

by the Vice-Chancellor and others, appear in slightly different forms on pages 41 and 148.) Hewison concludes that Ruskin's true legacy to Oxford was "the survival of the Drawing School, and of the teaching collection he created for it, though neither in quite the form Ruskin intended" (43). He also expresses the hope that "new technology will one day enable the sequences and juxtapositions of the teaching series to become once more accessible" (44). Until that happens, we shall have to content ourselves with reading about it in this attractive and informative book, which is a credit to all concerned.

PETER FAULKNER
University of Exeter

The Collected Letters of William Morris, edited by Norman Kelvin with assistant editor Holly Harrison; Volume III, 1889–1892, pp. lxx + 538; Volume IV, 1893–1896, pp. lvii + 465. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, \$45.00 each.

The third and fourth volumes of Norman Kelvin's edition of the letters of William Morris include extant letters from the last eight years of Morris's life, and their appearance in time for the centenary of his death provides invaluable resources for an overview of Morris's life and endeavors. The entire edition's 2500-odd letters and ancillary documents supplement the three best-known biographies—J. W. Mackail's *The Life of William Morris* (1899), E. P. Thompson's *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955; revised in 1972), and Fiona MacCarthy's *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (1995). Each of these is a searching work in its way, but the spectrum of Morris's correspondence strongly suggests that Morris may have been his own best biographer. Many of his letters were destroyed, but the eloquence and wry self-assessments of those that survive lead the reader into a small universe of personal, political, and aesthetic commitment.

The destruction and dispersal was indeed extensive—after Mackail finished his biography, for example, he apparently disposed of dozens of letters to and from Morris's family. The resulting lacunae are sometimes evident, and more letters may yet surface from disparate caches in unexpected locations. The edition's abiding virtue is its exhaustively researched annotations and many hundreds of illustrations, which provide rich visual and textual referents for the letters' many allusions, and witness the underlying unity and chaotic complexity of Morris's aspirations and endeavors.

During the period covered in Volume III (1889–92), Morris gave up the editorship of *Commonweal* and moderated the scope of his political activities, but continued to lead the Hammersmith Socialist Society, a reconstituted branch of the Socialist League. He also drafted a series of prose romances, co-authored translations for the Saga Library, and breathed life into that remarkable institution, the Kelmscott Press. In the years covered in Volume IV (1892–96), he struggled with growing illness (his own and others'), wrote new socialist essays, pressed the cause of his beloved Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, worked to acquire medieval books and manuscripts, and used these as inspiration in designing many Kelmscott Press books, among them the Kelmscott Chaucer. He had many active collaborators in these undertakings—former comrades in the Socialist League, his co-translators Eiríkr Magnússon and Alfred Wyatt, the bookseller

and publisher Bernard Quaritch, his friend and editor F. S. Ellis, his co-worker and fellow-Kelmscott Press printer Emery Walker, and his secretary Sydney Cockerell.

Inevitably, the letters in these volumes are preoccupied with questions of health, for he, Jane Morris, and his elder daughter Jane Alice (Jenny) were chronically ill. He curtailed his activities in the late eighties to spend more and more time with Jenny, whose mind gradually succumbed to successive bouts of epileptic seizures, and Morris seems to have been aware in the early nineties that he himself might not have long to live. In 1891, he suffered a five-week attack of "gout" and kidney-deterioration (likely complications of rheumatic fever); and had to decline speaking or social engagements more and more often because travel exhausted him. He began to make efforts to conserve his energies for the most essential tasks, and wrote to Bruce Glasier in 1892 that "... the absolute *duties* of my life are summed up in the necessity for taking care of my wife and my daughter, both of whom in one way or other are in bad health: my *work* of all kinds is really simply an amusement taken when I can out of my duty time" (14 Oct.). Too frail to walk far for much of the last two years of his life, he strove to finish all he could in the relative peace of Kelmscott Manor.

He expressed many personal and unguarded reflections in the extant letters to Georgiana Burne-Jones. In July 1891, for example, he visited Jenny in Folkestone, where he watched a heavy fog roll over sea and downs like a glacier and wrote that "I am . . . such a fool as to be rather anxious—about myself this time. . . . I thought it awful to look on, and it made me feel uneasy, as if there were wild goings on preparing for us underneath the veil." He was too frail to leave the grounds at Kelmscott by April, 1896, and remarked to her that "down in this deep quiet, away from the excitements of business, and callers, and doctors, one is rather apt to brood," but added that "I have enjoyed the garden very much, and should never be bored by walking about and about in it. . . . the rooks and blackbirds have been a great consolation to me." As Jenny's devastating seizures left her more and more isolated and confused, Morris visited and wrote faithfully to tell her about his activities, everyday household events, and the progress of their beloved garden. In his last surviving letter to her, sent three weeks before his death, he wrote: "Dearest own Child, I wish my hand were not so pen feeble, & then I could write you a proper letter. . . . I like your letters very much darling; please write me another, & pardon me if I don't answer it, or only in this fashion. Your most loving father, WM" (14 Sept. 1896).

Morris's socialist convictions never wavered, but the immobilizing effects of sectarian "pedantry" and dissension angered and dispirited him. To Bruce Glasier, he wrote on 9 Mar. 1892 that "I sometimes have a vision of a real Socialist party at once united and free. Is it impossible? Here in London it might be done I think but the S. D. F. stand in the way. . . . the society has got a sort of pedantic tone of arrogance & lack of generosity which is disgusting, and does disgust both Socialists & non-Soc." It must also have been painful to him to acknowledge, in a letter to *Commonweal* (18 May 1889), that "the people" in a socialist society might reject "the art of the people," and care little about clean air and uncut forests: "[I]t is not unlikely that the public opinion of a community would be in favour of cutting down all the timber in England, and turning the country into a big Bonanza farm or a market-garden under glass."

What, then, was to be done? How should those who loved beauty respond to their fellows who chose "for the sake of life to cast away the reasons for living?" He continued to

advocate the authority of a "public conscience," but he also began to draft the prose romances, and envisioned collaborative efforts to preserve certain forms of beauty for those who had the temperamental abilities to enjoy it. In this spirit he wrote Philip Webb, "I do the [Kelmscott] books mainly for you and one or two others; the public does not really care about them a damn" (27 Aug. 1894). Kelvin rightly points out that the remark is exaggerated, but there is a certain rough justice in Morris's assessments of his conflicts with "gas and water socialism," on the one hand, and mass "popular culture" on the other.

Despite all this, Morris tried to foster unity and harmony in the socialist cause. He maintained ties with members of other socialist organizations, and called for formation of a united Socialist Party whose separate branches could converge on common goals. To Robert Blatchford, for example, editor of *The Clarion*, he wrote that all "minor differences should be sunk in view of an assent which would, if it became common among the workers, produce such a prodigious change for the better" (25 Oct. 1894), and he made similar appeals for a broad Socialist Party in his last socialist essay, "The Present Outlook of Socialism in England" (1896) (reprinted IV: 393-400). He remained wary of craft and its stake in the status quo, but expressed hopes that "Trades Unionism is losing its old narrowness, and is learning that it must not champion this or that trade or occupation against the general public; . . . but the whole body of producers against the non-producers who exploit them; that, in short, the producers must claim the right to manage their own affairs." Even though "the possessing classes have practically admitted the necessity of a 'living wage' for the workmen, . . . though that must be taken from the profits of the employers," yet "producers" will always need a "real definite Socialist party." In contrast to his former opposition to Socialist electioneering, however, he had come to hope that such a pan-Socialist party might benefit from the "decision of the ballot box," and work toward the day when, in the essay's last words, "*Socialism* will melt into *society*."

Scattered among many letters to publishers and booksellers, Morris wrote some letters which remark on his own literary aims and pleasures. He wrote only a few poems in his last years, and interspersed them in *Poems By the Way* (1891) and the prose romances. His prose writings, *Commonweal*, and the Kelmscott Press became the primary focus of his creative efforts. To Jane Morris he remarked that "I have begun another story [possibly *The Glittering Plain*], but do not intend to hurry it—I must have a story to write now as long as I live" (17 Oct. 1889). In the event, he finished the abbreviated *Sundering Flood* 8 Sept. 1896, four weeks before his death.

Students of the period will also recall that Morris might have succeeded Alfred Tennyson as poet laureate, but declined to be considered for the post. In 1892, James Bryce, fellow SPAB member and liberal M.P., made representations to Gladstone on Morris's behalf, but Morris wrote Bryce to discourage such efforts, for reasons personal as well as political: "I am not a fanatic about forms of government and as you well know do not suppose that the abolition of the monarchy in England would go any way towards solving the great socio-political questions of our time; still I am a sincere republican, and therefore I could not accept a post which would give me even the appearance of serving a court for complaisance sake. . . . I *feel* that my independence would be hampered by my acceptance which would I am sure disappoint many friends whose good opinion does much to keep me straight in life" (27 Oct. 1892).

Solidarity and autonomy always meant more to Morris than conventional recognition, but he was sincerely grateful for reflective forms of critical praise. In an *Athenaeum* review of *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), Theodore Watts-Dunton called Morris "the one poet of the nineteenth century upon whom Euphuism, the didactic spirit, and rhetoric have exercised no influence whatever; that is, the one poet whose work is poetry and nothing else"; Morris was moved as well as pleased, and wrote his old acquaintance that "One has so often been praised for doing what one has by no means aimed at, that it is a very pleasant change to find some one who understands one's aim, and is so kind as to think the mark has been hit. . . . it is important for literature at present that your view . . . as to the curse of rhetoric should be so clearly and well stated" (7 Mar. 1895).

Morris was especially pleased in the early nineties, when he took direct control over most aspects of the publication and reprinting of his own works. To Jenny, he wrote happily of a projected Kelmscott edition of *Poems By the Way* that "I do so like seeing a new book out that I have had a hand in" (23 Sept. 1891), and he remarked to Bernard Quaritch, publisher for the Kelmscott-Press-produced edition of *The Golden Legend* (1892), that "looking at the finished book, I am proud of it, and of having pushed it through so promptly" (7 Oct. 1892). He found fault with most of the sample illustrations prepared for the Press by A. J. Gaskin and C. M. Gere, and finally chose to use others drawn by his old friend Edward Burne-Jones, or do without illustrations altogether. Kelvin even-handedly includes many of their rejected drawings. Morris obviously preferred the work of his closest friend in youth and middle-age, but the criticisms he appended sometimes clarified his interpretive aims. He essentially saw medieval illustrations as suggestive sources of schematic ideas, as he remarked in a note to Gaskin he sent with a medieval German book: "probably you may find it useful, not of course to copy; but these mediaeval things are so stimulating with their frank imagination & their grasp of essentials . . ." (11 Apr. 1895).

Morris avidly sought such "stimulation" in this period. He gathered toward the end of his life a very extensive collection of illustrated books and illuminated manuscripts, and took heightened pleasure in their daedal patterns as his own strength declined. At one point, Montague James, a representative of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, suggested that the Museum's Syndicate might lend Morris a missing illuminated leaf from his Clifford-Grey *Horae*, if Morris would bequeath the whole book to the Museum. Morris responded on 27 July 1894 that "I am not a rich man as the world accounts it, and am forced therefore to look upon my collection of books to some extent as the money laid by for my family after my death." In the spring of 1896, he wrote Philip Webb that as his agent Sydney Cockerell had bought a twelfth-century illuminated bestiary in Munich for 900 pounds, and remarked a bit sheepishly that "the murder is out. But you see it will certainly fetch something when my sale comes off" (4 May 1896). It did come off, and his executors successfully sold most of his library after his death.

Morris also continued to compose public appeals on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and blended these protests with kindred private expressions of anxiety about the English landscape. In one rather despairing letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones (29 Aug. 1895), he described a recent journey from Oxford to Lechlade, and remarked of a mutilated old barn that someone had reroofed with "zincd iron" that, "It quite sickened me when I saw it. That's the way all things are going now.

In twenty years everything will be gone in this countryside, nothing to help it or mend it. The world had better say, 'Let us be through with it and see what will come after it!' In the meantime I can do nothing but a little bit of Anti-Scrape—*sweet to eye while seen*." In April 1895, Morris—the author of a scene in *News from Nowhere* (1890) in which Ellen hugs a lichened wall—wrote the *Daily Chronicle* to protest the clear-cutting of Epping Forest, and remarked that "the hornbeam, though an interesting tree to an artist and reasonable person, is no favourite with the landscape gardener, and I very much fear that the intention of the authorities is to clear the forest of its native trees, and to plant vile weeds like deodars and outlandish conifers instead." Anticipating modern ecological practice, he added that "[T]he greatest possible care should be taken that not a single tree should be felled, unless it were necessary for the growth of its fellows. . . . We want a thicket, not a park, from Epping Forest" (22 Apr.).

He focused other, more public protests on the need to preserve edifices more conspicuous than barns. In May 1895, he denounced "restorations" proposed for the royal tombs at Westminster: "[T]he 'restorers' would try their experiments on the . . . works of art themselves; which means, in plain words, that before 'restoring' them they would have to destroy them. The record of our remembered history embodied in them would be gone; . . . the unremembered history, wrought into them by the hands of the craftsmen of bygone times, would be gone also. And to what purpose? To foist a . . . futile academical study . . . amidst the loveliness of the most beautiful building in Europe" (*The Times* 31 May 1895). Even more passionately angered by "repairs" to structures of the Cathedral at Rouen, he appealed to *Daily Chronicle* readers: "these days, when history is studied so keenly through genuine original documents. . . , it seems pitiable indeed that the most important documents of all, the ancient buildings of the Middle Ages, the work of the associated labour and thought of the people, the result of a chain of tradition unbroken from the earliest ages of art, should be falsified by an uneasy desire to do something, a vulgar craving for formal completeness, which is almost essentially impossible in a building that has grown from decade to decade and century to century" (12 Oct. 1895). In "The Aims of Art" (1886), he had described his first reaction to Rouen and its cathedral: "Less than forty years ago, I first saw the city of Rouen, then still in its outward aspect a piece of the Middle Ages: no words can tell you how its mingled beauty, history, and romance took hold on me; I can only say that, looking back on my past life, I find it was the greatest pleasure I have ever had: and now it is a pleasure which no one can ever have again: it is lost to the world for ever."

These admirably edited and annotated letters honor and preserve for us the continuity of William Morris's aesthetic sensibilities; his forthright independence; his deep solidarity; his capacity for poignant directness and familial affection; his idiosyncratic perfectionism in design; his radical political vision; and his passionate devotion to collective memory and historicist ideals. Morris was a poet, an artist, a pioneering book designer, an ecologist, a preservationist, and a socialist. But he was above all a man who rejected forced conjunctions of modernity, inequity, and ugliness. He believed that means justify ends. He understood that beauty gives meaning to our lives. And he refused to hoard this beauty for himself.

FLORENCE S. BOOS
University of Iowa