

The production of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*: a newly re-discovered exchange of letters

Martin Stott

A hitherto unrecorded exchange of letters between William Morris and George Campfield, in private hands, has come to light. The letter was purchased by the current owner from the Stroud-based dealers Ian Hodgkins & Co., who in turn bought it at auction from the estate of Barbara Morris, in 2010.¹ The letter (with Campfield's reply) is not included in Norman Kelvin's *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 4 vols in 5, 1984–1996. (Subsequently Kelvin).

The letter and response (Figures 1–2) are written on two sides of a single folded sheet of Morris's Kelmscott House writing paper. The letter is dated 16 Feb. Campfield in his reply on 18 February supplies the year – 1891. The exchange is short. It is interesting to compare the ways in which the two men address each other.

Page 12: Figure 1 – Morris's letter to George Campfield; (Images Figures 1 and 2 copyright the author)

Page 13: Figure 2 – Campfield's reply, on the reverse of Morris's letter

KELMSCOTT HOUSE,
UPPER MALL,
HAMMERSMITH.

Feb 16th

My Dear Campfield

I should be obliged
~~to~~ if you would cut the
N & B on this block in
place of others as I need them
for the work as soon as I can
get them - no need of pressure
though of course. Yes truly
W Morris

WELMESCOTT HOUSE,
UPPER WALL,
HAMMERSMITH.

Reply Merton Abbey Works
18th Feb: 1891

My dear Sir
The design of Block to hand
I have commenced the cutting, and
expect to have both letters **N** & **B** cut, and
proofs ready to be seen, the early part of
next week

faithfully yours
G. T. Compfield

Morris to Campfield:

KELMSCOTT HOUSE,
UPPER MALL,
HAMMERWIMITH.
Feb 16th

My dear Campfield,

I should be obliged if you would cut the N & B on this block in place of others as I need them for the work as soon as I can get them – no need of pressure though of course.

Yrs truly
W Morris

Campfield to Morris:

Reply

MERTON ABBEY WORKS
18th Feb: 1891

My dear Sir,

The designs & Block to hand

I have commenced the cutting, and expect to have both letters N & B cut, and proofs ready to be seen, the early part of next week

faithfully yours
G.J. Campfield

The exchange of letters occurred during an important phase in the establishment of the Kelmscott Press. According to Halliday Sparling, Morris had intended the *Golden Legend* to be the first book produced by the Press, but the paper delivery on 12 February 1891 – '10 reams Antique Pott, 16 x 11', 12 lb 480 sheets 'Flower' – 'proved to be unsuitable to the *Golden Legend* which was intended to have been the first book produced'. Sparling continues: 'Only two pages, out of over a thousand, could be printed at a time, and Morris, impatiently desirous of handling a finished book from his own press, resolved to put a smaller book in hand to go on with'.² This book was *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. How-

This is not the Land!" ¶ No more than that they said, but turned about their horses & rode out through the garth gate, and went clattering up the road that led to the pass of the mountains. But Hallblithe hearkened wondering, till the sound of their horse-hoofs died away, and then turned back to his work: and it was then two hours after high-noon.

CHAPTER II. EVILTIDINGS COME TO HAND AT CLEVELAND.



NOT long had he worked ere he heard the sound of horse-hoofs once more, & he looked not up, but said to himself, "It is but the lads bringing back the teams from the acres, and riding fast & driving hard for joy of heart and in wantonness of youth." ¶ But the sound grew nearer and he looked up and saw over the turf wall of the garth the flutter of white raiment; and he said: ¶ "Nay, it is the maidens coming back from the sea-shore and the gathering of wrack." ¶ So he set himself the harder to his work, and laughed, all alone as he was, and said: "She is with them: now I will not look up again till they have ridden into the garth, and she has come from among them, &

Figure 3 – 'N' as printed on p.4 of the Kelmscott Press edition of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (Images Figures 3 and 4 courtesy of the University of Iowa Libraries)

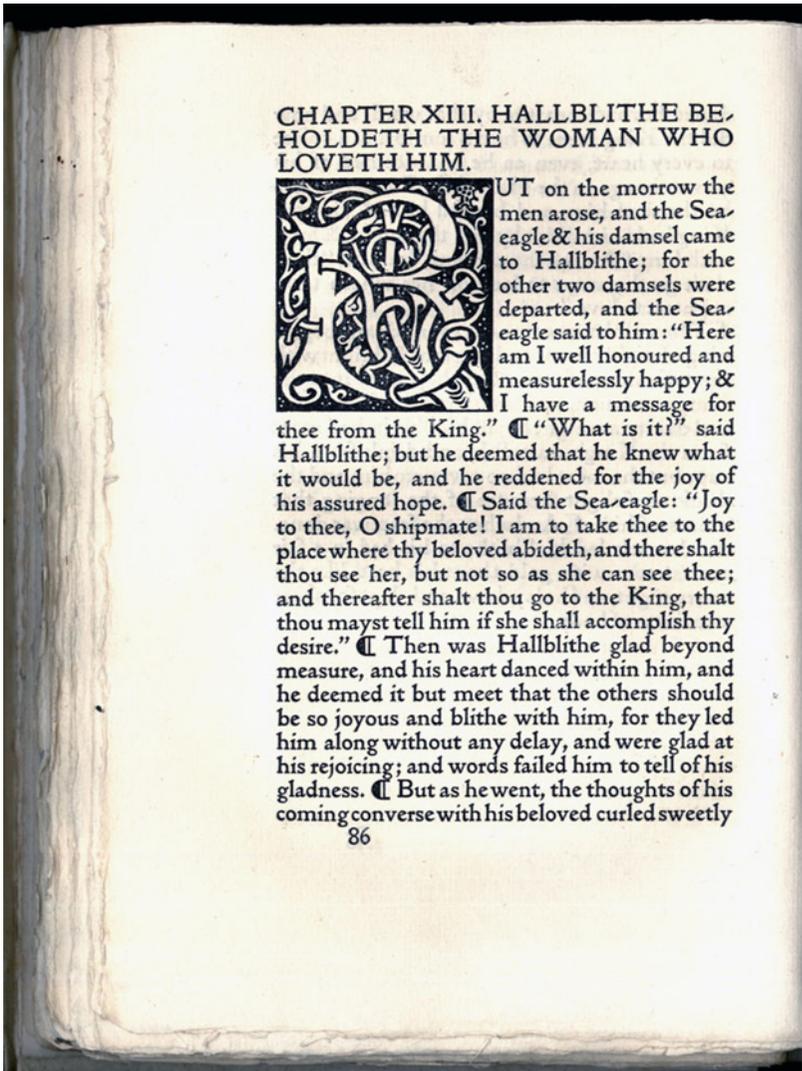


Figure 4 – ‘B’ as printed on p. 86 of the Kelmscott Press edition of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*

ever, having made the decision on the basis of the paper size, Morris was uneasy about the size of the decorated initials which he had designed for the *Golden Legend* being reused for the *Glittering Plain*. 'I would be obliged if you would cut the N & B on this block in place of others...' (Figures 3–4).

Sparling informs us that 'Some decorated initials had already been designed for the *Golden Legend* by Morris and had been engraved by George F. Campfield,³ an old friend of his, a pupil of Ruskin at the Working Men's College and the first employé [*sic*] to enter the service of Morris Faulkner, Marshall and Co. [*sic*]. These, though large for the page of the smaller book, would do to go on with ...'⁴

A trial-page was pulled on 31 January. Printing commenced on 2 March, was completed on 2 April, and the book was issued on 8 May 1891. Two hundred copies were printed, 180 for sale through Reeves & Turner, with Morris retaining twenty for personal friends.⁵ This exchange of letters therefore occurred right at the point where Morris was trying to complete the new border, and to get some of the decorative letters re-cut for the small, quarto-sized book.

In a note on a letter from Morris to F.S. Ellis, Kelvin remarks that: 'Morris's *The Story of the Glittering Plain* was in fact the first book to be issued by the Kelmscott Press and it was the only one to be issued from the Press twice. Morris had originally planned it with illustrations by Walter Crane, but was, according to Crane "so eager to get his first book out that he could not wait for the pictures, and so *The Glittering Plain* first appeared only with his own initials and ornaments".'⁶

The re-cutting of some of the decorative letters for the *The Story of the Glittering Plain* 'in place of others' was therefore something of a priority for Morris by 16 February, and it is unsurprising that the letter to Campfield half-jokingly refers to 'no need of pressure'. Campfield, who had been working for Morris for almost thirty years by then, clearly recognised that there was some urgency, and responded on 18 February by promising that the proofs would be 'ready to be seen, the early part of next week'. Nicholas Salmon records that this is the same day on which Sydney Cockerell recorded in his diary that 'a good supply of type' was delivered to the Kelmscott Press.⁷ It is easy to imagine Morris's combination of enthusiasm and impatience when he wrote to George Campfield about letters N & B on that day in February 1891.

NOTES

1. Barbara Morris (1918–2009) was Deputy Keeper (Ceramics and Glass) at the Victoria & Albert Museum. On retirement in 1978, she joined Sotheby's, setting up their decorative arts course. Among her publications is *William*

Morris and the South Kensington Museum, London: The William Morris Society, 1987, 23 pp.

2. H. Halliday Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris master craftsman*. London: Macmillan, 1924, pp. 62–3, p. 74. (Subsequently Sparling).
3. George Campfield (1829–1910) was originally a glass-painter, but, according to Kelvin in a footnote to a letter from Morris to Emery Walker on 8 April 1891, ‘had assisted in some of Morris’s early experiments with wood-engraving, including the 1860’s plan to illustrate *The Earthly Paradise*. He had also designed and cut the wood-engraved title of *Commonweal*. In 1891, he engraved some early initials for two Kelmscott Press volumes, *The Glittering Plain* and *The Golden Legend*’. Kelvin, III, 287.
4. Sparling, pp.74–75
5. Sparling pp. 75–76
6. Kelvin, Vol. III, pp. 199–200.
7. Nicholas Salmon with Derek Baker: *The William Morris Chronology*, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996, p. 236.

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