reach utopia – the Good Place, No Place, Destiny, Impossibility – if we cannot even identify it without widespread confusion as to meanings? Into the arena of directionless uncertainty have come the scholars whose job is to offer clarity. Recent years have seen a remarkably comprehensive and cogent utopist literature: Goodwin and Taylor’s The Politics of Utopia (London, 1982), Kumar’s Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times (Oxford, 1987) and now these two valuable additions to one of the most exciting areas of study in the contemporary humanities. That utopian studies must remain excited by and vulnerable to the theoretical ambiguities and imaginative playfulness of utopian thought is essential; few fates would be worse than for utopianism to become trapped within the dusty, turgid world of exclusive academia wherein dreaming is a strictly extra-curricular indulgence.

Anyone wanting to follow the utopian signposts should read Krishan Kumar’s learned and lucid short text. In it he examines the utility of utopian thought (“Utopia’s value lies ... in its relation to a possible future.” (p.3)); the components of utopianism (desire, design, harmony, hope); the boundaries of utopia (when is a political treatise a work of utopia?); the historical context of utopian thought (for Kumar it was a product of the Renaissance and “the democratizing impulse of western Christianity that found one outlet in the Protestant Reformation” (p.51)); the practical attempts to apply utopian principles; and the relevance – or otherwise – of utopianism today, of which more below.

Kumar offers a fine introduction to wide-ranging themes, even though the broad sweep is not always matched by an adequate depth of conceptual clarity, the latter being the concern of the Levitas book. Kumar defines utopia in terms of form, specifically that of More: “More’s Utopia was a distinctive literary invention that effectively marked out the field of utopia for the next five hundred years.” (p.26) (Oddly, this restrictive definition is contradicted later when J.C. Davis is criticised for just such “literary or typological idealism.” (p.44)) This form-based definition leads to some dubious assertions: that Fourier and Owen never “wrote a utopia” and therefore communities inspired by their thought cannot “strictly speaking, be treated as utopian” (p.73); that “mediaeval Christianity ... produced no utopia” (p.35) – despite numerous writings by medieval Christians reporting visits to earthly paradises and, most notably, the pervasive perfectionist heresy of Pelagianism; and that “There is no tradition of utopia and utopian thought outside the Western world” (p.33), a
The aim of Ruth Levitas’s *The Concept of Utopia* is to bring clarity to utopian language – clarity, not dogma, for she is the first to admit a recognition of the widest possible variety of ways of understanding utopia. After Levitas there are few excuses left for vague and self-contradictory terminology in utopian studies. She identifies three types of definitions of utopia, often combined together with various emphases. Utopia can be defined by content, in the subjective manner of deciding whether ‘the good society’ is good enough to qualify as utopian; or by form, in terms of the literary or other means by which an ideal society is depicted; or in terms of function: utopia as an instrument of or obstacle to social change. Chapter One provides a quite superb analysis of the concepts adopted by the early collectors and historians of utopias and Chapter Seven looks at the same conceptual uses and misuses in the writings of contemporary utopists, including the Manuels, Davis, Kumar (his earlier, more substantial book, of course), Bauman, Moylan, and Goodwin and Taylor. This cohesive analysis of an often disparate, fragmented and contradictory academic literature is in itself of major value, and in the intervening chapters there are detailed considerations of particular writers of utopian works, the ones on Ernst Bloch and William Morris being the most worthwhile. (The case for including Sorel as a contributor to utopian thought was lost on this reviewer, and the undue significance given to Mannheim’s somewhat mystifying interpretations seems to be obligatory in books about utopianism.)

Levitas responds to the much-trumpeted claim (not least by Kumar) that utopian thought is in decline by arguing, contra Mannheim, that utopianism need not be oppositional and that New Right utopias may now be replacing earlier egalitarian, democratic, non-market visions of the good society. The notion of The Capitalist Utopia is a significant one which cannot be dismissed (except politically, where it should be shattered to pieces in an explosion of genuine vision of global production for need) simply because it is foul. Contrary to Kumar’s odd comment about the “democratic spirit” of More’s *Utopia* (p.53), we should remember that most utopias, from More’s to Bellamy’s, have been unjust for the slaves and conscripts who would not be direct beneficiaries of the good life, but they have been utopias nonetheless.

Both Kumar and Levitas are friendly to Morris’s ‘utopian romance’, sharing the general view of utopists that *News From Nowhere* is the best kind of utopia. Kumar observes that

Morris was the first to confront the juggernaut of industrialism not with nostalgic reflection or technological socialism but with a humanized and aestheticized socialism that blended the best of Romanticism and Marxism. (p.103)

Levitas also offers a useful account of *News From Nowhere* (p.107) and its interpreters’ assumptions, ranging from Page Arnot and Morton (Morris the Marxist) to Meier (Morris Leninised) to Abensour and his idealistic humanism. Levitas herself is rather dismissive of the society depicted by Morris in his utopian novel: “the dominant mood of the book remains anti-industrial and the society presented by Morris is one of much greater simplicity than can be regarded as feasible.” (p.108)
What is it that makes a society too simple? What is a non-feasible society? Here are some new definitions calling to be clarified. For Levitas, following Thompson's reading of Abensour, the function of Morris's utopia is to educate desire, to assert "a radically different set of values ... encouraging the sense that it does not have to be like this; it could be otherwise." (p.124)

This review began by making reference to utopian fulfilment: a journey with an arrival. Desire is good company for never-ending journeys, but only hope transcends dreaming and envisages the journey's end. Both writers tend to confine the contemporary utopian function to the realm of desire. Thus, for Kumar, "utopia is a realm of impossible perfection" (p.77), and he quotes Goodwin and Taylor's notion of "the partial realisability of utopias." (p.71) (After the so-called lower, incomplete stage of socialism, advertised to us by certain theoreticians, please spare us the lower, incomplete stage of utopia - halfway to Nowhere!) Utopia is not about perfection (a static idealisation, of theological origin), but neither should it be about the pragmatic search for imperfection. For Levitas, "The essential element is not hope, but desire", the latter placing no emphasis upon the material possibility of realisation. She has reached this conclusion in the light of the apparent reluctance of the working class to perform historically as a transformative agent and the alleged failure of the socialist experiment - which would make anyone pessimistic if they really believed that it was a socialist experiment.

One need not share this pessimism. Utopian thought need not be relegated to compensatory expression or daydreaming, even though much of it always has been and will be (not least the privately armed, stateless free market of the 'libertarian' capitalist utopians.) Morris was not unmindful of the distinction, so ably clarified by Levitas, between hope and desire. News From Nowhere ends with a recognition of this distinction between private dreams and collective hopes. The word 'hope' was a favourite of Morris. (Used differently from the dreadful 'hopefully', so beloved by unconfident politicians and Gas Board officials in our own day.) Consider Morris's final words in 'The Lesser Arts': 'I am here with you to-night to ask you to help me in realizing this dream, this hope.” (Morris's emphasis) In ‘How We Live And How We Might Live’ Fear and Hope are described as “the two great passions which rule the race of Man” and the need to “give hope to the many” was the great task. If utopians or utopists become pessimistic in response to the momentary victories which market forces currently uneasily celebrate, who else will there be to look with eagerness to an achievable, decent future? Without real hope the inspiration of utopia would become self-torture. Morris can be relied upon to offer a worthwhile counter-view to all this pessimism. As he wrote in 'The Hopes of Civilization':

Every age has had its hopes, hopes that look to something beyond the life of the age itself, hopes that try to pierce into the future .... Times of change, disruption and revolution are naturally times of hope also, and not seldom the hopes of something better to come are the first tokens that tell people that revolution is at hand, though commonly such tokens are no more believed than Cassandra's prophecies, or are even taken in a contrary sense by those who have anything to lose; since they look upon them as signs of the prosperity of the times, and the long endurance of that state of things which is so kind to them.

Stephen Coleman

33

This is a superb book for any student of the work of the two men who brought Red House into being in 1859-60: Webb whose design, technically, it was, and Morris for whom it was built and who had an equal part in generating it. From this point flowed all that we know and inherit from these two dedicated lives; in architecture, in design, in their common critique of social order which was articulated publicly by Morris and held no less securely by his life-long friend.

Red House is a landmark in the history of nineteenth-century architecture and important in any critical view of the Twentieth century now dying around us.

In 1983 Ted Hollamby conspired with Raffaele Gorjux to produce for Italy a revelatory little book about Red House, largely pictorial; surely from that seed this present tree has grown, and since, in 1986, in *The Architects' Journal*, Peter Blundell and Martin Charles, under Ted’s guidance, wrote and illustrated a similar account in the *Masters of Building* series. Red House, especially since the 1950s when the Hollamby and fellow architects went there to live and began their great labour of love to make it as it first was, the beautifullest house in England, has been variously praised and denigrated but rarely well understood. There should be no further doubt as to its character and historic importance.

The front cover offers what one would have thought unfindable: a new variant on the familiar view into the angle of the house, now from under the boughs of the apple tree, looking straight at the Pilgrim’s Rest porch and the cone of the wellhead. Within, there is a short introduction by an old friend of Red House, Sir Hugh Casson, leading us to the main text – short too, less than a dozen areas of type set within the large square pages, about four hundred words each in small sanserif type, open leaded (not as Morris would have done) to make each area a square within a square. There is a simple chronology of the essential Morris years, 1853 to 1865. Then the house is displayed, largely in bled-off full pages, starting with six pages of Webb’s original drawings at near full size, not including the 1864 plans for the never-built extension. Then follow twenty four pages of wonderful, well reproduced photographs; with no lessening of Webb’s largeness and simplicity, photographer, platemaker and printer have given us every detail with microscopic sharpness, nothing lost of colour or texture. For example, after the long extent of the north-facing side where we enter we are given, within the porch, looking inward, not only Webb’s wrought iron strap hinges, but across the fine brickwork, the still-surviving painted *Dominus custodiet exitum tuum et retroitum* (The Lord keep thy going out and thy returning) in Lombardic letters to remind us what a master he was of inscriptive lettering; and the eye drawn from here through the hall to the window lighting the oaken stair. We are shown too the interior of the drawing room with Morris’s Red Lion Square settle, amended by Webb’s minstrel gallery and flanked by the Syre Degreaunt murals; that nearest the oriel shows Jane and Morris regally crowned, as hosts; the other ceremonial room, once the dining room, shows Webb’s own built-in sideboard. We are shown many details of the stairway and of individual windows, and the entrance door from within, showing very clearly the cunning wooden arch that crowns this doorcase. Nothing has been missed, and we are given drawnings to show exactly
where each photograph was taken. We cannot possibly get lost here. We are helped to make our way — more ways than one — through this living house, to or from its garden, up and down its stairs, the changing levels never taxing but exhilarating. Then come seven pages of sparsely drawn scale plans, with details of newel post and the famous oriel. Lastly, on the back cover, the same size as within but more strongly printed, Webb's drawings again.

The very readable and unassuming text falls into three parts, not separated but flowing naturally one into another: the story of how Red House came to be, who made it what it was — and is; how it was abandoned in 1865; then the analysis of its life, its articulation, the strengths and subtleties of Webb's building, all the meaning of planning down to the smallest (but none to Webb unimportant) details. This talks us through the walk we shall take from room to room, and is reinforced with marginal miniatures of the full-page illustrations we are to encounter, guiding us towards them. The first of such visual notes are two well-chosen sections of 1860 Ordnance Maps locating Upton just west of Dartford and just south of Watling Street, and then Red House (and Hog's Hole) in Bexley Heath.

The familiar story of how it all happened is less faithful than the analysis which follows. Proof reading of the very small sanserif type may account for ARS LONGO VIATA BREVIS as the motto over Webb's fireplace, but there are simple mistakes. There never was a Brotherhood in Morris's Oxford days, only the extravagant fancy expressed by Jones in his letter to Crom Price. There was the Set, as the Birmingham boys plus Morris called themselves, but it was never formal — like Topsy, it jes' growed. Nor did Morris either take up painting as an alternative to architecture or ever definitely give it up. As late as 1862 he was working on his Tristram picture for Plint, two things preventing its completion: Plint's death, and the increasing pressures on Morris as "our man of business" when he would be busy looking after the stand at the Exhibition and setting men to work on the commissions it brought them. This gradually brought his painting to an end, and the Tristram design was modified as one of the stained glass panels the Firm made for Harden Grange that year. For the same reason he must have abandoned his painting on the great hall cupboard, which has nothing to do with the Niebelungen lied. It is recorded by Burne-Jones that on the inside of one of the now-removed doors of the Red Lion Square settle he sketched but never painted a scene from that legend, which his son-in-law's text negligently transferred to the outside of the hall cupboard, which perhaps he never saw. 'The Tale of Sire Degrevaunt' has nothing to do with Froissart, diligent chronicler of a bloody century but no poet, but is one of four Thornton Romances edited for the Camden Society in 1844 by J.O. Halliwell, son-in-law of bibliomaniac Richard Phillipps who owned Crom Price's Broadway Tower. It was a favourite with Morris, who printed it at the Kelmscott Press in March 1896.

The hall cupboard painting, unfinished and partly obliterated as it is, is an important work. It relates obliquely to the Seddon King Rene Cabinet and the Saint George Cabinet, both exhibited in 1862. Like the latter, the hall cupboard is pictured outside and patterned within. What it shows us is a Hortus Conclusus, a Garden of Delights, where friends and lovers make music, sing, eat and drink under the summer trees. Faint as it is we can make out that its models were the friends who worked and, for a while, lived here. This is the life of Red House as they imagined and meant to live it.

The first six months of that life, from June to October 1860, saw much happiness
and pleasure, though the contractor’s men were still around for some weeks, hindering completion of the dining room decorations. Not only were Jane and Morris installed at the end of June, but from late July, for nearly three months, Georgie and Ned too, the latter painting his Degrevaunt panels and planning with Morris the Scenes from the Trojan Wars (not walls!), never actually made out. Charles Faulkner too, as soon as the long vacation released him from his duties at University College, was there for the same period. Webb must have been there often, if intermittently, with new commissions on his hands. Lizzy Siddal was present for a couple of weeks late in the year, beginning the mural which she and Gabriel had promised; he, already stretched with other work and needing the money, came down briefly to help, but this remained a ghost even fainter than the Trojan ship. Madox Brown and his Emma, with a growing family and commissions to meet, certainly were there from time to time: Emma it was who in January 1861 saw Jane through the birth of Jenny which coincides with that of the Firm.

The tour of the House, to which so many thousands have been generously welcomed by the author of the book, or by Doris to whom it is so rightly dedicated, begins with a walk around the outside. Instead of immediately going in at the main door, we go round to the Pilgrim’s Rest porch and the open court centred on the well-head, a robust jewel in the green lawn, and behind it the staircase tower — neither a romantic fantasy, each necessary and fully functional. Noting the big dormer over the maids’ quarters, we turn to the western side where once the friends played bowls (an alley, not your crown green) and see the soaring chimney and oriel break out of the grand west wall; and so back to the front entrance where Jane stood to welcome Ned and Georgie on their first visit. “I think Morris must have brought us down from town himself,” Georgie says in Memorials, “for I can see the tall figure of a girl standing alone in the porch to receive us.”

Now we walk in and go from room to room, through the hallway, up the stair, and indeed down the back stair, for nothing is missed — and as we go the detailing of all is briefly and incisively told us: what Webb did with material, forms, functions, substances, articulating “the beautifullest house in England”:

If externally the house expresses its vernacular origins in its solid volumes, massive roof and the use of windows, doors and openings, in a free expression of the function of the rooms behind them, then internally it is the brilliant manipulation of these volumes in spatial terms that demonstrates the relationships between the different parts of the house under its sheltering roof. The roof itself does not constrain the spaces below it, but is designed to receive their penetrating volumes.

Thus we go through every part, all exactly explained both at large and in detail, to return finally to ‘The Historical Significance of Red House’ with a brief look at the sources of the Webb/Morris building ethos and the declaration of their “belief that a house, or a school, a factory or a barn, were as important as a church, a palace, or a town hall.”

Don’t imagine that you can’t afford this book; what you can’t afford is not to have it. Here is set out the root and beginning of that forty year collaboration in the well making of what needs to be made that makes this architect and his client as important for the Twenty First century as they were in the Nineteenth and have been in ours.

Ray Watkinson


The Nine Elms Press continues its handsomely produced series of essays with what David Gerard tells us in the introductory note is one of Jack Lindsay’s last writings, a general account of Morris’s life and work, focussing on his moral and political legacy to us today. Lindsay, who died in 1990, was of course a prolific writer, whose autobiography, *Life rarely tells* (1982), vividly recaptures many aspects of his busy life. His previous works on Morris include the 1961 lecture *William Morris, Writer* (which I remember as particularly helpful to me as a young scholar trying to get my bearings on Morris), the major book *William Morris: His Life and Work* (1975), with its probing and challenging psychological approach, and the brief and unexpected piece on “The Early Poetry of William Morris and Karl Marx” in the book accompanying the *William Morris Today* exhibition in 1984. The essay under review does not show any marked change in Lindsay’s response to Morris, but rather provides a vigorous re-statement of his admiration for Morris’s social thought. Lindsay’s energetic account of Morris’s aims may serve as a fitting summary of the values which Lindsay, also, effectively stood for: the “rescue of each individual’s potential gifts through the activity of hand and eye, in collaboration, the emphasis on co-operation as against the frenzy of private greed and self-aggrandisement through accumulation of money or personal vanity or power at the expense of the community”. Unfortunately there are a number of minor typographical errors (I noticed six); and the editor might reasonably have been bolder in tidying up the punctuation, filling in some of the missing references, and changing the odd bibliographical system (which gives us the number of chapters in large Roman type, but has no plural for p.). Nevertheless, finely printed in Caslon on Sommerville Laid paper, this is an attractive final record of Lindsay’s undiminished respect for Morris’s achievement.

The kind of bibliographical remarks made earlier in this review are greatly facilitated by the Lathams’ *Annotated Critical Bibliography*. Readers of *The Journal* need no reminding of the debt we all owe to their energy and accuracy in the compilation of their biennial records. The book under review covers the whole period from Morris’s lifetime to 1990, under eight general headings: Books and pamphlets by Morris, Bibliographies and catalogues, Surveys and biographies, Aesthetic philosophy, Literature (with subdivisions), Decorative arts, Book design, and Politics. As the editors justifiably remark, “Morris presents an exceptionally difficult challenge to the bibliographer”. My own impression at first reading is that they have risen admirably to the challenge: there is in this book a tremendous encouragement to further research and scholarship, provided without fuss or fussiness. The straightforward indexes – Author index and Subject index – enable the reader to make interesting cross-references; who could resist the sequence: ‘Fabian politics / fafnismål / fantasy genre / fascism / Faulkner, Charles’? while the section arrangement
(though naturally occasioning a number of possible border disputes) is helpful for a more straightforward approach. The changes of critical fashion are clearly reflected in the reviews of particular works: *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* in 1971 was found “captivating even today because of the timeless element of natural beauty on which it is based”, but by 1980 it was reaffirming “a beneficent ascent of feminine consciousness”. (In 1897 it had been, “a vulgar three-decker in the environment of the fairy tale”). Gary Aho’s 1985 *Reference Guide* generally offers fuller and more elegant summaries than the Lathams, whose tone can be uncertain at times: they seem to catch Violet Hunt’s extravagance in summarising her ‘Kelmcott to Kelmscott’ as “Passionate, inhibited Morris renounced the self-indulgent, demonical Rossetti for dominating Jane Morris, and turned his personal energies to the communist cause”, and I was puzzled by the account of Graham Robertson’s *Time Was*: “Jane Morris is remembered as a silent woman whose natural personality was probably disallowed by her own striking beauty”. But our main requirements from bibliographies are accuracy and coverage, where the Lathams score very highly: the only inaccuracy I noticed was under 358, where there is a reference to *Architecture, Industry and Wealth Builder*; the *Builder* being actually the journal in which the review of the selection of essays appeared. Overall we have another very useful tool for Morris scholarship, well produced by Harvester Wheatsheaf. I only hope that libraries will be able to afford to buy it!

Finally it is appropriate to welcome Clive Wilmer’s selection of Rossetti’s poems and translations in the excellent Fyfield Books series of the Carcanet Press, which already offers good selections of Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Clough and Swinburne. Any anthologist has to decide where to lay the emphasis in selection, and Clive Wilmer has decided, surely correctly, to lay it on the lyrics. He does, however, also include a generous selection from the translations, which constituted Rossetti’s first published volume of poetry, in 1881: mostly from Dante, but also from the other early Italian poets who were to appeal so strongly to the young Ezra Pound, and from Villon, the famous ‘Ballad of Dead Ladies’. I was much impressed by ‘John of Tours’, a bleak ballad-like poem in couplets from the Old French. Wilmer argues in his informative and thoughtful introduction that it was in translating that Rossetti developed the basic stylistic characteristics of his own poetry: formal invention, the play of allegory with autobiography, the sublimation of sexual love, and intense particularity of image – characteristics which found their best expression in lyric poetry, most consistently in *The House of Life* sequence, from which we are given some forty sonnets. The only narrative poems included are ‘Sister Helen’ and ‘Jenny’, along with the topographical series, ‘A Trip to Paris and Belgium’. Reading the selection convinced me that his was the right principle: Rossetti is at his best in moments of illumination, as in ‘Nuptial Sleep’ or ‘The Woodspurge’. Wilmer finds something specifically modern in the sensibility embodied here, using the Woodspurge as a symbol, but one which “acquires its significance fortuitously, through subjective association”. We are, he feels, on the cusp of modernist subjectivity here. It’s an interesting reading which has the effect any good anthology produces, that of sending us back to the poems with renewed interest.

Peter Faulkner

The sub-title of this excellently-produced book is *Workshop philosophy and practice in the making of letters* and is a fair guide to an important way in which it differs from many manuals which are chiefly aimed at amateurs. Such manuals purport to show us the arts of calligraphy, embroidery, fabric printing, bookbinding, for which there seems to be an ever-renewing market. I guess, though, that there must be few amateur letter cutters passing their happy leisure in chiselling lovely letter forms into stone and slate just for fun or even for Christmas presents. This raises a doubt as to whom it is aimed at, for nobody would be more certain than the authors that only workshop practice, effective apprenticeship, wins the battle of craft. And though there is now, as in pottery, a far larger number of workshops able to make a living, which before the last War would have been confined entirely to monumental masons, still they can hardly constitute a sufficient market for such a book.

This is an excellent teaching manual and, as such, rightly opens with a tribute to the chosen material: slate; which is indeed unique among stones and tender and sweet to cut as no other is. Slate is durable too, and by its layered nature almost ready to the tool from its earthy bed, even without the levelling and smoothing given it, as here described, tempting to eye and hand both, like a fine handmade paper to the scribe, whose cousin the lettercutter is. Indeed, in the case of Eric Gill they were one, and are, if less conspicuously, in these disciples who keep his tradition, which Gill himself learned under Edward Johnston and Lethaby at the new LCC School of Arts and Crafts. They and all like them lie in the great tradition created by William Morris.

The fifty-odd photographs of actual works are fine in quality and show the scope of slate for elegance and humour, grace and gravity: less of its equal potential for the robust - and sometimes power has been lost in a false search for the expressive. The teaching drawings and their short, clear captions are well done and support the main text excellently. If you mean to follow this ancient and beautiful craft, in this material which is so peculiarly ours in these islands where it is to be got from the Lake District to Wales and south to Cornwall, here is your guide.

Ray Watkinson


This is a well-produced general account of Morris’s life and work, with many attractive illustrations (particularly of interiors like Queens’ College Hall and Wightwick Manor) and plenty of quotations from his writings. It begins with a discussion of Victorian Values as embodied in the Great Exhibition, and in the amazing ‘Crystal Palace’ wallpaper as well as Prince Albert’s opening speech. It tells the story clearly and, for the most part, accurately, though there are occasional errors as when the ‘Blue Closet’ of Rossetti is said to derive from Morris’s poem instead of vice versa, and it accepts some of the poetry as more simply autobiographical than other readers might. But overall, it gives a convincing sense of Morris’s achievement in working
against the grain of Victorian culture, does justice to J. H. Dearle and May Morris as designers, and concludes with a chapter on 'The Inheritors' which moves from The Century Guild to Frank Lloyd Wright (an office interior by whom forms the last illustration). All well and good.

I have some reservations about the book, however, especially on the political side. Dr. Coote ends his comments on Commonweal in 1889 with the remark that it "was being superseded by more practical papers". It isn't made clear that News from Nowhere first appeared in Commonweal in the following year, an omission which supports the misleading impression given by the successive chapter-headings 'Revolutionary Socialist' and 'Utopian Dreamer'. Although Coote rightly notes in the latter chapter that Morris's socialism "continued to be central to his vision of the world", he nevertheless follows the misleading comment of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (wrongly said to have "suffered for his socialist convictions" - Blunt was an eccentric type of Tory) about Morris's having latterly become disillusioned with socialism. And although he praises News from Nowhere, he sees its characters as "irresistibly reminiscent of the hippies of the 1960's" and states that "much of it prefigures the world of the 60's" - would that it had! Finally, it has to be remarked that the book has been very poorly edited; Ford Maddox Brown, Warrington Taylor, and Georgina Burne-Jones appear regularly throughout, the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings co-exists, even in the Index, with that for its Protection, the Social Democratic Foundation doubles with the Federation, and the Index reveals, along with Edward Aveline, Kier Hardie, and Charlotte Young, such works by Morris as 'Haystack in the Forest' and Views from Nowhere. It is a great pity that more care did not go into ensuring accuracy in what is in many ways an attractive, readable book.

Peter Faulkner