

Bellamy, Edward. "‘News from Nowhere’: William Morris’s Idea of the Good Time Coming." 1 *New Nation* (February 14, 1891): 47.

Perhaps the most distinguished of the many converts which socialism in England has made from among the cultured class is William Morris, author of "The Earthly Paradise," and one of the greatest of living poets. His "News From Nowhere," just published in this country by Roberts Brothers, is a setting forth in the form of a clever fiction of this ideal of the good time coming, and is exceedingly well worth reading. The tale is on this wise: After a heated discussion with his friends at the socialist league, the narrator goes home and to bed. When he wakes he is surprised to find it summer, whereas it was winter when he went to bed. On going forth he discovers that everything else is changed, and in fine that it is the England of the 20th century that he has awakened to. Then follows the story of a week’s wanderings among the friendly people by whom he finds himself surrounded, his experience naturally consisting largely of questions and answers born of his surprise at what he sees about him and the surprise of those about him at his surprise. All the while he has a vague idea, just as one so often has in dreams, that he is dreaming, and it finally turns out that he was dreaming, and he awakes again much disgusted in this musty 19th century. This dream business is very cleverly managed, though of course it is merely the contrivance for getting the author’s social ideas in objective form.

Mr. Morris appears to belong to the school of anarchistic rather than to the state socialists. That is to say, he believes that the present system of private capitalism once destroyed, voluntary co-operation, with little or no governmental administration, will be necessary to bring about the ideal social system. This is in strong contrast with the theory of nationalism, which holds that no amount of moral excellence or good feeling on the part of a community will enable them to dispense with a great ideal of system in order so to co-ordinate their efforts as to obtain the best economic results.

In the sense of a force to restrain and punish, governmental administration may no doubt be dispensed with in proportion as a better social system shall be introduced; but in no degree will any degree of moral improvement lessen the necessity of a strictly economic administration for the directing of the productive and distributive machinery. This is a distinction which anarchists too commonly overlook, when they argue against the necessity of government.

In Mr. Morris' ideal England there appears to be no central government, but merely an aggregation of communes or towns, each of which regulates its own affairs on a strictly democratic basis. We are given no suggestion as to how any form of administration extending beyond town limits is conducted, as, for instance, the railroad system. We are told that manufacturing has been so much improved that the greatest fear of the people is that presently there will be no more work to do; but as to the industrial system, by which this result has been effected, Mr. Morris is provokingly silent, although nothing is more certain than that a great deal of system must have been required to produce the effect described.

Such glimpses as we are given of the business methods of the people pique our curiosity still further as to how they manage to make the ends meet. In the stores and markets everybody takes what he wants and as much of it as he wishes, and that is all there is about it. This is delightful, and we are not to be understood as saying that the plan under given condition would be any more impossible than it now is for the community to maintain public roads and bridges for everybody to use at pleasure. We simply wish very much that Mr. Morris had told us more about the system. In Mr. Morris' England there appears to be no punishment for crime, not even homicide. It is found that society, being justly organized and artificial temptations to crime being absent, there is very little of it, and that the force of an absolutely united sentiment of public reprobation, together with his own

conscience, is quite sufficient punishment for an offender. We believe that Mr. Morris is right in describing this order of things as a characteristic of the coming era of social improvement.

There is one sort of crime which Mr. Morris gives us slight hopes of ever getting rid of,--homicide growing out of love quarrels. If, indeed, the women are going to be so distractingly lovely in the new age as Mr. Morris describes them, the men are scarcely to be blamed for losing their wits over them. Upon this theme he dwells with all a poet's enthusiasm. Upon the subject of education he has some very pregnant suggestions, though here too, as in the matter of economics, we wish he had been a little more definite. In one respect we regret to be obliged to make an issue with Mr. Morris. It is quite excusable for an Englishman to select England as the locality of his 20th century Eden; but we object to his describing America as being at that time so far behindhand in social progress as to be an object of pity.