



Major Textual Changes in William Morris's News from Nowhere

Michael Liberman

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Notes

MAJOR TEXTUAL CHANGES IN WILLIAM MORRIS'S *NEWS FROM NOWHERE*

William Morris's utopian romance, *News from Nowhere*, was first published in thirty-nine weekly installments, between 11 January and 4 October 1890, in the Socialist League paper *Commonweal*. Morris was the editor of *Commonweal* and probably the chief financial support of the paper and the League itself. The first edition in book form was published by Reeves and Turner in 1891. A Kelmscott edition, printed on presses in Morris's own London home, Kelmscott House, appeared in 1892.¹

Minor differences between the three texts that Morris saw through the press during his lifetime run to several hundred, including corrections of typographical errors found in earlier editions and new errors in subsequent editions. The Kelmscott Press edition was set in Golden type, a face designed by Morris himself. An italic version of the face was not cut, so that words and phrases italicized in the earlier editions are not thus rendered in the Kelmscott edition, and a few things previously italicized are capitalized. The dash, a punctuation that Morris used quite often, was missing in the Roman version of Golden type, and dashes are replaced in the Kelmscott edition by commas, colons, semi-colons, and, in particular, ellipses with varying numbers of periods.

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¹Information on the publication history of *News from Nowhere* appears in Vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of William Morris with Introductions by his Daughter May Morris* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. xxxi. Subsequent references to *News from Nowhere* are to this edition and appear in the text.

Two additional features of the Kelmscott edition are the ornamentation of the first letter of each chapter and of many other capitals in the text and shoulder notes at the top of the outside margin on each page. Each shoulder note, printed in red, is a brief abstract of the contents of the page on which it appears.

These minor variants in texts are secondary to several major changes, almost all of them additions, that appear in the Reeves and Turner edition of 1891. The changes include several pages appended to the chapter entitled "Trafalgar Square" (ch. 7), three paragraphs added at the beginning of "How Matters are Managed" (ch. 14), several pages inserted in "How the Change Came" (ch. 17) and the addition of one entire chapter, "The Obstinate Refusers" (ch. 26). The *Commonweal* version includes thirty chapters, subsequent editions thirty-two. The inclusion of "The Obstinate Refusers" added one chapter; the chapter numbered twenty-six in *Commonweal*, "The Upper Waters," becomes twenty-seven, and it is divided into two, with the new chapter twenty-eight titled "The Little River." Finally, the date for which the revolution is predicted seems to change significantly from the *Commonweal* to later editions.

The additions to the *Commonweal* text of *News from Nowhere* seem to serve four purposes: they picture physical work being done in the new age, discuss the relationship of the new society to the societies of foreign nations, modify the discussion of the course of the revolution that displaced the old regime, and introduce a cautionary note about the fragility of the new society.

The first major addition to the text comes at the end of "Trafalgar Square" (ch. 7) and begins at the top of page 47. Trafalgar Square had been the scene of the "Bloody Sunday" episode of 13 November 1887, in which three people were killed and many wounded as they gathered in the square to protest economic conditions. While passing through the square, Guest, the visitor to the new age, who is one of Morris's personae in the book, thinks of that day when police under the command of Sir Charles Warren, the Chief Commissioner, opened fire on the demonstrators.² A similar such gathering and response from the authorities, this time resulting in the deaths of more than a thousand of the demonstrators, is the spark that ignites the successful revolution described in chapter seventeen.

After recollecting the events of 1887, Guest discusses with his guides the penal system of the new age (there is none) and the state of industrialization and labor. In *Commonweal*, chapter 7 ends with Dick Ham-

²E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 488–95.

mond (who is a persona of Morris as a young man) stating that work is always available, that it is now a pleasure, and that factories, such as those for glass-blowing, still exist, although they are now decentralized, and enough people enjoy such heavy work for its own sake that there is no shortage of people available to perform it.

The addition to chapter 7 includes what is missing in the original version: an actual description of people at heavy labor. The travelers come upon a group of men engaged in road mending. Guest describes them as “like a boating party at Oxford would have looked in the days I remembered, and not more troubled with their work” (p. 47). There are echoes in this activity of the street sweeping in 1871 in London by members of Ruskin’s Guild of St. George and Ruskin’s sponsorship of a road-building project by Oxford undergraduates in Oxford in 1874. (Arnold Toynbee, uncle of the historian, was the foreman of the project, and Oscar Wilde was among the workers.)³

Dick says of the workers, “They are in luck to-day: it’s right down good sport trying how much pick-work one can get into an hour” (p. 47). Heavy labor now is a game to the populace. Dick concludes, “everything seems like a joke when we have a pleasant spell of work on, and good fellows merry about us; we feel so happy, you know” (p. 48). Labor, even heavy dirty work, is now pleasure, as Morris had so often wished.

The first eight paragraphs of “How Matters are Managed” (ch. 14) were added in the Reeves and Turner edition. They discuss relations with foreign countries, a subject not elsewhere considered in the book. National rivalries are said to have disappeared, as has the enforced fusion of different families or tribes into artificial nations to “stimulate their patriotism” (p. 85). Hammond claims that as a result there is no hostility between races and no wars between nations.

The third major addition to the text in the Reeves and Turner edition comes in “How the Change Came” (ch. 17), the book’s central chapter, its most important, and by far the longest. The chapter chronicles the successful revolution from its first misdirected steps to the overthrow of the established government and the foundation of the new world. As a committed Marxist, Morris believed that historical events dictated subsequent events and that no valid prediction of forthcoming events could ignore what had already taken place. As a result, the material added to the chapter takes into account the increasing influence of the gradualist Fabian wing of the socialist movement. Morris himself was opposed to

³E. T. Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1911), II, 225–26; Joan Evans, *John Ruskin* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 345–47 and 351.

gradualism, but as he was publishing *News from Nowhere* the Socialist League was coming apart under the twin pressures of those who favored gradualism on one side and absolute anarchists on the other.

The gradualists favored the selective strike, the adoption of the eight-hour day for workers, and the election of socialist representatives to Parliament. Morris favored only the tactic of the general strike, not strikes limited to single industries or companies. Opposing the election of socialists as Members of Parliament, he published an article entitled "Anti-parliamentary" in *Commonweal* on 7 June 1890, while *News from Nowhere* was appearing. He wrote:

What is the aim of Parliament? The upholding of privilege. . . . In the last act of the Revolution the Socialists may be obliged to use the form of Parliament in order to cripple the resistance of the reactionists by making it formally illegal, and so destroying the power of the armed men on whom the power of the parliament and the lawcourts really rests. (p. 180)

His opposition to the eight-hour day proposal was also expressed in an article in *Commonweal* while *News from Nowhere* was appearing. In "The 'Eight Hours' and the Demonstration," published on 17 May 1890, he wrote:

Every Social Democrat who knows the aims of his party, knows that a legal eight hours day will be unworkable without a legal minimum wage in each . . . trade . . . and that again will be useless without the enactment of a maximum price of all general articles of consumption; and these enactments will make it necessary to establish national workshops in order to destroy the profits of the capitalists, *i.e.* the capitalists themselves. (p. 153)

Despite Morris's opposition to these attempts to ameliorate the workers' condition, these proposals were attracting popular support among workers. The addition to chapter 17 of *News from Nowhere*, then, is Morris's vision of the end result of following a gradualist or state socialist course. In the added section, which appears from the beginning of the second paragraph on page 106 to the beginning of the fifth paragraph on page 111, Old Hammond (another older persona of Morris), who is describing the change, recalls that trades unions became an important force, so that the mere threat of a strike from them was likely to win concessions from the employers. But in the period of state socialism the unions never combined to hold a general strike designed to overthrow the ruling government. Instead, unions were full of corruption, exemplified by the embezzlement of strike funds by union leaders. Hammond

goes on to say that at the end of the nineteenth century the workers demanded and gained a shorter work day, but this had to be accompanied by minimum wage and price ceilings. In addition, the government was forced to establish and operate factories for the production of essentials, and to regulate government markets.

These measures, however, according to Hammond, alienated the "privileged classes" and did not help the workers. He says "the partial practice of State Socialism had at first disturbed, and at last almost paralysed the marvellous system of commerce under which the old world had lived so feverishly, and had produced for some few a life of gambler's pleasure, and for many, or most, a life of mere misery" (p. 109). The result is a reaction on the part of the wealthy, the reactionaries. This produces the Trafalgar Square massacre, a general strike by the workers in response, fear by the reactionaries that they will be exterminated, and eventual victory for the workers.

The addition of the section which discusses the attempt to impose state socialism and the failure of this attempt was Morris presenting his ideal as honestly as possible, taking into account history and current trends. *News from Nowhere* ends with the statement "if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (p. 211). This vision must be based on historical fact, not simply on wishful thinking.

News from Nowhere itself seems to be the third in a series of narratives about revolts and revolutions which Morris published in *Commonweal*. The first, "The Pilgrims of Hope," a narrative poem about the Paris Commune of 1871, appeared between March 1885 and July 1886. (The Commune appealed to Morris, and much of the discussion of the stages of the revolution in chapter 17 of *News from Nowhere* follows the discussion of the Commune in "A Short Account of the Commune of Paris," written by Morris, Ernest Belfort Bax, and Victor Dave and published in 1886.) The "Pilgrims of Hope" includes lines which clearly indicate Morris's belief in the pervasive influence of historical events on what follows them:

And I cling to the love of the past
and the love of the day to be,
And the present, it is but the building
of the man to be strong in me.⁴

The second narrative of revolt is *A Dream of John Ball*, which appeared in *Commonweal* between November 1886 and January 1887. A

⁴Morris, "The Pilgrims of Hope," in Vol. 24 of *Collected Works*, p. 408.

sleeper, like Guest in *News from Nowhere*, is transported back to the Kent of 1381 and the Peasants' Rebellion. This revolt failed, as did the Paris Commune, but John Ball leaves the narrator with the words "I go to life and to death, and leave thee; and scarce do I know whether to wish thee some dream of the days beyond thine to tell what shall be, as thou hast told me, for I know not if that shall help or hinder thee."⁵ This indicates that Morris was already thinking of writing a narrative depicting a successful revolution and the world that would result from it. The world that does result is very much like that inhabited by John Ball in its pristine, natural qualities, and it lacks the reduction to servitude against which the peasants were rebelling.

The final major addition to the text of *News from Nowhere* in its second publication is "The Obstinate Refusers" (ch. 26). While rowing up the Thames from London to what turns out be Morris's own Kelmscott Manor, Guest, Dick Hammond, Clara (Dick's wife with whom he has recently been reunited), and a friend, Walter Allen, pause to watch a group of people building and decorating a house. Those working on the house call themselves "The Obstinate Refusers" because they good humoredly refuse to spend their time haymaking, as Dick, Clara, and Guest are heading upriver to do. Rather, the refusers prefer to continue work on the house.

This chapter seems to serve two purposes. First, despite many references in *News from Nowhere* to the beautiful buildings of the new age, this is the only instance of a building being erected. For Morris, architecture was the most noble of the arts. In his essay "The Lesser Arts of Life" he said:

the existence of the other arts is bound up with that of Architecture. . . . [T]his art of building is the true democratic art, the child of the man-inhabited earth, the expression of the life of man thereon. I claim for our Society no less a position than this, that in calling on you to reverence the examples of noble building, and to understand and protect the continuity of its history, it is guarding the very springs of all art, of all cultivation.⁶

In this chapter, then, the discussions of the careful siting of the house, the choice of building material, and the type of decoration all underscore the success of the new age, which holds the arts, and especially architecture, in such esteem.

⁵Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*, in Vol. 16 of *Collected Works*, p. 286.

⁶Morris, "The Lesser Arts of Life," in Vol. 22 of *Collected Works*, p. 241.

A second possible purpose for the inclusion of this chapter may not be as approving. At the beginning of the book, the narrator speaks of leaving a League meeting at which six persons were present “and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions” (p. 3). The increasing influence of the anarchists led to their taking over the Socialist League during 1890 and removing Morris as editor of *Commonweal* even while *News from Nowhere* was being serialized.⁷ This action must have greatly hurt Morris. In chapter 3 of *News from Nowhere* an inscription on the panelling of the walls of the dining hall of the guest house that stands on the site of Kelmscott House reads, in part: “Guests and neighbours, on the site of this Guest-hall once stood the lecture-room of the Hammersmith Socialists” (p. 16). In the *Commonweal* version, it read “the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League.” The reference to the Socialist League has been dropped. The Hammersmith Branch was the only one which remained loyal to Morris. Morris was sympathetic to the anarchists and was a close friend of Peter Kropotkin, a leading anarchist theoretician who had fled to England from Russia.⁸ Indeed, the society pictured in *News from Nowhere* seems almost anarchic itself. But this society is in very delicate balance. If sufficient numbers of the population refuse to accede to the desires of the majority, the society will collapse.

Earlier, in “How Matters are Managed” (ch. 14), Old Hammond tells Guest how decisions are made. In essence, the majority always rules. He says, “if the minority has not perceptibly grown, they always give way; though I believe there is some half-forgotten rule by which they might still carry it on further” (p. 88). In matters such as hay-harvesting there is no possibility of disagreement: the hay must be harvested when it is ready. The Obstinate Refusers, unable to complete the house earlier because of the head carver’s illness, feel that “we really couldn’t go hay-making, could we, neighbours?” (p. 175). Enough people are available to harvest the hay, but the refusal of some to participate may bode ill for the society. After all, this book is subtitled “An Epoch of Rest,” and that epoch will not continue forever if people fail to cherish it.

As well as making major additions to the text after the *Commonweal* version, Morris seems to have become less sanguine about how quickly the revolution would take place. In the Reeves and Turner and the Kelmscott editions the action is set early in the twenty-second century, for Old Hammond says “We have been living for a hundred and fifty years, at least, more or less in our present manner” (p. 80). The violent

⁷Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 566.

⁸Thomson, *William Morris*, pp. 549–52.

civil-war portion of the revolution began in 1952, according to the section added to chapter 17, and it lasted about two years, as Old Hammond says toward the end of that chapter.

On the other hand, although Dick Hammond speaks of a great battle fought in Trafalgar Square in 1952 (p. 42), other indications of when the revolution took place have been dated later than they were in the *Commonweal* version. In chapter 2, the new and beautiful Hammersmith Bridge, which Dick says in the later editions was built in 2003, is in *Commonweal* said to have been built in 1971 (p. 9). The National Gallery, which Guest and Dick pass in Trafalgar Square on the way to see Old Hammond, is said to have been "built before the middle of the twentieth century" (p. 45). In the *Commonweal* version, it was "built quite in the beginning of the twentieth century." Later editions speak of the reactionaries seeking to crush socialist and democratic tendencies, which had been "treated with such foolish indulgence for the last sixty years" (p. 114). *Commonweal* has "such indulgence for the last twenty years."

In the Kelmscott edition Morris eliminated at least one inconsistency that appeared in the Reeves and Turner edition after he had altered the date of the revolution. *Commonweal* and the Reeves and Turner edition (and the *Collected Works*) speak of "the crude ideas [about art] of the first half of the twentieth century" (p. 72), after the success of the revolution. Having delayed the revolution, Morris writes of "the crude ideas of the first part of the age of Freedom" in the Kelmscott edition (p. 102).

From 1890 to 1891, then, Morris seems to have delayed the onset of the revolution some forty years. His belief that a revolution would come quickly seems to have disappeared as a result of the increasing factionalism among socialist groups. The major additions to *News from Nowhere* involve Morris addressing matters that were not considered in the original serialization—the performance of heavy dirty work; the conduct of international relations; the status of art and architecture. The changes in dates take into account political realities—the rise of moderate socialist and anarchist factions—which would serve to delay the revolution that he so earnestly desired.

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East Stroudsburg University