

Editorial

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According to *The William Morris Chronology*, between December 1877 and January 1896 William Morris gave well over five hundred lectures and political addresses, the vast majority of them (more than four hundred) during the years 1883–1890, when he was active in the (Social) Democratic Federation and the Socialist League. During this time, he lectured often in the Midlands, the North and Scotland, but most often, of course, in London – in Hammersmith, in Hyde Park, or in the East End, that mortar of humanity and political ideas. In this issue, Rosemary Taylor reviews this period in Morris's political life, and in particular discusses the various locations in which he delivered his speeches (including several which do not appear in the *Chronology*), and explores the link between Morris's political activities, and the environment of the old East End.

News from Nowhere, of course, has long been a source of inspiration to Morrisians, but maybe not quite in the way described in this issue by Tony Pinkney, who imagines William Guest's visit to the future taking place as a result of his being summoned by one of the spiritualist scéances fashionable even in some left-wing circles during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Éva Péteri, of the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, describes how Morris not only constructed his own narratives, but also used traditional stories, in this case from Hungary – the education by example of his nobles by the medieval king Mathias Corvinus – in order to illustrate his own ideas regarding the value of 'useful work'. Finally, Peter Faulkner compares various versions by Burne-Jones and Morris of the legend of the Sleeping Beauty, or here, the 'Briar Rose', to draw out yet another socialist lesson.

As well as the latest instalment of David and Sheila Latham's invaluable Morris bibliography, we also review a substantial number of books, the first on Morris's own socialism, and the next two on the lives of two of his contemporaries, the maverick laird and Liberal MP Robert Cunninghame Graham, who was at Bloody Sunday, and the novelist George Gissing, who admired Morris's poetry and the Arts and Crafts, but who disagreed with Morris on the need for socialists to make links with working people. We then consider books on the historiography of communism, and the use of early Romantic ideas, mainly those of Cole-

ridge and the young Wordsworth, in order to develop a new economics more sympathetic to the modern, dynamic economy.

The influence of Morris on contemporary crafts, and on the appearance even of many modern homes, continues, and three books on this general topic are also reviewed here. Last, we consider books on Alton Towers, past and present, and on modern memorial brasses. Finally, it must be recorded that we also carry an obituary of Lionel Young, whom I remember as a prominent member of the Society when I joined during the early 1990s.

Meanwhile, Morris continues to beckon us on. It was recently reported (*Guardian*, 17 August 2009) that Chinese villagers had stormed a local factory which they believe has poisoned six hundred of their children with lead, a problem with which Morris was all too familiar

A case of lead poisoning reported in the press this week is worth a little notice by workmen generally ... That man was killed by being compelled to work in a place where white lead was flying about, and that no precautions were taken to prevent him dying speedily. A shilling a week was the handsome sum given to the poor man thus murdered in compensation for his being killed ... An exaggerated example of the way in which the lives of the working people are played with. Under present conditions, almost the whole labour imposed by civilisations on the 'lower classes' is unwholesome; that is to say that people's lives are shortened by it; and yet because we don't see people's throats cut before our eyes we think nothing of it ('Notes on Passing events', *Commonweal*, 23 October 1886; *The William Morris Chronology*, p. 170)

As we clearly see, globalisation, far from making us all stupendously rich, as continually promised by its advocates, has merely exported certain problems, in this case both pollution *and* poverty, elsewhere. To a scientist, this is something which, as simple thermodynamics, ought to be self-evident, but clearly it is not, even though, many years ago now, Barry Commoner explained it quite succinctly in the second of his laws of ecology – 'Everything must go somewhere'.

The task does not become easier with the passage of the years, but Morris, thankfully, is an example from whom we can all draw strength.