

NOTES AND REVIEWS

'William Morris's Socialist Diary', ed. Florence Boos. History Workshop, issue 13, Spring 1982. London. £5.95.

William Morris's name is one that seems to demand rehabilitation with every generation. The reason, perhaps, is that Morris was always an odd man out, creating around himself groups of followers drawn not so much by the inherent power of his poems, or his designs, or his politics, but by the sheer vitality and intensity of his role identities: the poet, the designer, the politician. Thus each newcomer to Morris necessarily falls under a unique spell, depending on his or her perspective. To one Morris is the perfect pre-Raphaelite, the poet who wrote "Two red roses across the moon"; to another Morris is the reviver of Romance, seer of realms "beyond the world"; to yet another Morris is the embodiment of the Arts and Crafts movement; and to a group at least equal in size to all of these, Morris is the Father of English Socialism. As J. Middleton Murry put it more than fifty years ago, "Morris was the truest Marxian Socialist this country has ever had."

It is because of this prismatic image of William Morris that one of only two diaries Morris ever kept has now been published in complete form for the first time, not in a journal dedicated to poetics, or aesthetics, or Victorian studies, but in History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Historians. There Morris keeps company with Rosa Luxemburg's love letters, and a debate on whether 16th-Century servants were considered part of their parents' households, or their master's. Being Morris, of course, he transcends the circle in which he finds himself; and much of the credit is also due to Prof. Florence Boos, who has edited the diary, explained the references, written a provocative introduction, and even appended more than fifty capsule biographies of the personalities who surrounded Morris during the months of 1887 covered by the diary. She has made it a work worth seeking out.

The diary itself covers the period between 25 January and 27 April 1887, during which Morris's main concern seems to have been the work of his Socialist League, and efforts to prepare for the League's annual Conference later that spring. The record of committee meetings attended, of chapters visited, of trips to the South and to Scotland leaves one breathless enough in the mere reading to understand clearly Morris's decision to stop keeping the diary after three months because "I have been busy about many things." A fairly typical week, from 7 February to the 11th, may be summarized as follows: "Monday the Council meeting: peacable enough....Tuesday I took the chair at the meeting to protest against the (possible) coming war at Cleveland Hall....On Wednesday I went to lecture at a schoolroom in Peckham High Street for some goody-