

ROBERT OWEN, IDEALIST

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PART I. Owen's Psychology. The Five Fundamental Facts.

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ROBERT OWEN, IDEALIST.

THE main facts about Robert Owen's career as successful business man, and his endeavours to bring about social reform by means of State action, have been already described in a previous Tract treating of "Robert Owen, Social Reformer." Finding politicians unsatisfactory, the public thick-headed, and his attempts to create a Utopia on the basis of existing institutions impracticable, Owen diverted his eloquence, his energies, and his wealth to the task of setting up model communities which should realise those ideals of a rational life founded upon communal ownership of property which were peculiarly his own.

The amazing optimism with which he continuously prophesied sudden and complete moral and social revolutions, and the unflagging enthusiasm which led him to embark on new communities after repeated failures, spring from, and were in the main conditioned by, that particular view of human character for which he is perhaps most famous. It was because he believed that human nature was entirely malleable to impress, that he so continually strove to impress it with his own mark. It was because he was convinced that men could be made to lead any kind of life, that he never tired of preaching the life he wanted them to lead. Hence his practical efforts at community-forming arise directly from his psychological view of character-forming—otherwise their persistence would seem incredible.

The objects of this Tract are therefore twofold. Firstly, to give some account of Owen's peculiar view of human nature. Secondly, to describe the more important communities which resulted from that view.

PART I.

Owen's Psychology. The Five Fundamental Facts.

Owen was one of the most thoroughgoing materialists who ever lived. That is to say, he conceived of human consciousness as a purely incidental phenomenon occurring in a world of matter, and not as the essential underlying reality of the universe. He would so define the world as to leave man's soul upon it as a sort of outside passenger, or alien, as opposed to the spiritualist conception which insists that the intimate and human must surround and underlie the material and the brutish. Thus he tended to regard sequence as proceeding always from the inanimate to the animate. Whereas we most of us agree that the inanimate may have a limiting influence on the actions of the animate, Owen thought that the phenomena of consciousness were entirely caused and explained by the influence of the inanimate.

With regard to the old opposition of character and environment in the total human compound, he was continually emphasising the importance of environment, and belittling that of character. He carried this attitude to the point of denying absolutely that character was in any sense formed or controlled by the individual. It was formed for the individual by external circumstances independently of his will.

The view that the individual is in any way responsible for his character is regarded by Owen as the fundamental delusion, the arch-error, which is responsible for all the ills of society and the sufferings of the human race. He speaks of it in the fiercest terms. It is "this hydra of human calamity, this immolator of every principle of rationality, this monster which has hitherto effectually guarded every avenue that can lead to true benevolence and active kindness."

Once dragged to light by Owen's writings, this principle, "conscious of its own horrid loathsome deformity, will instantaneously vanish, never more to appear." In contradistinction to this principle, which has hitherto reigned paramount both in ethics and politics, Owen asserts his five fundamental facts, which explain the basis of human nature. The statement of and implications arising from the facts, repeated in various connections, form the contents of Owen's gospel of character, "The New Moral World."

The facts are:—

1. That man is a compound being whose character is formed of his constitution or organisation at birth, and of the effects of external circumstances upon it from birth to death: such original organisation and external circumstances continually acting and reacting upon each other.
2. That man is compelled by his original constitution to receive his feelings and his convictions independently of his will.
3. That his feelings and his convictions, or both of them united, create the motive to action called his will, which stimulates him to act and decides his actions.
4. That the organisation of no two human beings is ever precisely similar at birth, nor can art subsequently form any two human beings from infancy to maturity to be precisely similar.
5. That, nevertheless, the constitution of every individual, except in the case of organic disease, is capable of being formed into a very inferior or a very superior being, according to the qualities of the external circumstances allowed to influence his constitution from birth.

Implications of the Facts.

I. EDUCATION.

Conjoin the fifth fundamental fact, and the principle that characters are formed for individuals not by them, and the supreme importance of education in Owen's system is immediately apparent.

"The Government," he says "of any community may form the individuals of that community into the best, or into the worst characters."

"That great knowledge," therefore, with which it is Owen's privilege to enlighten the world, is that "the old collectively may teach the young collectively to be ignorant and miserable or to be intelligent and happy."

Instruction of the young becomes the keystone of his system, for, unless children are rationally trained, the State cannot hope to produce citizens sufficiently intelligent to appreciate the truth of Owen's system.

The then existing education must be "scrapped" utterly. "Reading and writing do not in themselves constitute education: they are the instruments by which knowledge, true or false, may be imparted." Thus, "according to the present system children may learn to read, write, account, and sew, and yet acquire the worst habits and have their minds irrational for life."

The true object of education is to teach the young to reason correctly, to develop their critical faculty, and to enable them to sift the true from the false. Only their memories, he says, are exercised under the present system, and these are only used to retain incongruities. The most controversial religious questions, for instance, are solved in a phrase, and the answer is taken on trust. "Children," he says, "are asked theological questions to which men of the most profound erudition cannot make a rational reply; the children, however, readily answer as they had been previously instructed, for memory in this mockery of learning is all that is required."

In his conviction that children must be taught primarily to think for themselves, Owen anticipated many educational reformers. To carry out his system of education, the most capable persons in the State were to be appointed teachers. State seminaries were to be established for the instruction of the teacher, and the children to be given uniform attention in community schools.

Owen rarely condescends to details, but a sketch of the various stages in a child's education is to be found in "The New Moral World."

There are to be four classes of children in the model community:

- I. From birth to the age of five. They are to acquire the primary characteristics of Owen's system: confidence in others, unselfishness, toleration, with knowledge of simple objects. These qualities will be inculcated by the automatic action of a healthy environment.
- II. Class II, from five to ten, will "discard the useless toys of the old world." Education will be confined to handling objects, and conversations with older persons. They will help in domestic arrangements, but there will be no tasks. They will work only for "amusement and exercise."
- III. From ten to fifteen:
 - (a) Children from ten to twelve will instruct and supervise the work of those in Class II.
 - (b) From twelve to fifteen they will learn the more advanced arts and handicrafts.

They will also receive instruction in the mechanical sciences.

IV. From fifteen to twenty, the Communists will be engaged in becoming "men and women of a new race, physically, intellectually, and morally." They will instruct the class below, and become "active producers on their own account."

A sketch of the future activities of the model Communist may as well be inserted here. His life is divided into eight stages, of which we have already described four.

- V. From twenty to twenty-five, the members, aided by the inventions of science, will be engaged in producing all the wealth required by the community. Further, they will be general directors in every branch of education and production.
- VI. From twenty-five to thirty, the main activities of the Communists will be directed to the distribution of the wealth produced by the lower classes, but this only for a few hours a day. For the rest, they will engage in study and intercourse.
- VII. Those between the ages of thirty and forty will govern the internal affairs of the community, settle disputes and administer justice.
- VIII. The eighth class, between forty and sixty, will undertake the duties of exchange of goods with other Communists, and the maintenance of friendly relations; in the course of these duties they will spend much of their time in travelling, partly on pleasure, partly on communal business.

Thus Owen maps out the whole life of man.

II. TOLERANCE AND CHARITY.

A conviction that men are in no way responsible individually for their characters will engender a universal tolerance for the shortcomings of others.

People will no longer be rewarded according to their deserts, for they are no longer responsible for their deserts. Distinctions of wealth will go the way of distinctions of birth, which are, of course, entirely irrational. Pharisaism will disappear with intellectual snobbery. Anger, jealousy, and revenge will give way to regret, perhaps, that other people's instincts are so unfortunate, but never to reproach.

"With insight into the formation of character, where is there any conceivable reason for private displeasure or public enmity?"

With this doctrine Owen lays one of the foundation stones of community life. Remove anger, jealousy, and revenge, and there is really no reason why people should not live happily together in communities, with common aims and common ownership of all property.

To remove those differences between individuals which operate in the main to create malice and enmity, Owen's system of education will act in two ways:—

First, children trained under a rational system will exhibit few

shortcomings. More especially, the desire to overreach one's neighbour in competition, which makes the majority of persons unfitted for community life, will disappear. Secondly, even if such shortcomings do exist, we shall find no cause of offence, for "rationally educated children will realise the irrationality of being angry with an individual for possessing qualities or beliefs which, as a passive being during the formation of these qualities, he had no means of preventing."

Prisons will disappear in company with workhouses. Illuminated addresses and knighthoods will be thought as illogical as satires and sermons.

Instead of blaming, "we shall only feel pity for individuals who possess habits or sentiments destructive of their own pleasure or comfort."

The problem of what to do, assuming these opinions, with the burglar who is caught stealing your silver will be solved by the considerations, firstly, that the burglar will have no incentive to steal, will, in fact, become extinct, and, secondly, that in stealing my silver he will be stealing the community's silver, which already belongs to him as much as it does to me.

Thus Owen's doctrine of character seemed to him to abolish at one blow the corrective and retributive functions of government, with all the difficulties they carry in their train.

III. THE LAWS OF NATURE.

Owen is continually reiterating the assertion that while all other systems, previous and present, have done violence to the laws of nature, his alone is in conformity with them.

"We undertake to explain the principles of nature," he says in the preface to "The New Moral World."

He conceives, in fact, of the present system of society as of something artificially imposed upon human nature which should be, and, in point of fact, has been at some period of the world's history, exempt from it. The Greeks thought that society was necessary to man, because it was only as a member of society that he could realise all that he had it in him to be. Owen felt, on the other hand, that the social structure, as it existed in his time, so far from developing, restricted the development of human nature.

Thus "it will be obvious," he says, "to children rationally educated that all human laws must be either unnecessary, or in opposition to nature's laws."

Like the Social Contract writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Owen envisaged a kind of Golden Age, existing before the institution of society, in which everybody did precisely what they pleased. One characteristic of this age was the fact that everybody lived according to Owen's principles, although, perhaps, they were never formulated. Owen's system, then, was an attempt to revive the freedom of the Golden Age, with the added advantages of a communal society somehow tacked on to it. So, under Owen's system, "none will be engaged in administering laws, at

once an improvement and a return, in opposition to the laws of nature ; or in adjudging artificial rewards and punishments to counteract those of nature, which are all wise and all efficient."

The sequence of the argument then proceeds as follows. The laws of nature are also the laws of the nature of individuals. But the laws of nature are not to be counteracted ; therefore no restriction is to be imposed upon human action, or check upon human feeling. Hence, "justice will be done for the first time to human nature by every feeling, faculty, and power inherent in each child being cultivated for its work to its full extent." It follows logically that every law which conflicts with individual pleasures, or violates any individual belief, is tyrannical and contrary to nature ; for it is Owen's belief that pleasures, being formed entirely independently of our will, "every individual is so organised that he must like what produces agreeable sensations in him."

Human laws, therefore, either (a) express our beliefs and pleasures, in which case they are expressing the laws of nature and are superfluous, or (b) conflict with them, in which case they are wrong. Owen never thought out all the implications of this doctrine. The following, however, which he recognises and accepts, appear as cardinal points in his system.

IV. (1) MARRIAGE. (2) PROPERTY. (3) COMPULSION.

(1) *Free divorce*: for there is no reason why people should continue to live together when it violates their feelings or proclivities to do so ; in fact, Owen sometimes speaks as if he accepted the full Platonic doctrine of the possession of wives in common.

(2) *No distinction of individual property*. In a state of nature things were held in common. The principle of the division of property is, further, the basis of the principle of division in the community, of the distinction between rich and poor, of poverty, of jealousy and of war. That harmony, therefore, which Owen claimed for his system can only exist if the institution of private property is abolished. There will be no difficulty about this, however, in Owen's state. Harness the inventions of science to the service of the community, and you will produce more than enough for all. Owen was tremendously impressed by the advance of scientific discovery. "In the time of your ancestors, sire," he writes to King William IV, "fifteen millions of men could produce enough to supply the wants of fifteen millions, and no more. But now, a population of twenty-five millions can, with the same expenditure of energy, supply the wants of six hundred millions." Thus, "wealth being made abundant beyond the wants or the wishes of the human race, any desire for individual accumulation or inequality of condition will consequently cease."

(3) *No compulsion*. Since no compulsion is possible where free play is to be given to every individual feeling we can say nothing either to the criminal or to the debauchee. Owen at times accepts this implication, looking to his system of education to abolish both. At others we find him faltering. Thus, although we are told that

pure affection and unreserved knowledge of each other's character is sufficient reason for any and apparently any number of sexual unions, he makes provision in "The New Moral World" that marriage shall be formal, and shall not be entered into without three months public notice, and that no separation shall take place under a year of union, and six months further notice, *i.e.*, eighteen months in all.

V. EUGENICS.

At times, moreover, a tendency to flirt with Eugenics is difficult to reconcile with free play to nature and to individual choice. "We have learnt to improve the breed of the lower animals," says Owen, "but in the much more important matter of breeding human beings we are content to leave all to chance." Regulations are therefore laid down to prescribe only the unions of the fit; which seems rather unfairly to penalise the unfit for what of course they are not responsible. Such minor inconsistencies abound in Owen's work. It would, however, be wasted labour and captious criticism to continue to score academic points against a system which appears as an ebullition of Quixotic enthusiasm, and yet, strangely enough, a movement of sound common sense, rather than as a logical structure, watertight in every compartment, propounded to delight Dons.

PART II.

The Community Ideal.

It is undoubtedly to Robert Owen that the conception of the community in the modern sense must be attributed. The promulgation of his ideas forms a landmark; it is the beginning of modern Socialism. The idea arose directly out of the distress caused by the cessation of the European war in 1815. In 1816 a public meeting of the "Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor" appointed a committee to enquire into the prevailing distress, under the presidency of the Duke of York. Of this committee Owen was a member. Having impressed himself upon the committee by a powerful speech, in which he ascribed the prevalent distress as due to (1) the cessation of the extraordinary demand occasioned by the war, and (2) to the displacement of human labour by machinery, Owen was commissioned to draw up a report to the committee. This report, also called the "Plan for the Regeneration of the World," embodies for the first time a definite statement of the community theory. Any successful plan which takes into account the present demoralisation of the poor must, says Owen, "combine means to prevent the children from acquiring bad habits, and . . . provide useful training and instruction for them; it must provide proper labour for adults, direct their labour and expenditure so as to produce the greatest benefit to themselves and society, and place them under such circumstances as shall remove them from unnecessary temptations and closely unite their interest and duty."

To serve these ends the working class are to be gathered together into an establishment; not too small, or else the cost of superintendence would be too high; not, on the other hand, too large to be effective. Hence the community of 500 to 1,500 persons. The community should be self-sufficing, and its members were therefore to engage in various branches of agriculture and manufacture. All were to work at suitable tasks, according to their ability. The necessary capital to build the required establishment was to be raised by voluntary subscription or advanced by the Government. Thus three main advantages are aimed at in the communistic scheme:—

- (1) It is the simplest and most effective method for educating the children of the poor.
- (2) It enables a greater population to be supported in a given area than under any other conditions.
- (3) It is so easy to put in practice that it may more conveniently be started than a new factory.

The original plan, then, in germ aimed simply at finding employment for the poor. Owen's optimism once having grasped the idea, saw far and quickly. A month later we find him stating not only that the community system was the only possible form of society for the whole world, but that, when it had once been promulgated by himself, "the principle and plan are so fixed and permanent that hereafter the combined power of the world will be found utterly incompetent to extract them from the public mind. Silence will not retard their course, and opposition will only give increased celerity to their movements."

The scheme was put forward under fashionable patronage, the papers were not unfavourable, and Owen was ingenious enough to propitiate the press as a customer and propagandise the country as a prophet at a single stroke by buying 30,000 copies of the papers containing his plan and distributing them to the clergy of every parish in the kingdom.

In 1819 the Duke of York held a meeting to appoint a committee to report on Owen's plan. The report whittled away the full-fledged communism of the plan to a joint-stock enterprise on a large scale. According to the report, the workmen would indeed feed in common and be housed in the same building, but "they will," says the committee, "receive their wages in money, and the mode in which they would dispose of them will be entirely at their own option."

A wealth of criticism and controversy centred not only round the extreme measures of the original plan, but even the milder recommendations of the other. The main point of vantage of the attack was the economic one.

Were Mr. Owen's communities, it was asked, to be self-sufficing or not self-sufficing? If they were to be the former, the number of workmen would not be sufficient to secure the sub-division of labour essential to modern processes, and the cost of production would be

increased; if the latter, and barter and exchange were permitted with other bodies, the community would lose many of those exclusive advantages for which alone it had been formed, and would become subject to the commercialism and fluctuations of ordinary markets.

Owen met such objections by emphasising the enormous ease and wealth of production which modern machinery had made possible, the importance of which, as we have already seen,* he continually tended to exaggerate. The colonists were to labour in a "community of interests." There would be no disputes either about the division of property or with neighbouring communities, because all "would produce the necessaries and comforts of life in abundance." Nobody, at present, says Owen, wants more than his fair share of air and water, simply because we have these things in abundance. The same would happen to property if society were rationally organised.

Despite, however, Owen's continual propaganda, despite the elaboration of his scheme contained in the "Report to the County of Lanark," the country still remained incredulous, and it was left to America to be the recipient of the first model Owenite community.

New Harmony.

Early in 1825 there assembled at New Harmony, Indiana, several hundreds of persons drawn from various parts of the United States to make a practical experiment in Communism. New Harmony had previously been the abiding place of a religious sect, the Rappites, who, cemented by a narrow and intense religious creed, had themselves not unsuccessfully grappled with the problems of Communism. The land was fertile, the climate good. Owen in 1824 had paid £30,000 down for the village as it stood.

The society was to be open to all the world except "persons of colour." The existing situation of the houses would not permit the establishment of an ideal community in all its completeness forthwith, nor would the inhabitants be able to adjust themselves to Communism without training. The society was at first to achieve only temporary objects; it was to be a half-way-house on the road to the communistic goal, in which materials were to be collected and preparation made for the final burst from "the chrysalis stage of semi-individualism into the winged glory of full Communism."

Accordingly, although at first there was to be pecuniary inequality in view of the superior talents or capital which certain members were bringing into the society; although members were to bring and to keep their own furniture and effects; although individual credit was to be kept at the outset for each member at the public store for the amount of work done and against it a debit registered for the amount of goods supplied; although, in short, these clogging traces of an obsolete individualism were still temporarily to cling to the embryo community, Owen hoped and stated that within three years the

* See section on "Community of Property," above.

members would be prepared to constitute a community of equality "and so for ever bury all the evils of the old selfish individual system."

The response to the appeal for members was somewhat overwhelming at first, both in quality and quantity. Robert Dale Owen, the founder's son, describes them as a "heterogeneous collection of radicals, enthusiastic devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians and lazy theorists, with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in." Of many it seems to have been true that their only credentials for the ideal world to come were constituted by their total failure in the world that is. A few of the most unsatisfactory were weeded out, but, in pursuance of Owen's principle, no general process of selection seems to have been exercised.

In spite of this, however, Owen on his return to New Harmony in January, 1826, after a visit to England to collect men of science and learning to leaven and instruct the community, found the experiment so far advanced that he was induced to cut short the period of probation and constitute immediately the finally developed community.

A committee of seven were elected to draw up a constitution. It will be as well to give the main articles of "Union" in full, as they embody fairly well what may be taken to be the main tenets of the community ideal, whether realised or not, aimed at in all the Owenite experiments.

Objects of New Harmony.

"All the members of the community shall be considered as one family, and no one shall be held in higher or lower esteem on account of occupation.

"There shall be similar food, clothing, and education as near as can be, furnished for all according to their age and, as soon as practicable, all shall live in similar houses and be accommodated alike.

"Every member shall render his or her best service for the good of the whole."

The governing body was to be constituted as follows :

Agriculture.) Should each form one department. Each department should again be divided under intendants. Each intendant was to choose four superintendents. All the officers with the addition of a secretary were to form the executive council. The real estate was to be vested in the community as a whole.
Manufactures	
Literature, Science,	
Education.	
Domestic Economy.	
General Economy.	
Commerce.	

We shall have cause to comment on the amazing intricacy of the governing body when we come to consider the community ideal in general. In the meantime it may be considered that complete communism was established. There was to be no discrimination between one man's labour and another's, and no buying and selling within the bounds of the community. Each was to give of his labour, according to his ability, and to receive food, clothing, and shelter according to his needs.

Success of the Community.

For the year following the emergence of the society into full communism all went well. A paper called the *New Harmony Gazette* gives a glowing account of the activities of the society. "The society is gradually becoming really as well as ostensibly a community of equality, based on the equal rights and equal duties of all. Our streets no longer exhibit groups of idle talkers, but each one is busily engaged in the occupation he has chosen for his employment."

Robert Dale Owen, arriving in 1826, is particularly enthusiastic. There were concerts, weekly dances, and all manner of social intercourse in the community hall; there were weekly discussions, and complete freedom of view was allowed. The housing, it is true, was of the simplest, and the fare of the rudest, while there was plenty of hard work to do. But there does seem to have been a real spirit of unity and enthusiasm pervading the community in the early days. Many distinguished persons also came to visit and observe the settlement.

Signs of Breaking-up.

From one of these latter, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, we have the first note of discord. He observed in particular two disquieting signs: the extreme frugality of the living, and the difficulty of amalgamating the different social grades. This last is significant. We are told that at the dances the "working men did not join in the dances in the public hall, but used the newspapers scattered on the table." . . . While, when partners were assigned for the cotillion, "the young ladies turned up their noses at the democratic dancers who often fell to their lot." In the lectures, the work, and the amusements alike, the better educated classes kept together, and eschewed their social inferiors. Some such social divergence was probably the real cause of the split of the main community into two smaller ones, Macluria and Feiba Peveli. Robert Owen finds only cause for increased optimism in this duplication of communities. Both societies contemplated pure Communism, it is true, and we find Owen saying that "the formation of communities is now pretty well understood among us, and is entered upon like a matter of ordinary business." But it is to be feared that Owen was gilding his facts to reflect his expectations. Divergence in the main community cannot be looked on as a healthy sign, and by 1827 no less than seven different communities had evolved from the parent society in a similar manner.

Already in 1826 we hear of dissension in the society. The real estate of the society was to be transferred from Owen to twenty-five representatives. Apparently, however, so much confusion arose in the financial affairs of the community that the transfer was never accomplished. The members complain that they are stinted in food allowance (two meals a day, costing, on an average, about three-pence in all, constituted their diet), while Owen is sumptuously regaled at the tavern. The accounts are complicated, and far too

large a proportion of the members are engaged in the unproductive drudgery of clerkships. Thefts of community money occur.

Three changes of constitution took place during the next year, 1827, and an editorial in the *Gazette* of 1827 practically owns the scheme a failure.

We hear that "the whole population, numerous as they were, were too various in their feelings and too dissimilar in their habits to unite and govern themselves harmoniously in one community." Again, and very significantly, the admission is made that "the deficiency of production appeared immediately attributable in part to carelessness with regard to community property; in part to their want of interest in the experiment itself—the only true incitement to community industry; and these, again, were to be traced to a want of confidence in each other, increased by the unequal industry and discordant variety of habits which existed among them."

In fact, all the bogeys visioned and marshalled in critical array by the Individualist, when making orthodox assault on Communism, do really seem to have appeared, and in May, 1827, the parent community was formally dissolved.

Dissolution of Community.

At the dissolution of the parent society into five separate villages, the inhabitants of which voluntarily selected each other, Owen offered land and pecuniary assistance to anyone who wished to settle on the estate. Of the inhabitants, all who did not join one or other of the daughter communities were warned that they must either support themselves by their own industry or leave New Harmony. "Under the circumstances," says Owen, "many families left New Harmony with their feelings more or less hurt." Even now Owen's faith does not fail him. "The cheering prospects before the daughter communities," he tells us at this time, "induce a belief that nothing can prevent a spread of the social system over the United States."

After this we hear little of the future history of New Harmony. In April, 1828, Owen, after a visit to England, returned to the place, and in a public address to the inhabitants practically confesses that the great experiment has failed.

Speaking of the leases of land that had been made a year previously to the daughter communities, he says: "Upon my return, I find that the habits of the individual system were so powerful that the leases have been, with a few exceptions, applied for individual purposes and for individual gain, and in consequence they must return again into my hands. This last experiment has made it evident that families trained in the individual system, founded as it is upon superstition, have not acquired those moral qualities of forbearance and charity for each other which are necessary to promote full confidence and harmony among all the members, and without which communities cannot exist." This confession on the part of the founder sounded the death-knell of New Harmony. In June,

1828, Owen bade farewell to the place, and the relics of the community soon lapsed into complete Individualism.

Queenwood.

After an interval of some dozen years, marked by several abortive attempts to establish communities, and by numberless societies formed for that purpose, the ideal once more materialised in the settlement of Queenwood, at Tytherly, in Hampshire. Queenwood was started and financed by the "Community Society," founded by Owen. Each branch of this society which subscribed £50 for the enterprise was entitled to nominate one of its members to join the community. In 1839 the members, to the number of some sixty, entered upon possession of a large farm at Tytherly. Once again, however, no real process of selection appears to have been exercised. Dissension took place in the first few weeks in the community, members were asked to resign, and the chosen residue, some nineteen in all, were entrusted with the whole management of the experiment. After numerous early struggles, mainly financial, into which it is unnecessary to enter, the community was fairly established in an apparently flourishing state by 1842. They were in full possession of a magnificent building, costing some £30,000, some six hundred people had now been collected to inhabit it, and a sketch of the life of the place at the time, given by a visitor, who writes in the *Morning Chronicle*, signed "One who has Whistled at the Plough," is full of interest.

After a description of the fields, garden, and outside of the building called Harmony Hall, we hear next of the kitchen. When the writer entered, three or four women were washing dishes with incredible speed and the aid of a mechanical contrivance. The kitchen was fitted up with every modern convenience, and communicated with the dining hall by a tunnel, along which ran trucks containing plates, dishes, etc. A bathroom and the sleeping accommodation are also described. On the estate itself we are told of the activities of builders, gardeners, brickmakers, roadmakers, and shepherds. Labourers had been hired from the neighbouring villages, and were paid at nine shillings a week, a wage apparently considerably in excess of the normal rates for Hampshire at that time.

An account of the behaviour of the Queenwood Socialists is given in a letter refuting the doubts recently expressed by the Bishop of Exeter respecting their morality :—

They are bringing, from all parts of the kingdom, the best improved implements and methods of working. . . . Amid a poor population they are creating and enjoying wealth ; amid an ignorant population they are dispensing education ; amid an imperfectly employed population they are spreading employment ; amid a population not remarkable for moral conduct they are showing themselves an example which compels the respect of all who know them, and who at first distrusted them. If their principles are as dangerous to society as has been often said, what is to be done to counteract them ? The anathemas of the bishops neither sink their thousand acres in the sea nor set a blight upon their crops.

Another Socialist visitor gives us a description of their meals. "Coffee without cream and buttered bread form the breakfast, pud-

dings and dainty vegetables the dinner. Meat is not eaten." The visitor fed on cauliflower with sauce, a turnip nicely prepared, a potato moulded into tempting shapes, and home-made bread. Certainly the Socialists did not expend their substance in riotous living. And yet, in 1844, the committee are faced with a deficit of £2,900 on the year's working, and new managers, "business men," are elected. Even they could not stave off the impending financial bankruptcy, and by the summer of 1845 the residents had melted away and the enterprise ended.

Only the fees from the community school had kept the settlement going for as long as six years; and before we examine some of the causes which led to the failure of New Harmony, Queenwood, and similar enterprises, we may pause a moment for a brief view of Owen's educational ideals working in practice in the communities we have described.

Community Schools.

Owen held that the individualistic tendencies of men and women, as he found them, were largely grown and fostered by the competitive spirit prevalent in the normal school. The one incentive to work was to do better than your neighbour. If you did notably better than your neighbour—or, as Owen would say, over-emphasised your individuality at the expense of his—you were given a prize; if notably worse, the cane. Had he known of Nietzsche's "Will to Power," he would have recognised in the existing school system a good example of its working. Hence, in the New Harmony Schools no rewards and no punishments were permitted. The boys, a lawless lot, were restrained and disciplined by sheer commonsense and good will on the part of Robert Dale Owen, the head-teacher. As the interest of the work itself was the only incentive recognised for the doing of it, it was plain that dull and informative textbooks would not succeed. In this matter, again, Owen held peculiarly enlightened views. He recognised that teaching does not necessarily involve a conception of a child's head as an empty box which you fill with facts as you fill a jar with jam. It was possible, he felt, to take into account the aptitudes of each individual child, and to let them to some extent dictate the teaching, instead of laying down a uniform curriculum for all; while a sense of discipline could be inculcated by setting the older children, as a reward of proficiency, to instruct the younger.

Hence we are told that the boys and girls at New Harmony "have a very healthy look, are cheerful and lively, and by no means bashful. The girls are as little oppressed as the boys with labour and teaching. These happy and interesting little children were much more employed in making their youth pass as happily as possible."

Each boy was taught a definite trade from the very first, and the rest of his education moulded accordingly. Apparently the children were not overfed, rose at five o'clock, saw their parents not more than once a year, and were otherwise subjected to a Spartan discipline.

At Queenwood a school was started on Owen's principles, the fees for which were £25 a year, including clothing, and to which the children of people who were not members of the settlement were admitted. The school was one of the few financial successes of Queenwood. In 1844 it numbered ninety-four children, of whom sixty-four were paying fees. The curriculum embraced the widest range of subjects, including astronomy, chemistry, anatomy, painting, vocal and instrumental music, land surveying, French, and German. The school, however, came to an end at the collapse of the settlement. This apparent failure does not impair the excellence of the system on which the schools were based. In education, perhaps, more than any other subject, Owen saw far in advance of his time, and it is only to-day that we are tentatively beginning to pay practical tribute, in the shape of schools on Owenite lines, to the merits of a system which has been loudly acclaimed in theory for years past.

Orbiston.

The Community of Orbiston, though prior in date to the Queenwood venture, has not been described hitherto, as Owen himself was not directly concerned with the founding of the community. He was, however, interested in the experiment, which drew its inspiration from his teaching, and he once visited the place.

In 1825 Abram Combe, a successful Edinburgh business man, who had become an ardent convert to Owen's system, associated himself with two or three sympathetic capitalists, and purchased the estate of Orbiston, about nine miles east of Glasgow.

An enormous stone building was here planned for the accommodation of a projected community, of which the left wing only, holding some three hundred persons, was ever finished.

On Saturday, April 8th, 1826, the new settlers took possession, although the building was still incomplete. The objects of the community were practically identical with those already described at New Harmony and Queenwood. Each adult was to have a private room, but all the cooking and eating arrangements were to be in common.

A special feature of interest, however, was introduced in the provisions with regard to children. In each of the other communities we have noticed, the care and education of the children was to be a charge on the community. At Orbiston it was agreed that each child should be debited with the entire cost of his maintenance and education, in the confident expectation that, on growing up, the children would willingly repay the sums expended on their education out of the profits of their labour. Unfortunately, as the community only lasted for a year and a half, it was never possible to judge whether these optimistic expectations were justified.

As at New Harmony, no principle of selection with regard to the members of the community appears to have been exercised. "A worse selection of individuals—men, women, and children—could scarcely have been made," said one of their number. They were

described as "a population made up for the most part of the worst part of society."

Combe, however, justified his action in admitting all comers by insisting on the truths of Owen's system. He explained: "We set out to overcome ignorance, poverty, and vice; it would be a poor excuse for failure to urge that the subjects of our experiment were ignorant, poor, and vicious." As Combe maintained the strictest adherence to the Owenite ideals of no compulsion and *laissez faire*, the communists were at first left without organisation or direction of any kind. Each was to act on his own account, and the only incentive to work was that of loyalty to the community. In these circumstances the familiar traits of individualism began at once to reappear. Those who wished appropriated to themselves the fruits of their labour; those did not, acted on the principle of taking as much from the community and giving as little to it as possible.

Consequently, Combe was forced, in order to keep the community going, to take in hand some measure of organisation. Squads were formed from among the communists, according to the capacities of the workmen. There was an iron foundry, a horticultural company, a dairy company, and a building company, whose first task was to complete the unfinished community buildings. Similarly, there were squads of hatmakers, clothworkers, and shoemakers, the necessary capital for each of these industries being provided as loan by the initiators of the community.

The domestic arrangements were divided among the women in a similar way. Payment for work done was given at ordinary market rates by book credit at the communal store, and the members were at first permitted to hire their labour to outside employers. In September, 1826, however, the members passed of their own accord the following resolution, affirming the principle of equal remuneration for all kinds of labour, according to the time given:—

That all the members of the society unite together to produce a common stock out of which all our common expenditure, hereafter to be agreed upon, will be paid; and that an equal share of the surplus of our labour be placed to the account of each member of the community, according to the time occupied by each.

At the same meeting the members agreed to take over the ownership of the land and premises from the proprietors, paying them five per cent. interest on their outlay, and ultimately the whole of the capital advanced, so that the community should be in every sense the owners of their dwelling-place.

By the spring and summer of 1827 the community appears to have attained a very real measure of success. The external aspect of the settlement had considerably improved. Roads had been made, and the gardens were well kept. The iron foundry was doing well, and the domestic arrangements under the squads of women were running efficiently. The boys, at first unusually unruly, had been reduced to cleanliness and order, without any grave departure from Owen's principles. The communists were, above all, remarkably happy. One lady member writes: "It is like another world. . . . I have been at a meeting last night, and such mirth I never

knew. There is dancing three times a week. Indeed, there is nothing but pleasure, with the best of eating and drinking." Nor did the stress of making ends meet preclude leisure for the cultivation of the arts. The boys were taught music, preparatory to the formation of an orchestra; and, as a crowning achievement, a theatre was actually built, and plays performed by the members. At this stage (summer, 1827) Owen paid a visit to Orbiston, and found the community afloat on the high waters of success.

Break-up of Orbiston.

Signs of disaster were not wanting, however, even while matters presented so fair an outward show.

It has already been noticed that all comers had been admitted at the opening of the settlement, and many abused to the full the privileges granted by the communist system. The method by which credit at the communal store was entered to the account of each member, according to the number of hours work returned, was particularly open to abuse. Members were constantly cheating the timekeeper by returning more hours than they had actually worked, and so inflating their credit at the store.

A large section of the communists worked just sufficiently to procure a requisite amount of food and clothing at the common store, for the remainder of their time hiring out their labour for wages to outside employers. Thus they were enabled to live in what was comparatively a state of luxury, while the more conscientious members were labouring and stinting to maintain the public burdens. Thus, in June, 1827, out of two hundred and ninety-eight persons, only two hundred and twenty-one fed at the public mess. The remaining seventy-seven fed privately, being enabled by their outside earnings to purchase at the store food superior both in quantity and quality to that which fell to their more public-spirited fellow-members. It is further hinted that some of the surplus food purchased by the individualistic seventy-seven was exchanged with outsiders for commodities which the exchangers would have been better without.

In August, 1827, Combe, the founder, died. His brother William endeavoured to carry on the community for a few weeks after his death, but from September, 1827, onwards our records cease entirely. All we know is that William Combe, probably under pressure from the mortgagees, gave all the members notice to quit the premises in the autumn of 1827, and that the whole concern was shortly afterwards sold by public auction.

There can be no doubt that financially the community was a great failure, that two at least of the founders lost all their money in the experiment, and that lack of capital accounted for the abrupt close of the venture.

Co-operative Societies.

The communities described above were by no means the only expression of the effects of Owen's teaching. Another important

development is now to be traced which resulted in the formation of co-operative societies. The rise of these societies, as contrasted with the parallel growth of communities, seems to have been due to the feeling that, assuming the validity of the main contentions of Owen's doctrine, it was still true that any attempt on the part of the working classes to better their condition must, to ensure success, originate among themselves. The communities had been artificial structures, in the sense that they had been founded from outside, and subsisted on funds provided by a few wealthy men. When outside support was withdrawn the communities went smash.

Referring to such attempts and their wealthy promoters, the *Co-operative Magazine* says: "Since their way is not our way, there could hardly be that unanimity and boundless confidence in a community established by them that there would be in one founded upon a system of perfect equality, every member of which may say, 'This is ours and for us.'"

Between 1820 and 1835 a considerable number of co-operative societies were formed, implicitly or explicitly, as a result of this conviction.

Their immediate objects are defined by the editor of the *Brighton Co-operator* as follows, though there were, of course, numerous varieties: "To protect their members against poverty, to secure comforts for them, and to achieve independence." The means to these three ends are, first, a weekly subscription from the members to secure capital to trade with; second, the manufacturing of goods for themselves; "lastly, when the capital has still further accumulated, the purchase of land and living upon it in community."

The immediate method by which profit was to be secured for the co-operators, and the chief advantage of the co-operative system, lay in the exclusion of the middleman. William Thompson, author of the "Distribution of Wealth," one of the ablest exponents of Owen's system, had done much to inspire the movement by his insistence on the doctrine that, as all wealth is the product of labour, the labourer has an indefeasible right to the whole of what he produces. He then goes on to define the primary object of a co-operative community formed of the producing classes to be the acquisition of the whole of the fruits of their labour by means of "mutual co-operation for the supply of each other's wants, and equal distribution amongst all of the products of their united industry."

Thus two more or less distinctive stages can be traced in the development of these societies:—

1. They were joint-stock trading enterprises, the goods produced by the members being accumulated in a common store. These goods were to be retailed to the members at practically cost-price, and to the outside public at a considerable profit, which was to go to a common fund. Thus the middleman and the capitalist were abolished together.

2. Out of the profits so realised, and an accumulation of weekly subscriptions, land was to be purchased and a community formed, wherein all the more revolutionary tenets of Owen's system, more

particularly with regard to the education of children, were to be put in practice. In this second stage incomes were to be pooled and all possessions held in common.

The first of these societies to be noticed, the London Co-operative Society (1824), placed in the forefront of its activities the popularisation of Owen's views. The "Crown and Rolls," in Chancery Lane, the headquarters of the society, witnessed nightly debates between Owen's followers and the individualist members of the young Liberal Party, including John Stuart Mill.

A plan was formed for the establishment of a community within fifty miles of London, and suitable farms were advertised for. Only Owen's return from America was awaited to put the project into operation.

As in the case of the Dublin Co-operative Society (1826), which was formed with the same object, and to which some thousands of pounds were subscribed, it does not appear that this project ever passed beyond the stage of optimistic anticipation.

The Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society of 1826, financed by a Mr. Vesey, seems to have been the first whose plans for a community passed beyond the paper stage. A small estate near Exeter was actually purchased, and thirteen co-operators started to prepare buildings for the expected communists. A month later twelve cottages were ready. Mr. Vesey, however, soon after this period withdrew his financial support, and the original settlement was abandoned.

In August, 1827, a fresh farm was purchased, crops were harvested, and several trades started. Although no new recruits for the society could be obtained, the prospect was regarded as not by any means discouraging. From this point, however, all record of the society in our only authority, the *Co-operative Magazine*, ceases.

In 1826 a more hopeful venture, independent of outside support, entitled the Co-operative Community Fund Association, was started. The objects of this association were identical with those already mentioned. The new departure lay in their method of obtaining the funds. £1,250 was the requisite capital aimed at, to be raised by means of fifty shares of £25 each. The shares were to be obtained by a weekly subscription of not less than four shillings from each member. When £500 had been thus accumulated, the purchase of land for a community was contemplated. The children of the members were to be supported at the common charge, and the government of the contemplated community was to be strictly democratic, consisting of committees elected from the members by the members, and sitting for short terms of office only.

With the establishment of the Auxiliary Fund by the London Co-operative Society in 1827, a new departure was made. From this time forward the characteristic feature, both of this and of the other societies whose course we are tracing, is the development of co-operative trading enterprises. Henceforward the second of the two objects noted above, the community ideal, tends to become more and more subordinated to the first. The general store or

shop, financed by the Auxiliary Fund of the Co-operative Community Fund Association, is the first step in a course of developments which ended in the famous Owenite labour exchanges.

The general store was primarily designed for the sale of articles produced by the members of the association. Before long, however, provisions and other goods in common use, by whomsoever manufactured, were admitted into the store and sold to the members at wholesale prices.

The store was very successful, and great hopes were formed of extending it. An optimistic prophecy contemplated the association as being in possession of one such repository in each of the main thoroughfares of London, which, by diverting the tide of riches from its present tendency to flood the pockets of capitalists and middlemen into the pockets of the producers, i.e., the members of the association, would "emancipate the millions from the control of the units."

The Union Exchange Society, 1827, was also formed about this time. The members agreed to meet together once a month, and sell each other such goods as they could command, ten per cent. being levied on the sales and handed over to a common fund, which was to be distributed equally among the members. Tea, bread, flour, boots, umbrellas, and brass and tin ware were sold in this way.

The Brighton Co-operative Provident Fund Association, founded with the same objects as the Union Exchange Society, had a much longer life. It started with a membership of one hundred and fifty, each member paying a penny a week subscription into the common funds. Shortly afterwards this was transformed into a trading association, with a capital in £5 shares, forty of which were taken almost at once. The association issued a circular, stating that they regarded "the real cost of all commodities to be the amount of labour employed in preparing them for use."

In order, as far as possible, to secure that the exact cost of production and no more should be paid, a joint store, repository, or exchange was established, "in which a confidential agent will receive from members of the association such articles as they produce, and, according to a scale authorised by a committee or council of work, give them an order for other commodities in store to an equal value at prime cost, or a note for the value of so much labour as is brought in, which note may be cancelled when articles of that value are issued for it, so that the labour notes may always represent the quantity of goods in store and work unrequited" (*Co-operative Magazine*, November, 1827).

It will be seen that it was but a step from a project of this kind to the complete labour exchange system.

Little more remains to be said of the co-operative societies. The Brighton Association, whose objects have just been described, is considerably the most important. It lasted for several years, started the earliest provincial co-operative magazine, the *Brighton Co-operator*, and exercised the greatest care in the selection of its members, to which fact in particular its success was attributed.

By 1830 there were no less than three hundred co-operative societies in the United Kingdom. In 1831 the first co-operative congress was held. In 1832 the number of societies had risen to from four to five hundred. These societies were becoming more and more directly simply co-operative trading associations, and the legitimate development of this aspect of the movement into labour exchanges soon followed. It is interesting to note, however, that these early co-operators never thought of competing for profit with capitalist enterprises. They were simply anxious that each man should receive the due reward of his labour, and for the great majority the immediate necessity of getting a living thrust the more inspiring aims of Owen's teaching into the background. Trading bazaars and labour exchanges took the place of communities.

The Labour Exchanges.

It is in the Report to the County of Lanark that we first find Owen suggesting that as "the natural standard of value is human labour," a standard labour unit should be established for purposes of exchange.

The inadequacy of the monetary currency system, which became a subject of acute controversy between 1830 and 1834, and was regarded by many reformers as an important factor in the prevailing poverty of the masses, together with the possibilities opened up by the stores and bazaars of the co-operative societies, combined to direct Owen's attention about this time to the question of evolving some satisfactory system of labour currency. Owen was at this time the editor of a paper called the *Crisis*, and in an editorial for June, 1832, thus states the theory which inspired the labour exchanges: "Hundreds of thousands of persons of all the various trades in existence rise every morning without knowing how or where to procure employment. They can each produce more than they have occasion for themselves, and they are each in want of each other's surplus products." He goes on to point out that the usual course then pursued is (1) to convert the goods into money by selling them to a middleman, and (2) with that money to buy the articles required again from a middleman, who thus intervenes at two points in the transaction, and diminishes the real value of the labour expended by the profits he keeps for himself.

"Now there is no necessity for the middleman," says Owen. "Producers can do without him if they merely want to come in contact with each other, and they can exchange their respective produce to their mutual advantage and to the advantage of the general consumer."

A standard of value and a medium of exchange is, however, required. The argument then proceeds as follows: All wealth proceeds from labour and knowledge. Labour and knowledge are generally remunerated according to the time employed. Hence time should be the standard or measure of wealth, and notes representing time or labour value will be the new medium of currency.

In practice the doctrine lost something of its simplicity in view

of the fact that different kinds of labour were paid at different rates, and an hour's labour expended by a skilled mechanic was more valuable than an hour's labour on the part of a navvy.

When the labour exchanges were actually working, the value of a man's labour was assessed as follows: The average day's labour was regarded as ten hours; the average rate of pay at sixpence an hour. Required, to value different kinds of labour according to this standard.

Mr. Podmore gives the following illustration: "If a cabinet maker, whose value in the open market was paid for at the rate of a shilling an hour, brought a chest of drawers to the Equitable Labour Exchange to be valued, its price in labour hours would be computed as follows: First, the value of the raw material would be set down in vulgar pounds, shillings, and pence; then the value of the labour would be added in the same base medium. The whole would then be divided by sixpence, and the quotient would represent the number of hours to be entered on the labour note." Clearly a purely artificial result, and not representative of anything in particular!

On Monday, September 17th, 1832, the first "National Equitable Labour Exchange" was opened in the Gray's Inn Road, near King's Cross. The deposits of goods produced, in exchange for which labour notes were issued, were during the first few days so numerous that the pavement outside the exchange was blocked. The goods stored at the Exchange were sold on receipt of cash as well as of labour notes issued by the exchange; but in the former case a small commission was charged, in order, as far as possible, to discourage the use of money.

For a time it looked as if the labour notes system was likely to spread. They were accepted as payment for tickets at the social festivals given at the institution run in connection with the Exchange, and many local tradesmen put up notices in their shop windows to the effect that labour notes would be accepted as payment for goods. During the remainder of the year 1832 the popularity of the Exchange continued to grow, the chief depositors being tailors, cabinet makers, and shoemakers. For the seventeen weeks ending December 22nd, the deposits represented 465,501 hours, and the Exchanges 376,166 hours, leaving a balance in stock representing 69,335 hours, i.e., £1,733. 7s. 6d.

The greatest difficulty lay in valuing the pile of diverse goods deposited, and there is no doubt that in some cases anomalies resulted. A tailor, for instance, wrote to the *Times*, stating that he had paid thirty-six shillings for cloth and trimmings to make a coat, made it, and took it to the Exchange, where it was valued at thirty-two shillings. Owen replied, justifying the assessment, on the ground that a low valuation of all goods had been purposely adopted in order to compete with outside traders; and that the tailor had suffered no real loss, inasmuch as all the goods at the Exchange were valued at the same low standard: an explanation which was clearly not very satisfactory to the tailor.

The following week, however, another tailor also wrote to the

Times, stating that he had received the full market price at the Exchange for a coat and trousers, both of which were clearly misfits and unsaleable elsewhere, so that it is pretty obvious that some of the assessments tended to be capricious.

The first Exchange, in the Gray's Inn Road, was brought to an untimely end by a dispute with the landlord, and moved to new premises in Fitzroy Square. Here, however, it passed under entirely new management; and whereas it had started as a kind of clearing house for the products of individuals, it now became a mart or bazaar for the exchange of the products of various co-operative societies.

This change took place in the following way. In 1833 a new body had been formed, entitled the United Trades Association. This association comprised societies numbering among their members representatives of all the chief producers. The main object of the association was to find employment for the out of work members of the societies. A weekly contribution provided a fund to procure material and workroom accommodation for unemployed members. The goods produced were sent to the Labour Exchange to be valued by persons elected by the societies from among themselves. In most cases the products were exchanged direct at the Exchange. Thus notes appear in the *Crisis*, the successor to the *Co-operative Magazine*, to the effect that the Surrey Society had made a quantity of clothes, for which they had received in exchange a quantity of leather. The carpenters likewise report that they have engaged to fit up a shop for the shoemakers, who have promised shoes in exchange.

It soon became apparent, however, that something was inherently wrong with the financial arrangements of the Exchange. For a considerable time the accounts were kept straight by entering on the credit side large amounts received from the lectures and festivals held by the different societies, many of the lectures being given by Owen, while at the same time a considerable amount of business continued to be transacted at the Exchange.

During the latter half of 1833 the deposits averaged over 10,000 hours a week, but by January, 1834, this figure had diminished to 5,284 hours. During the early part of 1834 the deposits continued to shrink at an alarming rate, and we find that many articles were sold for three-fourths cash payment and only one-fourth notes, so that the peculiar currency system of the Exchange seems to have been falling into disuse.

By the summer we find the affairs of the Exchange to be in such a bad way, and the surplus stock in hand so small, that the secretary of the association, who was in direct charge of the management, writes to Owen, recommending that the affairs of the Exchange be wound up. After this we hear no more of the Exchange, and the various subsidiary Exchanges that were opened about the same time in some of the provincial towns appear to have closed down also.

The immediate cause of the failure of all these Exchanges was simply that they did not pay. Their financial difficulties were, according to William Lovett, who had been at one time storekeeper

to one of the London associations, caused by "religious differences, the want of legal security, and the dislike which the women had to confine their dealings to one shop." Owen's rationalistic lectures appear to have caused much disturbance among the more religious members of the co-operating societies, and were ultimately the cause of many withdrawing their support from the Exchange.

The Exchanges had no legal safeguards, as they were not enrolled societies, and could not obtain legal redress when their servants robbed them. Love of shopping on the part of the women, and the unwillingness they felt for their husbands to be acquainted with the exact extent and nature of their purchases, precluded much enthusiasm on their part for the experiment.

Owen, however, never appears to have been heart and soul in favour of the Exchanges. He explains in the "New Moral World" that it was not his wish to start a Labour Exchange at the time and in the manner chosen, and speaks of the experiment as being forced upon him by the inexperience of impatient friends. There appears to have been always at the back of his mind the feeling that mere buying and selling arrangements were a trivial matter in comparison with the complete revolution he contemplated, and unworthy of the attention of a comprehensive reformer.

Syndicalism and Guild Socialism.

The position of Owen in the history of social reform and legislation is comparable to that of Plato in the history of philosophy. The germs of all subsequent movements can be found in his teaching. There is no single measure of social or industrial reform which has since been advocated about which he did not have something to say. Thus he has been acclaimed as the apostle of many contradictory things, and among others of Guild Socialism.

We have seen how the co-operative societies were, to begin with, miscellaneous associations of men of different trades. They discharged the functions now performed by the sick and benefit funds of a trade union, and during a certain stage of their development frequently maintained a Labour Exchange for the employment of their out of work members. As time went on it was found more convenient and more profitable for members of the same trade to associate together. As such the societies became to all intents and purposes trade unions, and during the disturbed times of 1832-1834 indulged in strikes for better conditions and more wages, mainly unsuccessful, on modern lines. The policies of these trade unions were directly inspired by Owen's teaching, and, though he disapproved of their more militant aspect, he made great efforts to capture the leadership of the whole movement.

These early trade unions rapidly took on some of the functions with which the modern National Guild movement is anxious to endow them. Thus in 1834 the operative tailors address a circular manifesto to their employers, stating that they have decided to introduce some new regulations into the trade. The circular concludes: "Your workmen, members of the society, will cease to be

employed by you should you decline to act upon the new regulations. In that case they will no longer consider it necessary to support your interest, but will immediately enter upon the arrangements prepared by the society for the employment of such members for the benefit of the society."

A Grand National Guild of Builders was actually formed in 1834, and set to work on building a guildhall in Birmingham. The guildhall was, however, eventually finished by the landlord, as the association lacked the necessary funds to complete the work.

Owen seized upon the opportunity provided by these tentative experiments as the occasion for delivering a lecture, in which he outlined all the fundamentals of the modern Guild Socialist scheme. "We have long since discovered," he said, "that as long as master contends with master, no improvement either for man or master will be possible. There is no other alternative, therefore, but national companies for every trade. All trades shall first form associations or parochial lodges, to consist of a convenient number for carrying on the business." These parochial lodges should send delegates to county lodges, and so on, up to the Grand National Council. "This is the outline for individual trades. They shall be arranged in companies or families; thus all those trades which relate to clothing shall form a company, such as tailors, shoemakers, hatters, etc., and all the different manufactures shall be arranged in a similar way. No secret shall be kept from public knowledge. Any information respecting costs and profit shall be freely communicated, and shall be done by a gazette."

Owen later made it clear that he contemplated unions, including not only operatives, but also masters and manufacturers, and ultimately the Government itself.

As a result of this propaganda there was founded in 1834, under Owen's auspices, a "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland," which in a few weeks time is said to have enrolled between half a million and a million members, with auxiliary branches—"lodges," they were called—in all the large industrial towns.

The programme of the union and the objects it set out to achieve are insufficiently recorded in the evidence available on the subject, but it appears that in some rather vaguely defined way it aimed at securing control of the conditions under which its members worked in all the leading industries, the strike being the weapon contemplated in the case of recalcitrant employers.

The Grand National caused profound alarm among the propertied classes, but its career was lamentably brief. The first of its activities was the organisation of a monster procession to present a petition to the Government against the sentence of transportation passed upon six Dorsetshire labourers for an alleged offence against an out of date Act with regard to the administering of illegal oaths (the swearing of oaths was a preliminary formality to joining a trade union lodge). But the Government was determined to break the strength of the movement, and acted with a high hand. Several

unsuccessful and costly strikes on the part of various unions followed. We hear incidentally that the Potters' Union expended £6,223 2s. 11d. in strikes during ten months, 1833-1834. There seems at length to have been a growing weariness of strikes among the unions, and a desire to return to the earlier method of co-operative trading and exchange, and the Grand Lodge was accordingly shortly remodelled on co-operative lines.

In August, 1836, a special meeting of delegates was convened in London under Owen's presidency. Owen stated in his address that the union "had experienced much more opposition from the employers of industry and from the wealthy portion of the public, as well as from the Government, than its promoters anticipated."

It was then resolved that the name of the union should be changed to "The British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity, and Knowledge," that the initiatory ceremony of membership should be dispensed with so as to conform with the law, that effective measures should be adopted to reconcile the masters and operatives throughout the kingdom, and that a charter should be applied for from the Government."

At the same time Owen, in an editorial in the last number of the *Crisis*, announces that the "awful crisis" in human affairs is now happily terminated; that the old world will pass away "through a great moral revolution of the human mind, directed solely by truth, by charity, and by kindness."

Henceforth, Owen drifted further and further away from the trade union movement. His distrust of reform springing from the people themselves left him at bottom out of sympathy with the fundamental doctrines of what we should now call Guild Socialism. At the same time his attitude was often akin to that of the modern Syndicalist.

A Syndicalist tendency is manifested in Owen's distrust of political measures as a means of engineering the revolution. He was not, for instance, in favour of enlarged political rights for the masses, and refused to co-operate with the Chartists. "The Owenites," says Bronterre O'Brien, "seek every opportunity to speak sneeringly and contemptuously of their possession (the vote) as a consideration of no value."

Owen was impatient of the slowness of all agitation on political lines, and refused, for instance, to work with Oastler for his propaganda in support of an eight hour day. Such things were mere palliatives; they delayed the revolution by chloroforming the workers. "Why waste your time in useless theories," he says, in a manifesto to the Chartists, "instead of going straight forward to the immediate relief of your wants—physical, mental, moral, and practical? You, the Chartists, have been gradually stimulated to expect the most unreasonable and impracticable results from the Charter. If it were to be obtained to-morrow and its workings known, there are none who would be more disappointed with its effects than the Chartists themselves. It is not any mere political change in your condition that can now be of any service to you or society." The true

remedy, he intimates, can only be found in the Socialist Community at Queenwood.

Bureaucratic Tendencies.

On the other hand, Owen's whole attitude towards the people whom he desired to reform was strongly bureaucratic. He always tended to regard the community ideal as something imposed on the people from without, not arising spontaneously from within. In effect he said to them: "You can lead a better life than the life you are leading: to wit, the community life as I have pictured it. But you are so stupid and ignorant that unless I keep urging, teaching, and directing you, you will never discover this for yourselves."

He distrusted a spontaneous movement for social betterment because he was convinced of the ignorance of the people. At present they were not fit; they must be remade. He was convinced of the practicality of his own proposals because his view of human nature told him that people could be remade; his view of his own, that he could remake them. He could not tolerate half measures. He preached the revolution on the Owenite plan or nothing; but this is quite intelligible when we remember his belief that nothing could prevent the revolution on the Owenite plan. He is said to have stated in an interview, explaining his high-handed conduct on a committee, that "we must consent to be ruled by despots until we have sufficient knowledge to govern ourselves."

To Metternich, Prime Minister of Austria, he reports himself to have said that "it will be much easier to reform the world by Governments properly supported by the people than by any other means. Let Governments once be enlightened as to their true interests in promoting the happiness of their peoples, and they will lend their willing assistance and powerful aid to accomplish this ever to be desired result."

Such a view constitutes the very antithesis of the conception of a spontaneous movement among the people towards self-government. Owen never seems to have recognised the almost theoretic impossibility of devising an efficient government which is truly representative of the people, and it is on this rock that his community ship was found ultimately to split.

Reasons for Failure of Communities.

The really important question that arises for consideration from this short sketch of Owen's efforts to found communities is whether the actual failure and break-up of every community that was founded was due to incidental defects of bad management in each successive case, or to anomalies inherent in the community ideal itself, which made it unworkable in practice. Did the communities fail simply because all communities must fail, or because these particular communities were badly organised, insufficiently financed, unwisely selected as to membership, and so forth?

Now the most thorough and comprehensive scheme of Communism ever put before the world is that contained in the Fifth

Book of Plato's "Republic." Theoretically perfect and logically complete, it embodies an ideal so inspiring and comprehensive that we cannot but believe that Owen endeavoured to model his own attempts at realisation closely upon it.

Against this plan for a communistic society Aristotle makes certain criticisms, which derive great interest from the significant manner in which they were borne out by Owen's experiments.

In the first place, the distribution of the common property, says Aristotle, will be a perpetual source of dispute. Members will protest that they are not receiving in proportion to their worth.

Secondly, compulsory association with others will not bring harmony, but friction.

Thirdly, common property, inasmuch as it belongs to nobody in particular, will be apt to be neglected by everybody.

Fourthly, it is obviously better to share voluntarily with others what is your own than to hold it compulsorily in common. Communism destroys generosity and hospitality by making them unnecessary.

Fifthly, unless the community is very small, there will be no real self-government by the members.

Now the truth of nearly every one of the strictures is exemplified by the course of events at New Harmony and at Queenwood. Taking the last point first, we have been struck already by the extraordinary elaboration of the governing committee at New Harmony. With a community of a thousand persons, some kind of delegation and representation was obviously necessary; but in a community of equality, the mere existence of superintendents and intendants, a group of officials, who might conceivably act as a check upon one another, but were officially uncontrolled during the period of office by the community, constituted a grave inequality.

Hence the parent community is found to split up into daughter communities. Dissension and distrust prevailed among the members, we are told, because they had no real voice in the governance of their affairs; the committee of government was delegated from above.

Again, New Harmony made it clear that a most careful selection of members was necessary before success could be achieved. Shapers, unsuccessful speculators, and amiable visionaries do not form a good amalgam. There is no scourge for idleness, no incentive to work. All very well if you are a set of religious fanatics who, having abolished man-made law, will work owing to your possession of divine grace, and eschew material goods. In New Harmony, however, material goods were desired, but, being shared equally amongst all, went to the idlers equally with the workers. There were further social inequalities, religious and racial difference, yet the members were compulsorily associated. Hence we are told that "it was found much easier to assimilate a few with the same pursuits than many having different occupations."

Two lessons emerge: make your community small enough to be really self-governing, and make your members homogeneous, bound

together by a common enthusiasm, preferably religious, and it may succeed.

So far we have pointed only to mistakes in the actual experiments; we have not invalidated the ideal. To say that New Harmony was run badly is not the same as saying that a community cannot be run well. Is this latter statement true?

The Community Ideal.

Roughly, the community ideal may be said to rest upon the theory that there is a certain kind of good life that all men should lead, and that this life should be roughly the same for all men. Differences come from private property and the inequalities thereof. Abolish differences and inequalities of property, and a common kind of life may result.

Now, in the first place, equal participation in common property predicates a great degree of intimacy and power of getting on with each other among the participators. Intimacy and knowledge are required both to avoid squabbling and to ensure a proper selection of rulers. On the other hand, as soon as your community is extended beyond a small number, it is difficult to make the bulk of the members feel that they are taking part in the direction of their own property. Could you then extend those principles, which have had so little success even among small communities, to a large heterogeneous population, compelled to rely solely on itself for internal government and external defence? It seems unlikely.

Nor must it be forgotten that the disadvantages which attach to the administration by the members of property held in common are serious. It is open to question whether they do not outweigh its advantages.

The path of the individual in modern life is not a path, but a groove. He has little scope for expanding his personality or stamping his impress upon environment. His voice is a pipe in the world, but it may be a thunder in his own home. It is here alone that he may give expression to his own will and to the aspirations of his own personality.

If you give to each only according to his worth, you restrict his activities to definite tastes. On the other hand, the possibilities of falling into distress through lack of wisdom in management, and the contrary possibility of success by contrary conduct, are valuable elements in the life of the citizen. So long as private property exists, a man may, at least in that restricted sphere, possess the power of carrying out his own plans in his own way, and of displaying his own initiative. Under Communism he would simply do the State's work under regulations. It is only in the home that the capitalist may be said at present not to have got hold of the worker. Without the control of a certain amount of material property, then, a man cannot be said properly to give expression to his own will.

Finally, as Aristotle naively remarks, "the possession of private property is a source of harmless pleasure, and therefore desirable."

The Good Life.

The institution of Communism is not without objections; but it was not advocated as an end in itself. It was embraced and preached by Owen because he definitely desired to produce a certain kind of life in his citizens, and he considered that private property, by introducing the principle of difference, militated against it. We have already seen reason to doubt Owen's ethical principle that character and life may be formed for individuals, and not by them. We have noticed the distrust and opposition which his view of reform, as something imposed upon the worker from without, produced. Finally, we cannot subscribe to his principle that there is one kind of good life for all men. This was the Greek view, which lay at the basis of the Greek view of the State. The State, according to Greek thinkers, was the one organisation which made the good life possible for its members. It was only within the State that they realised their full nature. Similarly, in Owen's view, it was only in a community that man could realise all that he had it in him to be.

We, on the other hand, have come to hold, as the result of the individualist and democratic thinking of the last century, that neither the State nor any individual is in a position to predicate a certain kind of good life for others. We hold it vital that each man should judge for himself what he holds to be valuable in life; while, if we are to accept authority on such matters, it must be self-chosen. Hence modern Utopias have always inspired a feeling of repulsion, because men do not happen to want to live the life which the authors of these hopeful and aggressive works want them to live. It is here, I suspect, that we must look for the root reason of the failure of Owen's communities. The members did not all want to live one kind of life, nor was it the one kind of life Owen favoured. For the first and last time the hack anti-Socialist criticism hit the mark, "The Socialist did not take account of human nature."

Value of Owen's Work.

The communities were the concrete embodiment of all that Owen stood for. They failed, but their failure did not negative the value of his work. In an age when Individualism was rampant, Owen was the first to emphasise the need of State control.

The Individualism of the Manchester School of Liberals was based upon the view that man being fundamentally selfish, he himself was the person most capable of looking after his own profit and interests, without interference from his neighbours.

In a state of society with equality of power, wealth, and opportunity, this position may be sound; it is obviously better than to have everybody meddling with everybody else's affairs and the State poking its inspectors into every household. Economically, however, it rested on three fallacies:—

1. That each individual is equally farsighted and has an equal power of knowing what he wants.

2. That each individual has an equal power of obtaining it and equal freedom of choice.
3. That what all the individuals want is identical with the well-being of the community as a whole.

The results of Individualist policy were the hideous cruelties which necessitated the Factory Acts. It was seen that the State must step in to prevent some individuals exploiting their fellows in their efforts to satisfy their wants. As a result of his experiences at New Lanark, Owen realised this fact very clearly. The State must control its members; but, in order more efficiently to do this, it must delegate its functions to self-supporting communities, wherein men may be trained to govern themselves.

We have said above that only the communities which have banded themselves together for religious purposes have approached success, but it is fairly clear that to some of the settlers at Queenwood their community was a religion. An austere enthusiasm for the millennium was illuminated by a devoted veneration for their own community, which was pointing the way.

Hymns to community, a strange goddess, in the Socialists' Hymn Book, bear witness to the devotion of the early Communists to their ideal. And they worshipped Owen as a divinely inspired prophet. Amid much that is ridiculous, both in the man himself and in his followers, something cast in the heroic mould remains. Owen saw and thought far in advance of his age. But it is not in his intellectual creed that his greatness lies. Owen stands out permanently as a prophet and a dreamer. Pervaded by a real hatred of the iniquities of the social system as he found it, he combined the inspiration which he drew from this source with an unflagging enthusiasm in the pursuit of his ideals. It was the great force of sincerity which enabled him to appeal so strongly to the imaginations of men, and to suffuse his creed with a religious tinge. If he was a dreamer, he was not content to dream his life. He possessed that greatest of faiths, the faith to live his dreams.

NOTE.

The best life of Owen is entitled "Robert Owen: a Biography," by Frank Podmore, two vols. Hutchinson, 1906. It is out of print. Another is "The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen," by Lloyd Jones, third edition, 1900. Allen & Unwin. 3s. 6d.

The most extensive bibliography available is published at 1s. net (54 pages) by the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, for the Welsh Bibliographical Society, "A Bibliography of Robert Owen, the Socialist, 1771-1858," compiled by A. J. Hawkes (1914). The best collection of Owenite literature is in the Goldsmiths' Company's Library of Economic Literature, University of London, Imperial Institute, S.W. 7, which contains a large part of the library of Owen's "Institute" in John Street, Tottenham Court Road.