

## SIR BASIL BLACKWELL

Sir Basil Blackwell was one of the most remarkable businessmen of his generation—a lively publisher as well as an enterprising bookseller. Indeed, it was during his long Chairmanship of B. H. Blackwell from 1924 to 1969 that he made the name of Blackwell known throughout the world. When his ninetieth birthday party was held at Blenheim Palace—and I was privileged to attend it—it was suggested in that very appropriate place that his great success proved that the pen is mightier than the sword.

Yet Basil Blackwell was far more than a publisher and bookseller. He was a great reader, who gave reading as his recreation in *Who's Who*, and he was keenly interested in the relationship between the book as a saleable commodity and the book as a work of art. One of the people who he most liked to read was William Morris, and it was because of his deep and wide-ranging interest in Morris that he was made President of the Society in 1968.

When I succeeded him in 1979, I had most interesting talks with him about what Morris had meant to him; and long after that he continued to keep in touch with me about the affairs of the Society, the future of Kelmscott House, and the continuing and growing interest in Morris of a very different generation from his own. Of course, I talked to him about many other things also, and, like all his friends, I feel that he is quite irreplaceable. During the last years of his life he told me that he was reading only those books which he felt had some special long term significance, and for this reason he had embarked on a study of Boethius. He never wanted to waste his time. He will be missed in many circles, and the William Morris Society is one of the most important of them.

*Asa Briggs, May 1984*