

Editorial

The William Morris Society has been very fortunate in its Presidents, Sir Sydney Cockerell, Stanley Morrison, Sir Basil Blackwell, Lord Briggs of Lewes. Now that Asa Briggs – to give him the name under which he is most easily recognised – has resigned on his retirement as Provost of Worcester College, Oxford (with the wholly characteristic intention to devote his retirement to travel as well as scholarship), it is appropriate to record the Society's thanks. This has already been ably done by John Kay in the Newsletter, focussing on the approachableness and geniality which made him so humane a President. Here I should like to repeat John Kay's expression of regret that Asa Briggs's Kelmscott Lecture on 'Morris and London' remains unpublished, and to comment on the part played in the growth of interest in Morris, which is so encouraging a feature of recent years, by the Penguin anthology, originally published in 1962 as *William Morris. Selected Writings, and Designs*, and still in print as *News from Nowhere and Other Writings by William Morris*.

By the time he brought out that book, Asa Briggs was already a distinguished social historian, having published *Victorian People* (1954), *The Age of Improvement* (1959), and *The Birth of Broadcasting* (1961), precursors of his many more recent books in the field, all demonstrating the fine combination of scholarship and enthusiasm which mark them as the products of a believer in teaching, in sharing humane knowledge with others. The book appeared in the wake of E.P. Thompson's 1955 biography and Raymond Williams's account of Morris in *Culture and Society* in 1958, and shares their preference for the political writings. Thus the section entitled 'Romance' runs to thirty-five pages, as against sixty-nine for 'Socialism' and one hundred and eighteen for 'Utopia' – the first eighteen chapters of *News from Nowhere* and its conclusion.

The Introduction is brief but helpful – we have the sense of an Editor keen to serve his material, not to show off his own knowledge. The writing is crisp, as the opening sentence suggests: "William Morris was one of the most searching critics of British Society in the nineteenth century. He cared nothing for its institutions, questioned its achievements, and scorned its values." The reader is then given a clear account of Morris's development, with a strong political emphasis, with *News from Nowhere* being given the prominence it deserves. If Asa Briggs's selection is to be replaced by Penguin with one including the whole of *News from Nowhere*, it should not be allowed to do so without due recognition of how useful the book has been in introducing Morris and his ideas, particularly the political ideas, to many readers, in an easily accessible form.

Finally we can say with confidence that the Society's good fortune will continue, with the acceptance by Ray Watkinson of the Presidency. It is very much to be hoped that now that his labours on Ford Madox Brown have been completed, the former Editor of this *Journal* will be able to share with its readers further examples of his extraordinarily wide-ranging knowledge of Morris and all his works. His book on Ford Madox Brown will be reviewed in our next issue.