# The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen

by

A. L. Morton

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Dedicated
to those who prefer a system of society
which will ensure the happiness of the human race
throughout all future ages,
to a system which
so long as it shall be maintained,
must produce misery to all.

Owen's Dedication to
THE BOOK OF THE NEW MORAL WORLD, 1836

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# Foreword

The object of this book is to give a general account of the life and work of Robert Owen by means of extracts from his own writings. For this purpose they have been grouped in sections covering the main stages of his career and the main aspects of his thought. A certain overlapping is unavoidable, especially as Owen was an extremely diffuse writer, whose leading ideas were formed early and who was never afraid of repeating them. Except for the development of details, and for some eccentricities which appeared in old age, there is little in his later works which has not been said, and as a rule said better, in the writings of his New Lanark period (1813—21). It is upon them, therefore, that I have drawn most heavily, though passages from later books have been included where they seemed helpful. An exception is his autobiography, published at the very end of his life, though perhaps partly written earlier. This I have used freely, as it gives the most vivid impression of his work and character.

Owen, I think, is one of the few writers who really gains more than he loses by being read in selections. His books taken as a whole are so verbose and rhetorical that the core of wisdom and good sense, seldom absent, is often lost in a desert of words. In selection it is possible to see much more clearly what he was aiming at and what is new and valuable in his thought.

In my last section I have given a number of estimates

of Owen—favourable and otherwise—made by contemporaries. And in a few places I have included passages, not by Owen but by his son Robert Dale Owen and others, which seemed to throw useful light on his work.

My introduction does not pretend to give a detailed account of his life—that has been done elsewhere, or of his thought—that I hope is done by the extracts which follow it. It aims rather at supplying the information necessary to make the extracts intelligible. I have referred throughout to those extracts which relate to particular passages in the introduction. These will be found enclosed in brackets: thus (X, 3) would be extract No. 3 in Chapter X.

While a detailed bibliography would be out of place here, a short note on books for further reading may be helpful. Apart from Owen's own writings, there is much information in the autobiography of his son, Robert Dale Owen. *Threading My Way* (New York, 1847). This, however, has little for the period after the New Harmony experiment, as Robert Dale took American citizenship and remained in the U.S.A. *The History of Co-operation* by G. J. Holyoake (Revised ed. 1906) is a ramshackle and not always reliable book, but contains a great deal about people and events of which Holyoake had personal knowledge. Of later books, the most convenient biography is *The Life of Robert Owen* by G. D. H. Cole (Revised ed. 1930) *Revolution 1789 to 1906* (1920) and *The Builders' History* (N.D.), both by R. W. Postgate, are useful for the Trade Union period (1833—4), and *William Thompson* by R. K. P. Pankhurst (1954) for the early Co-operative Movement. *Heavens Below* by W. H. G. Armytage (1961) may be consulted for the Owenite Communities. Other books which may be used for the general background are *A History of British Socialism* by Max Beer (1940), *The Early English Socialists* by H. L. Beales (1933), and *The British Labour Movement,* 1770–1920 by A. L. Morton and George Tate (1956).

I have made use of the following abbreviations:

*New View.* 'A New View of Society: or Essays on the Principle of the Formation of Human Character.' 1813.

*Observations.* 'Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System.' 1815.

*New Lanark.* 'An Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark.' 1816.

*Relief of Poor.* 'Report to the Committee for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor.' 1817.

*Catechism.* 'A Catechism of the New View of Society and Three Addresses.' 1817.

*Development.* 'Further Development of the Plan for the Relief of the Poor and the Emancipation of Mankind.' 1817.

*Children.* 'On the Employment of Children in Manufactories.' 1818.

*Manufacturers.* 'To the British Master Manufacturers.' 1818.

*Working Classes.* 'An Address to the Working Classes.' 1819.

*Report.* 'Report to the County of Lanark.' 1821.

*Dialogue.* 'A Dialogue in Three Parts, between the Founder of "The Association of all Classes of all Nations", and a Stranger.' 1838.

*Address.* 'An Address to all Classes, Sects and Parties.' 1840.

*Marriages.* 'Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World.' 4th ed. with an Appendix. 1841.

*Revolution.* 'The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race.' 1849.

*Millennial Gazette.* 'Robert Owen's Millennial Gazette,' No. 11, August 1st, 1857.

*Life.* 'The Life of Robert Owen by Himself.' 1857. (Reprinted by G. Bell, 1920. References are to this edition.)

*Life, 1A.* 'A Supplementary Appendix to the First Volume of the Life of Robert Owen.' 1858.

*Cole.* 'A New View of Society and Other Writings.' Robert Owen. Ed. G. D. H. Cole. Dent, Everyman Library, 1927. (This volume contains a number of Owen's important writings, and when quoting these I have given page references from this edition as being more accessible than earlier ones.)

*Buonarroti.* 'Buonarroti's History of Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality.' Translated by Bronterre O'Brien. 1836. (O'Brien printed several of Owen's writings to show the similarity of his views to those of Babeuf.)

*T.M.W.* 'Threading My Way,' by Robert Dale Owen. New York. 1847.

# PART ONE

# Owen's Life and Work

# I

# England in 1785

About the year 1785 England, and more especially Lancashire, stood at the edge of a period of unprecedented industrial development. This affected all branches of the economy—mining, metallurgy, transport, agriculture—but most of all it affected the new manufacturing industry of cotton textiles. Here the rate of growth was greatest. New machinery was used most widely, the new industrial towns were most rapidly enlarged, the vastest fortunes were made. Cotton was only one part of the Industrial Revolution, but it may justly be regarded as the most typical part, the one in which its character was most fully embodied.

A decade earlier—between 1766 and 1785—the series of inventions associated with the names of Hargreaves, Arkwright and Crompton had been developed: these were now beginning to be put to use on a mass scale, and both in Lancashire and in Lanark, along the Clyde, numbers of new spinning mills worked by water power were being built. The new methods were being applied, of course, also to other textile industries, but here they had to overcome long-established prejudices and productive relationships. Cotton, a new industry with few traditions, was speedily and completely conquered. Further, cotton goods were cheap and suitable for mass production and export. They therefore began to replace woollens as Britain's leading export. One set of figures

will sufficiently indicate the rapidity of the advance. In 1780, 6,700,000 pounds of raw cotton were imported; in 1790, over 30,000,000; in 1801, over 50,000,000 and in 1810, over 123,000,000.

In 1785, also, two other new developments had their beginning. In this year the first steam-driven spinning mill was opened, and within a generation steam had virtually replaced water as a source of power, making possible larger units, greater efficiency and a greater concentration of production. The factory could now move from the hill-side, to which workers had to be brought, into the towns themselves, so that industry at last became fully urban. And second, in 1785 Edward Cartwright invented the power loom, which, while it took longer to become widely used, was in the end to revolutionise weaving, the other branch of the textile industry.

All this was not merely a *technical* revolution. It was a social transformation in which, as Marx said, 'entire classes of the population disappear and new ones with new conditions of existence and new requirements take their place'. A new bourgeoisie and a new working class, the proletariat in the modern, scientific sense of the word, were created. New possibilities of wealth, new methods of exploitation and new forms of struggle appeared. Britain, which had been unique in Europe only in its political structure, now became unique also economically. It was the land of developed capitalism, of machinery and of industrial mass production, dominating the markets of the entire world.

It must be remembered, also, that this advance took place under abnormal conditions. From 1793 to 1815 Britain was waging a war against revolutionary and imperial France on a scale previously unknown, and war, though it disturbs and distorts industrial growth, is also a forcing house. Large quantities of certain types of goods are in urgent demand, rising prices encourage enterprise and speculation, and the sense of national crisis may be

used to break down established customs and enforce changes to which in other circumstances there would be the greatest opposition.

Such, very briefly, were the changes taking place or foreshadowed in 1785. And in this year the young Robert Owen came to Manchester, the very heart and centre of the new England.

# II

## Early Life 1771–1800

Owen had been born in a different time and in very different surroundings. His father was ironmonger and postmaster at Newtown, a small, sleepy market town in central Wales, hardly touched even by the changes whose beginnings were becoming evident elsewhere. The only new feature, perhaps, was the intellectual and moral ferment of Methodism, by which Wales was deeply affected. Robert was the sixth of seven children, and neither his parents nor any of his brothers or sisters seem to have had any ability out of the ordinary. After his early boyhood he appears to have had little contact with any of them. He was a precocious child, as may be seen from his *Life* (II, 2): at the age of seven he had learnt all the village schoolmaster had to teach him, and it was an important part of his make-up that he was in all essentials entirely self-educated. All he learnt he learnt for himself and it became a part of his own thought. This was to be a source both of strength and weakness in later life. Because his ideas were based so directly on his personal experience he held to them with immense tenacity, but he never learnt to evaluate them properly.

When he was ten he left home for good, as he tells us, with forty shillings in his pocket, and henceforth was self-supporting. He went first to London and then to Stamford in Lincolnshire where he was apprenticed to a draper with a well-established, rather aristocratic business. Here he

was kindly treated, not overworked, and found time to read a great deal—about five hours a day, he tells in his *Life*. If he was an omnivorous reader as a boy, he seems to have abandoned the habit early. His son, Robert Dale Owen says that 'he read a good deal, but it was chiefly one or two London dailies, with other periodicals as they came out. . . . He usually glanced over books without mastering them.'[1] Thus his mind closed early, and while he made important deductions from his personal experience he lacked the field of reference for his ideas which serious study might have given him. It is probably true to say that never in his whole life did he doubt the absolute truth of his convictions (I, 5; IX, 9).

In 1784 he left Stamford and became an assistant to a large firm of London drapers, Flint and Palmer. Here the work was hard and the hours long, and the next year he found a third employer, a Mr. Slatterfield of Manchester (II, 3). Manchester, as we have said, was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution just entering its period of greatest advance. Owen was now well qualified to make use of the abundant opportunities which were opening before him. True, he knew nothing of industry or of machines, but he knew textiles and he knew the market. He was industrious, ready to learn, ready to take chances and bursting with self-confidence. All around him people were talking about the cotton trade, the new machinery and the profits that might be made from them. It was a time when anyone who could command even a small capital could hope to make a fortune.

Owen's life during the next few years might almost have been invented to illustrate this phase of capitalist development. With a borrowed capital of only £100 he embarked with a rather dubious partner in the making of spinning machinery: when the partnership broke up Owen was left with three of these 'mules'. Setting them to work

[1] *T.M.W.*, 90.

he was soon making a net profit of £300 a year. We can see from this both the fantastic rate of profit that could be obtained and the degree of exploitation which made this possible. Employing only three workmen, Owen was able to extract a clear £2 a week profit from each of them. (II, 4). These super-profits in a period when machine reproduction was still not general, help to account for the rapid accumulation of capital and the expansion of production in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Robert Dale Owen writes of this time: 'Yarn, of a quality which in 1815 was sold for three shillings a pound, brought, in the infancy of the manufacture, as high as thirty shillings.'[1]

Before long Owen abandoned this project to become, at the age of twenty, manager of a large spinning mill employing 500 workers, and soon, he says, 'my name was now up for being the first fine cotton spinner in the world, and this was my standing as long as I remained the manager of Mr. Drinkwater's factory.'[2] After a few years a disagreement arose and Owen was able to take a new step forward by becoming partner as well as manager of a newly formed firm. In 1797, while on a business visit to Glasgow, he met Anne Caroline Dale, daughter of David Dale, owner of the great spinning mill at New Lanark, which Dale had built with Arkwright some seventeen years before. Friendship with Miss Dale led to a proposal of marriage, and this, in turn, to a train of events which ended in Owen and his Manchester partners buying the New Lanark Mill. At the beginning of 1800 he moved to Scotland to take over the management of the establishment (II, 5).

With this move a new stage in his life began. Hitherto his had been a success story, remarkable enough but not exceptional in the England of his time. At New Lanark he became a national figure and began to put into practice the ideas which have made him famous.

[1] *T.M.W.*, 34. [2] *Life*, 48.

# III

## Owen at New Lanark

The New Lanark Mills, employing some thousand workers, were among the largest in Britain. Owen has given a graphic and no doubt honest account of the conditions as he found them there, but it is only fair to add that under Dale this was generally regarded as a model establishment.[1] Nevertheless we must accept Owen's description of the situation at New Lanark as correct in essentials, and this may be taken as an indication of the terribly low level that was then taken for granted in such places. It seems likely, also, that Dale, who had a number of other business interests, and was in 1800 an elderly man on the way to retirement, did not in these last years give close personal supervision to the Mill. His benevolent intentions were perhaps less fully realised than he had imagined.

It is clear from Owen's own statement (II, 5) that he went to New Lanark with the formed and conscious purpose of putting into practice what were already clear and definite ideas about man and his environment. These ideas are fully explained by Owen in numerous writings at all stages of his life and only a few comments need be made here to supplement his own exposition (I). They are based upon two propositions which he was never tired of repeating: 'Man's character is made for and not by

[1] (III, 1.) Compare G. J. Holyoake, *Self Help a Hundred Years Ago* (1890), 128-134.

him,' and 'Any character from the worst to the best, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by applying certain means, which are to a large extent at the command, and under the control, or easily made so, of those who possess the government of nations.' It was this statement which he placed upon the title page of his first important book, *A New View of Society,* in 1813.

The deductions which he drew from these propositions were directly contrary to the orthodox thinking of his time and class. It was for them an article of faith that the masses were poor because they were idle, vicious, intemperate and ignorant. Their poverty was therefore a just consequence of their sins and a part of the divine order of the world. Owen thought that in so far as the masses were idle, vicious, intemperate and ignorant it was because they were poor. As they were lifted out of their poverty, as they were better housed, fed and clothed, and given cultural and educational opportunities, so their character would be transformed. He began with this conviction and, testing it at New Lanark, he found that it worked (III, 2, 3; VII, 1).

The great element of truth in Owen's theory is no less evident than its one-sidedness. Yet his thinking was less naïve than is sometimes supposed. He wrote that 'any character may be given to any *community*', not that it may be given to any individual, though at times he both wrote and acted as if he believed this also. Yet, as his account of his proceedings at New Lanark shows, he had a very shrewd estimate of the difficulties and the limits of what could be expected at this stage (III, 2, 3).

His true weakness, and one to which his position as manager and employer contributed, was his inability to see that the new environment must be created by the efforts and struggles of the working people themselves. He, Owen, had changed the environment at New Lanark with startlingly benefical results: he, Owen, could instruct his

fellow employers and managers, and under his instruction they also could change the environment of the whole working population with equally benefical results. And while he did gain a certain degree of practical insight into the minds of his workpeople (though never to the extent that he imagined), he never understood the ruling class and, despite endless disappointments, never lost his belief in their benevolence and convincibility. A politician had only to show polite interest in whatever he had to say and he was convinced that he had won a firm disciple. He never learnt to recognise a polite brush-off, though he must have met with more of these than any other man in history, nor did he learn the futility of bombarding monarchs and ministers with long manifestoes calling upon them to transform the world (VIII, 3, 8, 9; IX, 1). The Revolution by Reason upon which he pinned his hopes always involved the possibility of persuading the rich and powerful to give up their privileges.

Yet all this lay in the future, and in the twenty years following his arrival at New Lanark one success followed another. Overcoming the natural suspicion which the workers felt for a 'foreign' employer, he gradually won their confidence. Their houses, all owned by the Company, were enlarged, sanitation improved, hours of labour shortened and conditions of work improved, shops were opened at which cheap and good quality food and clothes could be bought, continually improving educational and cultural facilities were provided—and used. In the course of years New Lanark became known all over Europe as a model community to which hundreds, and finally thousands, of visitors came every year. It should, however, be noted that, contrary to what has sometimes been said, money wages were not greatly above the normal. The deputation which visited New Lanark in 1819, sent from Leeds under the leadership of the well-known Liberal newspaper owner Edward Baines, whose report was in general enthusiastic, even declared that 'among us

their wages would be thought low', though we must make allowance for the different level of prosperity in Scotland and the West Riding at that time (III, 5). Still, there were sufficient other reasons for Owen's employees to consider themselves exceptionally fortunate. Perhaps the greatest benefits from his work were enjoyed by the children, at this time perhaps the most cruelly exploited section of the working population.

# IV

## Education and the Factory Children

One of the results of the mechanisation of spinning was the increase in the number of women and children employed. Statistics from both Scotland and Lancashire show that almost half the employees in spinning mills were children, and, of the adults, by far the greater number were women. Men, as a rule, were employed for skilled work or as supervisors. And since water was the power first used to drive the machines, factories had to be built where a sufficient force of water existed, often at a distance from any centre of population. In order to meet the labour problem so created, the system of taking on pauper apprentices grew up. Workhouse children were virtually sold to the millowners by public authorities who were too glad to get them off their hands to inquire closely what happened to them afterwards. What this meant for children who came into the hands of brutal or unscrupulous employers can well be imagined, and even under the best circumstances, as Owen shows, the sytem was extremely unsatisfactory (III, 1; VI, 1, 2). Many other children employed were, of course, sent to the factories by their parents, and while some parents accepted this as natural and inevitable, many hated the necessity and only sent their children as a consequence of their own poverty (VI, 3).

Owen found both pauper apprentices and other children working at New Lanark and as soon as he was able

he began to improve their conditions. We do not know just how fast he was able to move. When considering his New Lanark activities it is important to remember that he never had a completely free hand. He was manager and part owner, but had always to convince and carry with him partners whose ideas were very different from his own. He formed in all three partnerships, and in the first two his partners were business men to whom profits were the main consideration and who were reluctant to spend anything on education or social welfare. It was not till his third partnership, formed in 1813, and consisting largely of Quakers, but including also the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, that he had partners who were content with a fixed return of 5 per cent on their capital and were prepared to give him a fairly free hand (III, 4). And with these he ran into a new kind of difficulty, since some of the Quakers, when they found that the education of the children included dancing and music, concluded that Owen was imperilling their immortal souls.

Paradoxically, I think that the very difficulties Owen had to overcome, especially in his first two partnerships, were among the reasons for his success at New Lanark as compared with later failures. They kept him firmly on the ground, forced him to take one step at a time and to grapple constantly with objective difficulties and problems imposed from the outside. Later, without such restraints, he tended to lose all sense of his limitations and leapt from one grandiose plan to another less practical. Or, to put it another way, the problems he was set at New Lanark were just those which a self-educated, empirical industrialist, trained in the practical school of Manchester, was best capable of solving. Perhaps his early success came too easily, for he came to believe that all problems could be solved in the same way and no amount of failures could persuade him that it was not so. The contrast between his uninterrupted success till about 1820 and his

repeated failure after is striking: but it may be that the later failures were part of the price he had to pay for his early success, which gave him a false impression both of his own powers and of the difficulties he would have to face.

At any rate he had to proceed gradually at New Lanark, but the children were certainly his first concern. This was partly because he believed, rightly, that the characters of children could be much more easily formed than those of adults (VII, 3), but also because he really loved children and wanted them to be happy. And he believed that without a happy childhood they would not grow up to be rational, properly balanced men and women. His first step was to reduce hours of work and get the very young children out of the factory. This he did by stages, till none were employed before ten years old. The working day was reduced to ten and three-quarter hours, as compared with fourteen or more hours then often worked. He would have liked to make the age for starting work later, but this was as far as any of his partners would follow him. At least it left a number of years in which the basis of education was possible.

Owen's work as a pioneer of education has perhaps received less recognition than it deserved. In general, of course, his theories were those of the Enlightenment. But he put them into practice on a large scale and with resounding success. And the contrast between Owen's practice and that of his contemporaries in Britain was complete. Their method may be summed up by saying, 'Take a child and drill, or, more usually, beat a number of facts into it—Greek and Latin for the upper classes, a minimum of literacy for the lower.' The most fashionable method among those who thought of themselves as advanced, that of Joseph Lancaster, was a fantastic attempt to apply the technique of mass production to education. A master would instruct selected pupils by rote and these in turn would mechanically pass on their newly

acquired knowledge to others. In this way, it was hoped, a single teacher could 'educate' a thousand or more children. The results of the system may easily be imagined.

At one time even Owen was disposed to favour it, but soon discarded it when he came to develop his own schools. He believed that the object of education was not to cram a child with facts but to prepare it for life by developing its character and personality (VII, 4). Therefore children must not be abused or frightened, but surrounded from the start with love and understanding, they must be kept interested and drawn out to desire knowledge, and this knowledge must be given to them in a simple, practical way. Books should be used sparingly (Owen says not till after the tenth year, perhaps forgetting for a moment his own youthful passion for reading) and at all stages lesson and play should go together. Dancing, singing, and physical exercise was an essential part of the New Lanark education (VII, 1). And, since the imparting of knowledge had only a minor place in Owen's conception of education, he was ready to take children at a much earlier age than was then usual. As soon as infants could be brought to the school they were received, encouraged to play happily, and were well looked after. In this way they began to learn and to acquire confidence very young. They were also saved from the terrible neglect that was the fate of nearly all young children whose parents were both working long hours in the factories.

After the formation of his third partnership in 1813 Owen was able to carry out his educational plan more fully. He enlarged his schools, improved the equipment, and on January 1st, 1816, the school became the nucleus of his Institute for the Formation of Character, designed, as he said in a speech to the people of New Lanark, 'to effect a complete and thorough improvement in the *internal* as well as the *external* character of the whole village'. It was a large two-storey building used as a school

for the children by day and a club, adult education centre, dance hall and concert room in the evenings.

Owen, intensely serious as he was, was no enemy of enjoyment (XIII, 3). In an age when long hours were seriously defended on the grounds that unless employed the workers would inevitably be misusing their time (VI, 5), he believed that leisure and recreation were necessary both for children and adults. Some visitors to New Lanark were, indeed, critical of this side of his work, finding it too worldly, too much concerned with the good of the body and too little with the salvation of the soul. For Owen, these were two aspects of the same thing. And certainly in his last years at New Lanark the overwhelming majority of the thousands of visitors, who included, as Owen wrote, beside the Tsar Nicholas, 'Princes John and Maximilian of Austria, Foreign Ambassadors, many bishops, and clergy innumerable—almost all our own nobility—learned men of all professions from all countries—and wealthy travellers for pleasure and knowledge of every description,'[1] went away amazed and enthusiastic. Owen began to be a figure of international reputation.

In 1815 he began his first public campaign—for a Bill to regulate the employment of young people in textile factories. He began by calling a meeting of Glasgow cotton magnates, at which he proposed resolutions asking the Government to remove the tax on imported raw cotton and to pass an Act to improve the position of the factory children. The first was carried enthusiastically, the second failed to find a single supporter. Owen then approached Sir Robert Peel (father of the Prime Minister of the same name) who promised to introduce a bill which Owen drafted. This prohibited the employment of children under ten in textile factories, reduced hours to ten and a half per day for all under eighteen, for whom night work was

[1] *Life*, 203.

also forbidden, and set up a system of Inspection, without which, as was later discovered, any such measure would be ineffective.

Owen seems to have expected little opposition to his Bill, but he soon found it was attacked from all sides and he himself subjected to the most unscrupulous personal abuse (VI, 5). Every possible delay was created, and in the end it was not till 1819 that a Bill, so mutilated as to be virtually useless, was passed through Parliament (VI, 2, 3, 4). Almost its sole importance was in establishing a precedent for Government interference with industry, and in fact it was the first of many such Acts. In this respect, as well as in the field of education, Owen occupies a distinguished place among the early defenders of the rights of children. However, he was so disgusted at the delays and manoeuvres which he had encountered, that long before 1819 he had left the conduct of his Bill to Richard Oastler and others and had turned his attention elsewhere.

# V

# A New View of Society

The ending of the long war against Imperial France in 1814-15 precipitated a general economic crisis. The artificial market created by the war vanished, and some time elapsed before new markets could be developed. Thousands of demobilised soldiers and sailors were flung upon the labour market. Prices fell, production was cut down as stocks of unsold goods piled up, unemployment reached unprecedented levels, everywhere there were riots and disorders, while political agitation, which had been forced below the surface during the war, flared up as millions saw in a corrupt and oligarchic society the cause of their hunger and sufferings.

The ruling class was thoroughly alarmed. The Tory Government of the time, headed by such men as Liverpool, Eldon, Sidmouth and Castlereagh, was possibly the most callous and reactionary that Britain has ever known, nor did it at all understand the changes which had come over the country during the last generation. One problem which attracted immediate attention was that of the rapidly rising poor-rate. Poor relief was then organised on a parochial basis, every parish being responsible for the relief of its own poor. In those areas and parishes where unemployment was concentrated this was becoming a crushing burden, all the more so since the system was most inefficiently administered. About the middle of 1816 a meeting was called in London, attended by many

of the bishops and aristocracy, to discuss the question. Owen also was there.

As we have seen, his work at New Lanark had made him widely known. He was the benevolent Mr. Owen, the philanthropic millowner, whose schools and welfare schemes were universally admired. And a few years earlier, in 1813-14, he had published his first important book, *A New View of Society,* sometimes known as *Essays on the Formation of the Human Character.* Though most of Owen's later ideas are implicit in this book the more alarming of them are not obtruded: Owen is dealing mainly with generalities about character and environment, the importance of proper education and the advantages of humane treatment of workpeople. The book is dedicated to, among others, Wilberforce and the Prince Regent (later George IV). Consequently, though *A New View* had attracted considerable attention and helped to increase Owen's reputation, it had not alarmed the ruling class. When the meeting decided to set up a Committee, under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury, to raise a fund to relieve distress and to consider possible remedies, Owen was included.

When it met he was probably its only member with practical experience of industrial conditions, and was therefore listened to with marked respect. When he declared that he had a positive remedy, the Committee invited him to prepare a written report explaining it. This document, *Report to the Committee for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor* (1817), was the first statement of Owen's famous Plan, to the advocacy of which the rest of his life was to be devoted and which has given him his place among the pioneers of socialism.

Details of the Plan are given below in Owen's words and need not be elaborated here (X, XI). Broadly, he proposed that instead of pouring out money unproductively on Poor Relief, the Government should raise a fund to establish village settlements, each with around 1,200 in-

habitants, in which the unemployed could maintain themselves and add to the wealth of the nation. In many respects these villages were to resemble his own establishment at New Lanark, with the important difference that while that was purely industrial, these were to have sufficient land to produce their own food: Owen always regarded a unity of manufacture and agriculture as the ideal basis for any community.

At this stage, it should be noted, Owen's object was the limited one of meeting the crisis and relieving unemployment: he had not yet begun to think of the villages as the basis for a new kind of society based on co-operation instead of competition. They were, therefore, not to be self-governing or socialist in any proper sense, but controlled by officers appointed by the public bodies, or groups of public-spirited capitalists by whom they might be established (X, 3). Soon, however, as the idea grew clearer in Owen's mind, he felt that life in these villages would be in every way better than life under any existing circumstances, and then, 'of course no part of society will long continue in a worse condition than the individuals within such proposed establishments. . . . The change from the *old* system to the *new* must be universal' (X, 5). In Owen's later writings, from his *Report to the County of Lanark* (1820) onwards, though the technical details of the Plan do not greatly change, many details are developed, more and more stress is laid on the necessity for equality and self-government, and the questions of the relations between the villages, their grouping into an all-embracing national, and, finally, international structure, are increasingly insisted upon (X, 67; XI, 1, 5).

When Owen presented his *Report,* as he says, 'the Archbishop and the Committee appeared to be taken by surprise, and appeared at a loss what to say or do.'[1] After a little thought they decided that such a plan fell outside

[1] *Life,* 182.

the scope of their avowedly charitable objects, and they passed him and his Plan on to a Parliamentary Committee which had been set up to consider the revision of the Poor Laws. But they, too, found the plan embarrassing, and after keeping Owen waiting about for two days, informed him that they would not hear his evidence. He was naturally indignant, and attributed their refusal to the influence of the ideas of Malthus, with which he strongly disagreed (V, 6). He did not understand that the ruling class could never accept a Plan which threatened their dominant position in society, but attributed every rebuff to some misunderstanding, to particular stupidity, or to the intrigue of some personal enemy. At this particular time, far from intending to do anything to improve the condition of the workers, the Government was more and more turning to open violence, repressive legislation and the wholesale use of spies and provocateurs to crush the growing revolt. Owen could not see this, and he continued for years to press his Plan upon all sorts of prominent people (VIII, 5).

At the same time, he did begin to realise that he must now appeal to a wider public, and on August 14th, 1817, held the first of a series of large and enthusiastic public meetings in London at which he explained his ideas. He accompanied these with a publicity campaign by pamphlets and through the press (VIII, 1). It was at the second of this series of meetings, on August 21st, that he made the famous attack on religion which he always regarded as one of the turning points of his life (XIII, 1).

This laid him open to what were then the most damaging attacks, and Owen always believed that it was this action which lost him the support of most of his 'respectable' backers. This, perhaps, is only partly true. No doubt it was at about this time that many former friends began to abandon him, but this happened only gradually and it seems likely that the increasingly clearly socialist and subversive nature of his Plan was in the long run more responsible. The charge of 'infidelity' might be a con-

venient excuse for those who wished to withdraw on other grounds. Engels is perhaps more correct when he attributes Owen's loss of upper-class support to his triple attack on private property, religion, and bourgeois marriage (XVII, 4).

As late as 1820 he was invited by the County of Lanark to submit a plan for 'relieving Public Distress and Removing Discontent, by giving permanent, productive Employment to the Poor and the Working Classes'. His *Report to the County of Lanark* is in many ways the clearest and best reasoned statement of his Plan. Like his earlier proposals it was politely received and promptly shelved.

Between 1817 and 1824 Owen was constantly in the public eye, addressing meetings, issuing a stream of pamphlets and travelling incessantly. He visited Europe (VIII, 6) and Ireland and became acquainted with many of the leading personalities of his time. As yet, however, he had no connexion with the working class or their radical leaders (VIII, 4). He appealed, as indeed he continued to do throughout his life, to the men of enlightened good will in all classes (IX, 6).

With all these activities Owen obviously had less time to give to New Lanark, and after about 1817 the detailed supervision of his factory was increasingly left to subordinates. Some of his partners, too, especially the Quaker William Allen, were alarmed by his religious unorthodoxy, and insisted on modifications to his plans—something that Owen was the last man to accept readily. Besides all this there was the growing sense of the inadequacy of what could be done under the conditions imposed upon him there. Owen was a perfectionist and New Lanark was obviously still far from perfect (III, 5). All these factors combined to lessen Owen's interest, and in 1825 he ceased to be manager of the New Lanark Mills, though he kept his financial interest till 1828.

# VI

## Owen in the New World

As the hope of securing official backing for his Plan receded Owen began to turn to the idea of himself establishing a model community whose success could act as an example and inspiration for others. At first he hoped to act through the agency of the benevolent rich.

In 1819 a Committee was set up, under the Chairmanship of the Duke of Kent and including the Duke of Sussex, Sir Robert Peel, senior, and the economist David Ricardo, with the object of raising £100,000 to set up an Owenite community. It was proposed to pay 5 per cent interest on all capital subscribed. In its address to the public the Committee thought it necessary to reply to certain objections, and the passage in which it did so gives an interesting glimpse of the grounds upon which Owen was already being attacked:

'The private opinions which Mr. Owen has been supposed to entertain on matters of religion form one of such objections. This is a point on which it has not been thought fit to require Mr. Owen to make any public declaration; it is deemed sufficient to have ascertained that Mr. Owen is not known to have in any one instance endeavoured to alter the religious opinions of persons in his employment; that the desires of his workmen to attend their respective places of workship are complied with and aided to the utmost extent; that a minister has long been paid by the

proprietors of the manufactory under Mr. Owen's management for performing Divine service, in the Gaelic tongue to the Highland workmen; that Mr. Owen's own house is a house of daily prayer; that he is father of a large well-regulated moral family; that his conduct appears to be free from reproach, and that his character is distinguished by active benevolence, perfect sincerity, and undisturbed tranquility of temper.

'Several other objections rest upon a supposition that Mr. Owen's plans necessarily involve a community of goods; this is a great mistake or misrepresentation. In the establishment which is now proposed there would be no community of goods nor any deviation from the established laws of property. Mr. Owen has expressed on a former occasion some opinions in favour of a state of society in which a community of goods should exist, but he has never considered it as essential to the success of such an establishment as is now proposed, nor required it as a condition of his superintendance. Mr. Owen's opinion upon this matter need scarcely be regarded with apprehension by any part of society, when it is considered that the present laws of real property make a community of profits from land quite impossible, and that the legislature are not likely to alter the laws of the land in this respect upon any suggestion of Mr. Owen's.

'It has also been said that these plans have a tendency to the equalisation of ranks. This notion is connected with, and depends upon, the erroneous one that they involve a community of goods. If the laws of property are preserved, and the plan rests, as it does, upon the supposition of its being a profitable mode of investing capital, it has no other tendency to equalisation than all plans which have for their object the extension of the comforts, the intelligence, and the virtues of the poorer classes of society.'[1]

[1] *Life, IA,* 245-6.

After several months less than £8,000 had been subscribed, and the Committee decided to wind up its affairs and dissolve. A second appeal launched by a similar Committee in 1822 was little more successful. Owen now began to turn his thoughts to the possibility of a more radical experiment, more directly under his control and in a new land where the laws of real property were less restrictive. The U.S.A. was not only such a land, it was also widely regarded a this time as the world's potential Utopia, a place where the corrupting traditions of Europe had never penetrated and where it was possible to make a really new start under the most favourable conditions. It was a promised land to which thousands of emigrants were already making their way from Europe. Already a number of Utopian communities, mostly on a religious basis, had been established there, and as early as 1817 Owen had published an account of one of these groups, the Shakers, sent to him by a Philadelphian Quaker, with an introductory note calling it, 'a simple but convincing proof of the effects of the principle of combined labour and expenditure'.[1]

In 1824, therefore, Owen went to the U.S.A. with the belief that here was the best promise for his great experiment. He met with an enthusiastic welcome and lectured successfully in all parts of the country, illustrating his lectures with a scale model of his proposed community. This model is lost, but we know from drawings by Stedman Whitwell that it was an impressive quadrangle rather like one of the Oxford or Cambridge colleges on a grand scale. Owen was now a rich man, but his wealth was still not sufficient to start on quite this style. However, he found that the Rappites, another group of religious communists, were anxious to leave their settlement of Harmony, Indiana. Owen could buy the well-constructed village and 30,000 acres of good land, much of it

[1] *Life, IA,* 146.

already under cultivation, for £30,000. On this venture he risked the whole of his considerable fortune and ultimately lost the greater part of it.

Owen now issued a general invitation to 'the industrious and well-disposed of all nations' to come and join in the first step towards a new civilisation. By May 1st, 1825, about 800 had assembled and New Harmony was officially inaugurated. Its first constitution gave him complete control for a preliminary period of three years. Shortly after the opening Owen returned to England for some months. During this period New Harmony appears to have developed fairly satisfactorily, and on his return in January 1826 with a number of distinguished supporters, he proposed a new constitution based on complete equality and self-government. This was the second of seven constitutions adopted within a space of two years. The result was disappointing: quarrels, the formation of factions leading to secessions and the formation of break-away communities followed. It would be pointless to trace these events in detail, but by the spring of 1827 New Harmony virtually came to an end. Only the school, which had all along been its most successful feature, survived in a modified form.

Robert Dale Owen, who had played a leading part in the experiment, has some interesting reflections on its failure:

> *'My father made another still greater mistake. A believer in the force of circumstances and of the instinct of self interest to reform all men, however ignorant or vicious, he admitted into his village all comers, without recommendatory introduction or any examination whatever. This error was the more fatal, because it is in the nature of any novel experiment, or any putting forth of new views which may tend to revolutionize the opinions or habits of society, to attract to itself (as the Reformation did three hundred years ago, and as spiritualism*

*does today) waifs and strays from the surrounding society; men and women of crude, ill-considered, extravagant notions; nay, worse, vagrants who regard the latest heresy but as a stalking-horse for pecuniary gain, or a convenient cloak for immoral demeanor.'*[1]

There is no doubt that the absence of any attempt to select members was not accidental but the result of Owen's oversimplified views of the effect of environment on character: he genuinely thought that it would not much matter who came because, once there, all would be speedily transformed. Today, while we may accept in principle the correctness of belief that human nature is a product of human life, we have learnt from experience that the transformation is a long, complex and difficult process. At New Harmony, at any rate, there was no time for the process even to begin. The community was overweighted from the start with middle-class intellectuals who were incapable of sustained manual labour or regarded it as beneath them, and they and the working-class members were never able to pull together.

Owen was not really discouraged by his failure, but began at once to negotiate with the Mexican Government for concessions of territory 'one hundred and fifty miles in breadth from the Gulph of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean',[2] on which the Plan might indeed have been carried out on a stupendous scale. Perhaps understandably, nothing came of this project and after some more lecturing and debating in the U.S.A. Owen returned to England in 1829. While he still did not doubt in the slightest the correctness of his ideas, he was in a mood to consider other means of realising them.

[1] *T.M.W.*, 259. [2] *Revolution*, 128.

# VII

## Owen Among the Workers

The years during which Owen had been chiefly in the U.S.A. had been a time of remarkable advance for the working-class movement in Britain. The repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 had legalised trade unions, though leaving them still under great legal disabilities, and they had grown everywhere in numbers and power. The political movement for democratic reform, which had receded in the years immediately following the Peterloo Massacre (1819) revived again as Britain approached the crisis that secured the first Reform Bill (1832). And in this revival the workers began to take a more independent part, throwing up their own leaders and looking for their own distinctive ideas. A left-wing press that had a *class* as distinct from a purely radical outlook came into being leading up to the founding of the *Poor Man's Guardian* in 1830. It was in these years, too, that many of the books of the early English socialists were published, and the term socialist (at this time used as a synonym for Cooperative) was then first coined. William Thompson published his *Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth* in 1824. In 1825 both John Grey's *Lecture on Human Happiness* and Thomas Hodgskin's *Labour Defended* appeared, while Thompson replied to the latter in his *Labour Rewarded* in 1827.

All these works were broadly Owenite in character, though by no means merely derivative. This is especially

true of Thompson, whose *Inquiry* made an important advance by linking Owen's Plan to the idea of exploitation. Owen is known to have read and admired this book and his thinking was perhaps influenced by it: it is certainly from about this date that the conception of his Plan as a means of ending exploitation begins to emerge.

So in these years—1825 to 1830—Owenism, which before had been a general idea operating outside class, now began to appear in a new, working-class form. I think this was less in spite of than because of Owen's absence from the country. So long as he was conducting the campaign he did it in his own benevolently dictatorial way. There could be no real movement, only Owen and his disciples who accepted all he said and did and left him to make all the decisions. He could never learn to work with others as an equal: he must be totally right, and if so, what other men thought or desired could not be of any importance (XVII, 3).

But in his absence a broader, genuinely democratic movement could develop, with no one leader but a number of active figures—Thompson, Minter Morgan, William Pare, Dr. King, Benjamin Warden, William Lovett, to name only a few of the better known.

From about 1826 Co-operative Societies began to be formed, mainly by groups of skilled artisans in London and other towns. These Societies differed greatly from the Societies we know today. They were definitely Owenite in the sense that the objective was the setting up, eventually, of a co-operative community. But as they were formed by poor men, the problem of finding initial capital had to be faced. So they began to engage in retail trade among themselves, hoping in time to accumulate a common fund with which, in the end, a community could be started. Meanwhile, they were pleased to be keeping in their own hands profits that would otherwise have gone to some middleman. A little later groups of trade unionists, or sometimes of self-employing artisans, began

to set up Productive Societies, with the idea that instead of working for some capitalist master or merchant they should combine to produce goods and sell them direct to the public. In a few years a large number of Co-operatives of both these types, as well as some combining features of each, were in existence. A natural further step was to combine these local Societies into some sort of federation for mutual help and encouragement. Such was the stage which the movement had reached when Owen returned in 1829.

Owen at first, Lovett tells us, 'looked somewhat coolly on these Trading Associations.' He had always been accustomed to work on the grand scale and through the medium of statesmen and influential people. These little trading ventures among the workers seemed mean and unpromising to a man who always believed he was about to change the whole world within a few years (IX, 6; XII, 2). Holyoake, quoting from *The New Moral World,* tells us that Owen,

> *'related that on his journey to New Lanark he passed through Carlisle. Devoting Tuesday and Wednesday "to seeing the friends of the system, and those whom I wish to make its friends: to my surprise I found there are six or seven co-operative societies, in different parts of the town, doing well, as they think, that is, making some profit by joint-stock retailing. It is, however, high time to put an end to the notion very prevalent in the public mind, that this is the social system which we contemplate, or that it will form any part of the arrangements in the* New Moral World".'[1]

But more than this was involved.

Owen's previous contact with workers had been at New Lanark, where he was in authority—a just, kindly

[1] *History of Co-operation,* I, 141.

ruler, but an absolute one. It was for him to benefit the masses, for the masses to respond gratefully. And the New Lanark workers were politically backward and quite unorganised. There is nothing in Owen's writings to suggest that he had even heard of trade unions before this time, though presumably he must have done so.

Now he had to deal with the skilled London craftsmen, the proudest, most articulate, most politically developed section of the working class at that time, even if not in the long run the most militant. They had behind them generations of struggle and conscious radicalism and were accustomed to think of themselves as the natural leaders of their class. Where Owen had previously commanded he must persuade and convince, a thing he had never learnt to do. The London artisans were ready to admire and respect Owen, they had already learnt much from him—but they were not prepared to surrender their mental independence. It was inevitable that a partnership between them would be stormy and impermanent. It was also inevitable that such a partnership should be attempted.

Owen had failed in his attempts to convince the rich and powerful. He had failed at New Harmony. He was no longer the rich millowner of New Lanark. And here were the workers, whom he genuinely wished to benefit, accepting his teachings, and trying, no doubt inadequately, to put them into practice. He would go to them and show them how to do better.

The next stage was that of Co-operative Congresses and Labour Exchanges or Co-operative Bazaars. The first Congress was held in Manchester in May 1831. It proposed that a sum of £30 should be raised from each of 200 local Societies to establish a Community to which each subscribing Society could nominate one of its members. Owen opposed the scheme on the ground that its scale and resources would be quite inadequate, but it was nevertheless adopted by the Congress.

In this difference of opinion we may perhaps see the beginning of a conflict between Owen and Thompson. Thompson was unquestionably the other outstanding figure in the movement at the time, with a prestige almost equal to that of Owen and a greater ability to work on terms of equality with others. In his *Labour Rewarded* he had expressed his support for manhood suffrage and, outlining a plan for a co-operative community similar to that of Owen, he had given it a democratic structure quite foreign to Owen's outlook. And, while he regarded a community of about 2,000 as ideal, he had written in the *Co-operative Magazine* suggesting that a start might be made with as few as ten families and a quite small working capital. He knew at least that there was no possibility of accumulating within the existing movement, almost entirely working class, capital on the scale which Owen believed necessary.

This was, indeed, unhappily demonstrated, for a year later it was found that only a few pounds had been subscribed and the project had to be abandoned. While the individual societies maintained the objective of establishing communities, in practice the struggle to survive swallowed up all available funds.

At the third Congress (April 1833) the differences were even more acute. Thompson again advocated a small-scale venture suited to their limited resources, Owen a grand scheme, for which, he said, money could be borrowed on the Stock Exchange. He suggested that only he had the necessary knowledge and experience and should be given a free hand. The Congress decided in favour of Thompson's proposals, and also took the more practical step of appointing a number of 'missionaries' to carry on Co-operative propaganda in all parts of the country. These disputes, though they bulk large in the Co-operative literature of the time, were in themselves perhaps healthy: they reflect the growing pains of a real movement in which difference and argument were possible. It would seem

that Thompson was the only figure in this movement who had the ability and prestige to stand up to Owen, and the indications are that he was carrying it with him. But he was already in bad health and died in the following spring.

Meanwhile a good deal of the movement's effort was being directed to the formation of Labour exchanges. The first of these was set up in London in 1830, and others followed in London, Birmingham and Liverpool. The largest and best known was the National Equitable Labour Exchange set up by Owen himself in 1832 in the Grays Inn Road.

The idea was that co-operators in all branches of production should bring the articles they had made to the central Exchanger or Bazaar, where they could be credited with Labour Notes based on the estimated cost of the raw materials and the amount of time taken for their manufacture. Apparently the maker's own estimate of the time was accepted and little attempt was made to differentiate between the value of the time taken in different forms of production. Consequently, some articles were valued much above and others much below the normal market price. The natural result was that the undervalued goods were immediately sold and the overvalued accumulated in the store. In this way a steadily worsening financial position might be concealed for a time by brisk sales. By 1834 the National Equitable Labour Exchange, now transferred to new premises in Charlotte Street, which were for a long time to be the Owenite headquarters, was running into difficulties. What might have happened to it cannot be known, since it, like many other Co-operative enterprises, was caught up and overwhelmed in the great crisis of that year.

# VIII

## Owen as Trade Union Leader

The growth of the Co-operative Movement has been outlined as if it was the only important development of these years, and this, I think, is how it probably appeared to Owen himself, who hardly seems to have noticed the intense political excitement that centred around the struggle for the Act of 1832 for the reform of Parliament. But of course it was not the only development, since these were years of bitter struggle, disillusionment, and the growth of a new political understanding among the masses. The Whigs had mobilised these masses behind the slogan of Parliamentary Reform, but the most advanced sections of the workers, organised by the National Union of the Working Classes and Others, whose leaders included Lovett, Hetherington and a number of others actively engaged in the Co-operative Movement, were already moving in the direction of independent working-class politics which led a few years later to Chartism.

The sense of betrayal which followed the passing of the Reform Act of 1832 greatly strengthened this tendency, but it led also, and more immediately, to a parallel movement in the direction of revolutionary Trade Unionism, the idea that a new society could be secured by industrial action. Owen's connexion with the Labour Exchanges had brought him into close contact with trade unionists, not only in London but also in provincial cen-

tres to which he went on propaganda tours. Trade Unionists began to form the bulk of his audiences, and in some cases it was the Unions which organised his meetings. He found an England in an extraordinary ferment of mingled hopes and despairs which made men eager to consider new solutions to their problems.

For a number of years, and especially since the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824, the idea of a Trades Union had been gaining ground. At this time most existing unions were not only confined to a particular craft but to a particular locality or area—the idea of a national union covering all workers in a single craft or industry was only beginning to arise, and such national unions as did exist tended to be temporary and far from inclusive. In the industrial struggles of the time these local craft unions found they were seldom strong enough to defeat the much better organised employers, especially as these usually had the active support of the State apparatus. So attempts were constantly made, like that of John Doherty, a convinced Owenite who was the outstanding figure in Lancashire trade unionism, to form a Trades Union, on a federal basis, which would eventually include all workers of all industries in all parts of Britain.

They did not meet with much success, but attempts to form a national organisation for a single industry fared better, especially among the Builders, who in 1830 formed a Builders' Parliament which included not only all sections of craftsmen but attempted to organise on the one hand the architects and on the other the labourers. It was to these provincial workers that Owen's ideas made the strongest appeal. They were, on the whole, of a different stamp from the London artisans with whom he had been dealing, less sophisticated, less sceptical and perhaps also less limited in their outlook. They were also poorer and more exploited, and so less ready to await the outcome of a slow process of education and propaganda.

Their attitude to Owen was consequently much less

critical. James Morrison, one of the most capable of the Builders' leaders, wrote to him:

> *'I hope you will not hesitate to tell me my errors, my prejudices and my natural discrepancies. Your doctrines have made me a* better *and* happier *being. . . . Be then my Physician—I put my case in your hands. Give me your counsel—your practice inspires my perfect confidence.'*[1]

Similarly Joseph Hansom, a Birmingham architect who played a leading part in forming the Builders' Guild, writes to Owen in 1833:

> *'We have been reading your Manifesto* [XII, 3] *this morning together, and were particularly struck with the force of its truth. There does indeed seem to be a* new life *producing to us, and a* new light *wherewith to see things . . . The Builders are a beautiful class of men to operate, with their minds less sophisticated than others, yet tutored to a great extent in practical knowledge.'*[2]

This receptive and explosive world of trade unionism, so new to Owen, must have intoxicated him and sent his hopes soaring with the possibility of using the movement as a means of establishing his socialist commonwealth. He began to dream of a society in which the unions became productive bodies, dominating the industries which they covered, and ultimately replacing the State by a network of inter-related producers' co-operatives. He believed that this could be done quite peacefully, and opposed any idea of class struggle. The workers, inevitably, saw things differently. While they were, many of them, ready to welcome Owen's utopian vision with enthusiasm, they were in practice engaged in class struggle every day of their

[1] R. W. Postgate, *The Builders' History*, 83. [2] *ibid.*, 85.

lives, and for them the unions remained, as they had always been, primarily a means of defending or improving their actual conditions of life, an aspect of things with which Owen hardly concerned himself at all.

In the long run, therefore, conflict between Owen and the mass of his followers was inevitable, but this was not immediately apparent, and Owen's great national prestige made him at the outset a welcome and universally respected leader. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that his adhesion gave trade unionism a new national standing.

The first steps were taken by the builders. In September 1833 the Builders' Parliament met at Manchester and heard Owen expound his plans. The Union virtually transformed itself into a National Guild, which planned to organise production in such a way as to make the capitalist master builders superfluous, to improve the living standards of its members, and to begin the 'reeducation' of them and their children which would 'enable them to become better Architects and Builders of the human character, intellectually and morally, than the world has yet known or even deemed to be practicable.'[1] (XII, 3.)

The Guild secured a few small contracts and began to build a Guildhall in Birmingham which would serve as a national headquarters. From the start, however, it met with opposition from the masters, who in many places refused to employ anyone who would not sign a declaration, known as 'the Document', that they were not members of the Union and would not support it in any way. In other places the Union made demands for higher wages, or for control of the conditions under which contracts were accepted. All over the country there were local, stubbornly contested strikes and lockouts, which soon strained the resources of the Union to the utmost.

The Builders were only a part of a much wider movement. In October Owen presided at a conference in

[1] Postgate, op. cit., 465.

London which decided to form the all-embracing Trades Union which later adopted the name of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. Within a short time it claimed half a million members, and the total number of trade unionists throughout the country was estimated at a million. Many of these, no doubt, were members of existing unions which affiliated to the new organisation, but a great many new members were certainly made, often in areas and trades where unionism had previously been almost unknown. Quite early differences began to show themselves. The October Conference decided to call a further conference in the following March to draw up a formal constitution: in the event, a conference was called in February on Owen's personal initiative, an ominous indication of his impatience and disregard of democratic decisions. It was probably for this reason that the Builders did not attend and some other powerful groups were not represented on the Executive Council of the Consolidated Union. Nevertheless the conference was representative and enthusiastic, and adopted a constitution whose general aims clearly reflect Owen's views and influence, declaring,

> *'That, although the design of the Union, is, in the first instance, to raise the wages of the workmen, or prevent any further reduction therein, and to diminish the hours of labour, the great and ultimate object of it must be to establish the paramount rights of Industry and Humanity, by instituting such measures as shall effectually prevent the ignorant, idle, and useless part of society from having that undue control over the fruits of our toil, which through the agency of a vicious money system, they at present possess; and that, consequently, the Unionists should lose no opportunity of mutually encouraging and assisting each other in bringing about* a different state of things, *in which the really useful and intelligent part of society only shall have*

*the direction of affairs, and in which well-directed industry and virtue shall meet their just distinction and reward, and vicious idleness its merited contempt and destitution.'*[1]

There was a clearly expressed belief that the Union would develop in such a way as to replace the existing State and render it superfluous:

*'If every member of the Union be a constituent, and the Union itself become a vital member of the State, it instantly erects itself into a House of Trades which must supply the place of the present House of Commons, and direct the commercial affairs of the country, according to the will of the trades which compose the associations of industry.'*[2]

Soon, however, the Union was facing external and internal problems. In March the arrest and transportation of six Dorset farm workers from the village of Tolpuddle for the crime of administering oaths while forming a branch showed that the Government meant to act forcibly against what it regarded as a serious menace. The case aroused general indignation, uniting all sections of the working-class and radical movements from Cobbett and Fielden to O'Connor and the Owenites and trade unionists. At the same time, more strikes and lockouts were taking place everywhere, and all those involved expected help from the Union which it had no funds to give.

Meanwhile, an open quarrel deloped, with Owen opposed to James Morrison, editor of *The Pioneer,* the Union's journal, and to J. E. Smith, editor of *The Crisis,*

[1] G. D. H. Cole, *Life of Robert Owen,* 335.

[2] *The Pioneer,* May 31st, 1834. From Max Morris: *From Cobbett to the Chartists.*

which was more directly controlled by Owen. Owen accused them of preaching crude class hatred instead of concentrating on the peaceful transformation of society XII, 5). Smith wrote in *The Pioneer*:

> *'He means to work behind the curtain and yet be dictator. Now our move is to prevent this dictatorship, for we know it cannot be tolerated.'*

By the summer Owen had closed down both journals and Smith and Morrison were driven out of the movement.

By this time the G.N.C.T.U. was virtually dead, destroyed by the attacks of employers and government, by the inadequacy of its organisation and by the confusion of its ideas. Owen acknowledged this, in effect, by calling a congress of his supporters in August to set up a new organisation, The British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity and Knowledge, whose avowed purpose was to affect a reconciliation of classes throughout the country. Closing down *The Crisis,* he declared that its purpose had been served. The crisis was over, and the old world was about to pass away through a great moral revolution of the human mind. This new stage he proposed to signalise by a new journal, to be called *The New Moral World.*

His trade union supporters could not follow him on the new course. The G.N.C.T.U. continued for a few months in rapid decline till it finally disappeared, and with it ended Owen's influence over the mass of the workers. Henceforward Owenism was to continue as a sect, active and lively, but outside the main stream of working-class life. During the next few years there was a slow recovery of the trade union movement from the defeat of 1834, and a great political advance which led to the Chartist movement of 1837—48. With neither of these was Owen in any way directly concerned, though many Chartists as

individuals were still influenced by his socialist ideas and looked towards some sort of Co-operative Commonwealth as an ultimate ideal. But they rejected his tactics, seeing that the first step was to win control of the State, and that this could only be done through political struggle. In this new stage, Owenism began to seem irrelevant to the great majority of the people.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to regard this episode as effort wasted. For the first time the conception of the possibility of a completely new kind of society, based on equality and co-operation, had been put forward and had been accepted by thousands, perhaps by millions. The means by which Owen proposed to reach such a society were impracticable, the necessary conditions and forms of organisation did not yet exist, but the idea had been implanted and was never entirely to die. It is one of Owen's great positve achievements to have given to the masses in Britain their first conception of Socialism.

# IX

## Owen's Last Years

Owen was sixty-three in 1834: he was to live another twenty-four years, but it is important to remember that in 1834 he was already an old man by the standards of his time, and it is by the work he had done in these first sixty-three years, and not by the eccentricities of his old age, that he ought to be judged. And that work was surely substantial enough. Socialist thinker, enlightened industrialist, factory reformer, pioneer of education, founder, if almost by accident, of the Co-operative Movement, leader of a great episode in our trade union history: for any one of these things he would have deserved a place in history. Taken together they constitute a truly remarkable achievement, and we have no right to complain if he did not add anything significant to them in his last years.

Owenism, as an organised movement, now assumed a mainly propagandist character. The fall of the G.N.C.T.U. had brought down with it the Labour Exchanges, already in difficulties, and the productive Co-operative Societies which had throughout been closely connected with the trade unions. Some of the trading Co-operatives lasted longer, but very few survived to the time when Trading Co-operative Societies revived in a new form in the 1840's. The last of the series of Co-operative Congresses, which had begun in 1830, was the seventh in the spring of 1835, and both this and the sixth (March 1834) seem to have been quite small as compared with their predecessors. It is

true they were succeeded by a series of Socialist Congresses, but whereas the Co-operative Congresses had been composed in the main of delegates from Societies, these latter were little more than public meetings of individual followers of Owen.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underrate the extent and activity of the Owenite agitation. Active branches existed in scores of towns all over Britain, a number of full-time 'missionaries' were employed in lecturing and organisation, journals, pamphlets and leaflets were produced and distributed in large numbers and in the most important centres the Owenites had their own meeting places, often newly built and commonly known as Halls of Science. Holyoake, himself one of the most vigorous of these missionaries, writes of this time:

> *'In two years and a half two millions of tracts were circulated. At Manchester one thousand were distributed at public meetings every Sunday. In London 40,000 were given away in one year. During the Birmingham Congress half a million were dispersed. Fifty thousand copies of Mr. Owen's manifesto in reply to the Bishop of Exeter were sold. The outline of the rational system was translated into German, Polish and Welsh. At one meeting £50 was received for the sale of pamphlets. During one year fifty formal discussions were held with the clergy. During another 1,450 lectures were delivered, of which 604 were upon theology and ethics. Three hundred and fifty towns were regularly visited by missionaries, and the country was divided into fourteen missionary districts.'*[1]

As a result of all this, socialist and secularist ideas were widely circulated and influenced, directly or indirectly, a large part of what Engels calls the 'most educated and

[1] *History of Co-operation,* I, 244.

solid elements' of the working class. But far from being able, as Engels hoped in 1844, to advance to the standpoint of the working-class, Owenite Socialism as the years went by became more abstract and remote from reality. This is perhaps reflected in the grandiose titles of the organisations which succeeded one another but which in fact were only the same group under another name. Thus, the British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity and Knowledge, formed in 1834, was replaced in 1835 by the Association of All Classes of All Nations, and this in 1839 by the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists.

Meanwhile Owen, who since the *Report to the County of Lanark* had written little but a stream of manifestoes and addresses, began to produce a new series of books and pamphlets. The most substantial of these was *The Book of the New Moral World,* which appeared in parts between 1836 and 1844. It became a sort of sacred text for the Owenites, but in fact really adds nothing to what Owen had already written. Generally speaking, all his later books were more verbose and less carefully planned than those of the New Lanark period. The one which attracted most hostile attention was a pamphlet *The Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World* (1835), expounding his unorthodox views about marriage and the family (XIV). Like his religious beliefs (XIII) these were made the excuse for the most unjust attacks upon Owen, and upon his Socialist ideas with which, in fact, they have little connexion.

Owenism also returned to the old idea of establishing a Community. Once again subscriptions were collected from the Owenite bodies all over the country, and more substantial sums were given by well-to-do-disciples. In 1839 about 500 acres of rather poor land were leased at Queenwood in Hampshire, and a start was made. Owen at first opposed the project on the grounds that the capital available was inadequate: he now said that £250,000 was

the lowest sum with which a successful experiment could be made. Despite this, the attempt was made but soon began to encounter difficulties. In 1840 Owen formed a new body—the Home Colonisation Society—to raise additional capital, and in 1841 became Governor of the Community.

With the architect Joseph Hansom, who had earlier helped to form the Builder's Guild, he began construction at Queenwood on a magnificent scale. Both men were accustomed to think big, and they decided that everything about the new venture should be of the best: only the finest materials and craftsmanship were allowed, an excellent principle which swallowed up money as fast as Owen could collect it. At no time did the community ever approach the position of being self-supporting: few of the members, though they seem to have been of a better quality than those of New Harmony, were accustomed to the agricultural work, the necessary basis for such a venture.[1]

By 1844 the Owenite societies were becoming restive at the apparently never-ending demands Queenwood made upon them. At a Congress held in that year John Finch was elected President—a post hitherto automatically occupied by Owen—and resolutions were passed criticising Owen's administration. He at once resigned, and went to join his sons in the U.S.A. where he remained till 1847. In 1845 Queenwood was dissolved and the last and most ambitious experiment of its kind in Britain ended in a rather sordid legal squabble over the remaining assets.

[1] It is worth observing that the only community on Owenite lines which looked like being a success was that founded at Ralahine in Ireland under the influence of William Thompson. This was composed entirely of peasants, accustomed to hard work and plain living. It came to an end in 1833 only because the sympathetic landowner on whose estate it was formed had to sell it to pay his gambling debts.

The failure of Queenwood and the dissatisfaction which accompanied it virtually ended Owenism as a serious movement. When Owen returned from the U.S.A. he continued to hold meetings, wrote books, organised conferences and sent out addresses to all and sundry (IX, 1, 2, 3) but less and less attention was paid to them and the number of his supporters steadily diminished.

While Queenwood, the last of the old-style Co-operative ventures, was struggling for life, the first venture in the new style was opening in the North. In 1843 a few weavers in Rochdale, Lancashire, Owenites and Chartists, opened a small shop for the sale of groceries. It was on the face of it, a typical enterprise like hundreds that had begun and ended during the previous dozen years. Its rules even contained the usual hope 'that as soon as practicable the Society shall proceed to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education and government; or, in other words, to establish a self-supporting home-colony of united interests, or to assist other Societies in establishing such colonies.[1]

While the Rochdale Pioneers thus paid tribute to Owenite orthodoxy they made it an empty tribute by arranging to pay out their profits in the form of a dividend on purchases to their members. This innovation proved a success, the society flourished, and during the next decade scores of similar societies grew up, established themselves permanently, and were the true originators of the Co-operative Movement in the form which we know today. With all this Owen had no direct connexion: as we have seen he took little interest in, and even despised, such trading concerns as a petty travesty of his great Plan for world regeneration. Yet it was the work of his followers, and without his inspiration they could never have moved. The vast movement which grew up from these beginnings is right in thinking of Owen as its founder, though he

[1] G. D. H. Cole, *Life of Robert Owen*, 303.

would probably have thought poorly of it if he could have seen how it was to develop. As it grew, many of those who had been his intimate followers turned towards the new Co-operation, especially after his death when there was not even the shadow of an Owenite movement in the old sense.

In Owen's old age the Messianism which lies at the back of all utopianism grew stronger (XVI, 2, 3). The true second coming, a universal Jerusalem, spirit forces guiding the rulers of the world, his old supporter the Duke of Kent making appointments with him through mediums (VIII, 4; XVI, 4), became hopelessly confused with the realities of everyday life. Yet Owen was never at any stage insane, and in these very years he wrote his best and most readable book, *The Life of Robert Owen written by Himself,* which appeared only a year before his death. This, I think, is one of the great autobiographies, and it is unfortunate that it was unfinished, taking the account only to about the end of the New Lanark period. It is a narrative which helps us to understand why Owen, with all his failings, some of which must have been infuriating, was not only respected but loved by everyone who knew him. Even those who disagreed or had quarrelled with him seldom spoke of him afterwards with anything but affection.

Up to the end he went on writing and speaking: in 1857 he presided at and constantly addressed a 'Congress of Advanced Minds' which was held in London and fully reported in his last periodical *The Millennial Gazette.* In 1858 he was interested in the formation of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, in which Lord Brougham was a leading spirit.[1] At the end of October, though ill, he insisted on travelling to Liverpool to address its annual conference. After doing so he was

[1] Lord Brougham, Lord Chancellor in the Whig government of 1830-5, an old friend of Owen.

escorted or carried out and had to be put to bed. Recovering, he suddenly decided to visit his birthplace, Newtown, which he had not seen since his boyhood. There he immediately began to arrange a series of lectures, but was clearly dying.

*'Shortly before his death the local clergyman came to his bedside to offer him religious consolation. Owen declined the offer in the most decided manner, and when the minister asked him whether he did not regret having wasted his life in fruitless efforts, he made the proud rejoinder: "My life was not useless; I gave important truths to the world, and it was only for want of understanding that they were disregarded. I have been ahead of my time."'*[1]

Shortly after, on November 17th, 1858, he died.

[1] Max Beer, *History of British Socialism*, II, 174.

# X

## Owen and the French Utopians

Owen was convinced of the absolute originality of his plan and of his ideas about human nature and society. All the same, as Engels has pointed out, these ideas derived to a great extent from the work of the French philosophers of the Enlightenment. Owen shared with them the conviction that the interests of the individual and society ought to coincide and that only a rational reorganisation of society could produce this result. He shared their complete confidence in the powers of reason, their rational and secularist optimism, and, finally, their certainty that education is capable of changing man and society. There is, he constantly declared, no obstacle but ignorance.

It is difficult to say to what extent this coincidence of views was due to his reading. We have no evidence to show that Owen had ever read, for example the works of Helvetius or Holbach, or even those of Volney, whose book, *The Ruins, or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires* enjoyed a considerable popularity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Yet he may very well have read at any rate some of these things, for a number were published in English in this period and quite widely discussed.

The question is anyhow of minor importance. The fact that the ideas of the Enlightenment were widely discussed is sufficient reason for us to assume that they were familiar to him, if only at second hand. In his early days

he had been an active member of the Philosophical Society in Manchester, and one of his most important characteristics was his ability to grasp and assimilate any idea he needed for his special purposes. If he encountered these ideas in conversation rather than in books it would be all the easier to convince himself they had originated in his own mind. In this connexion the talks he had with the philosopher Godwin, with whom he became friendly in London in 1813, were perhaps of the greatest importance.

In the same kind of way Owen and the French utopian socialists, Saint-Simon and Fourier, would seem to have developed independently along paths that were often closely similar. Fourier, indeed, made some rather condescending remarks about Owen, and Fourier's system was the subject of a critical article in Owen's journal *The New Moral World* written by the young Owenite Goodwyn Barmby who had visited France and was well acquainted with French socialist writings. These comments, however, belong to a period well after the formation of Owen's ideas, and are no evidence that he had known of either Saint-Simon or Fourier during his experiments at New Lanark or when he was formulating his Plan for villages of co-operation.

Nevertheless the similarities remain striking and could have resulted from an infiltration of French utopian thinking, from the necessity of solving similar social problems, or, indeed, from a combination of both factors. A few of the more outstanding of these may be noted.

The first lies at the root of their social criticism. Owen condemned existing society, just as Saint-Simon and Fourier did, because of its irrationality. It is to this that they ascribe the origin of all human miseries. All other causes are secondary and derived. The remedy was the complete reconstruction of society on a new, rational basis.

Next we may note the insistence with which Owen declares that the old house must not be abandoned till the new one is ready (VIII, 5b) and compare this with the

minute detail in which Fourier elaborates the features of his ideal phalanstery.

Another significant point is that they all, Saint-Simon and Fourier even more completely than Owen, rejected the conception of a class struggle. Like him they saw no need for political democracy and hoped confidently to win the support of governments and of the rich. In this respect Owen, at least during the period when he was engaged with the trade union movement and in close contact with working-class co-operators, was in advance of the French utopian socialists.

Finally, and this is perhaps a universal characteristic of utopians, all three were convinced that they alone, by an extraordinary effort of their own reasoning powers, had discovered the final solution to all the problems which confronted the human race. Fourier wrote, for example: 'I alone have confounded twenty centuries of political stupidity, and it is to me alone that present and future generations will owe the foundation of their immense happiness.'[1] This messianic streak has made it dificult for utopian socialists to admit, even to themselves, that they have any ideological ancestors.

One more relationship may be noted, that between Owen and Cabet. We know that during his exile in England from 1834 to 1839 Cabet had many contacts and discussions with Owen and his disciples. Even if he drew his inspiration more directly from Fourier, his system includes a number of features which show Owenite influence. These include his insistence upon rational dress and communal meals, both of which points are developed by Cabet with the utmost detail. At a somewhat later date Cabet's ideas in turn had some influence in England and were assimilated into the stream of Owenism.

[1] *Textes Choisis,* ed. Félix Armand, 11.

# XI

## Conclusion

It is illuminating to compare the estimates of Owen and his work made by Engels in 1844 and in 1878 (XVII, 7). At first sight they seem contradictory, till we remember the circumstances in which they were written. In 1844 Engels was actively involved in the struggles of Chartism, in the actual development of a political movement and a political party among the British workers. From this point of view, Owenite socialism, standing apart from and claiming to be above the struggle, had to be criticised: only by descending into the arena and accepting the standpoint of the masses could the positive side of Owenism be developed. In fact, as we have seen, it proved unable to do this, and socialism *in this form* virtually disappeared. Socialism reappeared a generation later only in a new, Marxist, form, into which the positive side of Owenism had been absorbed.

Yet without this positive side it would not now be remembered, and Engels writing in 1878, on the eve of the rebirth of socialism in Britain, realises that this is the side on which it is now useful to dwell, that the mistakes which destroyed it are no longer a source of weakness to the movement and may be ignored. Engels now insists on Owen's greatness and the contributions he made to the advance of the working class in a whole number of fields. In a sense, it is a question of the stages of development of the working class.

Utopian socialism is a natural product of the first stage of growth, when the working class is 'just separating itself from the propertyless masses as the nucleus of a new class, as yet quite incapable of independent political action, [and] appeared as an oppressed, suffering estate of society, to which, in its incapacity to help itself, help could be brought at most from outside, from above'.[1] At this stage Owen had a real contribution to make. He set before the masses the conception of a different social order, based on co-operation and not on competition. He showed that the growth of machine production and large-scale industry, far from being an evil in itself, made the advance to this new society both necessary and possible. He put forward the idea, developed by Thompson and others, that labour is the source of wealth and the measure of value. He put forward also the idea that labour was not necessarily man's curse but could be made a source of fuller life and happiness. In advocating the abolition of the antagonism between town and country and of the excessive division of labour Owen was sketching the new conception of the role and purpose of labour which Marx and Morris were later to extend. Owenite socialism, like Marxist socialism, leads us to see man as the measure and master of things, not as their victim or slave.

By doing all this he played a great part in the development of the working class itself, helping it to a better understanding of society and of its own tasks. In the generation after Owen began to write (1815-45) the British working class was able to make an immense advance, in organisation, in clarity of ideas, in confidence. It ceased to be merely 'a suffering estate' and began to make history, to set itself the objective of conquering State power as a means of transforming the conditions of life.

In reaching this stage it owed much to Owen, but by reaching it it outgrew him. As we have seen, his mind was

[1] *Anti-Dühring*, 290-1.

formed early and it is not really surprising, or greatly to his discredit, that he was unable to develop his ideas to keep pace with the development of the working class. In 1834, his utopian socialism, based on abstract reason, and to be imposed from above by a benevolent dictatorship, had ceased to correspond to the needs and realities of the situation.

It is perhaps also true that Owen's mechanical determinism led inevitably to a growing rigidity. He saw man as the product of his environment, his character automatically shaped by his heredity and environment. And of course, as compared with the theories that human nature is unchangeable or that man is inherently sinful, there is a side of Owen's idea which is both true and progressive. But such a doctrine cannot really account for change: if man is wholly the product of his circumstances, how can he transform them? Owen attempted to get round this problem by supposing that to him alone the truth had been opened, and if mankind would listen to him this truth would set it free.

He never realised, and indeed this was something not yet understood, that man and his environment are dialectically related, that man by his struggle with his environment transforms both himself and it, that history is, in fact, a process in which human struggle, and in particular the struggle of classes, leads from one stage to the next.

Owen lived in an age of bitter and increasing class struggles, but he never understood them. For him class struggle was merely the outcome of ignorance and could be abolished by demonstrating that it was unreasonable. For this reason, though the workers were attracted by the prospect of socialism as he presented it, he was never able to be an effective leader of a class on the move. It has often been said that on his return from the U.S.A. in 1829 Owen turned to the workers—this is true in the sense that he came to see the organised workers as a means of realising his Plan. But it is at least as true to say that the

workers came to Owen, drawing him towards them, and, for a time, carrying him to an understanding which he would not otherwise have reached. They took from him not what he wished to give, nor what he thought he was giving, but what they needed from him—a confidence that if they were prepared to help themselves they could create a new society, and a conception of the shape which that society might take.

I have mentioned already the particular fields in which Owen was a pioneer, and in all these his contribution was important and will be remembered. But I think that in the end his place in the history of the Labour Movement will rest upon his part in developing the confidence and maturity of the British working class, the most advanced of its time in the world, at a critical stage of its growth.

# PART TWO

# Selected Writings

# I

# First Principles: Human Nature and Environment

[All Owen's ideas were based on a few simple principles about human character, which can be summed up in his dictum that man's character is formed for him and not by him. He believed that to change environment was speedily and directly to transform human nature. This belief, supported by his experiences at New Lanark, remained unaltered by any subsequent experience.]

## 1* MAN'S CHARACTER IS FORMED FOR HIM

From the earliest ages it has been the practice of the world to act on the supposition that each individual man forms his own character, and that therefore he is accountable for all his sentiments and habits, and consequently merits reward for some and punishment for others. Every system which has been established among men has been founded on these erroneous principles. When, however, they shall be brought to the test of fair examination, they will be found not only unsupported, but in direct opposition to all experience, and to the evidence of our senses.

This is not a slight mistake, which involves only trivial consequences; it is a fundamental error of the highest possible magnitude, it enters into all our proceedings regarding man from his infancy; and it will be found to be the

* *New View*, Cole, 44-5.

true and sole origin of evil. It generates and perpetuates ignorance, hatred and revenge, where, without such error, only intelligence, confidence, and kindness would exist. It has hitherto been the Evil Genius of the world. It severs man from man throughout the various regions of the earth; and it makes enemies of those who, but for this gross error, would have enjoyed each other's kind offices and sincere friendship. It is, in short, an error which carries misery in all its consequences.

This error cannot much longer exist; for every day will make it more evident *that the character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him; and that it may be, and is, chiefly created by his predecessors that they give him, or may give him, his ideas and habits, which are the powers that govern and direct his conduct. Man, therefore, never did, nor is it possible that he ever can, form his own character.*

The knowledge of this important fact has not been derived from any of the wild and heated speculations of an ardent and ungoverned imagination; on the contrary, it proceeds from a long and patient study of the theory and practice of human nature, under many varied circumstances; and it will be found to be a deduction drawn from such a multiplicity of facts, as to afford the most complete demonstration.

## 2* TRUE AND FALSE PRINCIPLES

Every society which now exists, as well as every society history records, has been formed and governed on a belief in the notions, assumed as *first principles:*

First—That it is in the power of every individual to form his own character.

Hence the various systems called by the name of religion, codes of law and punishments. Hence also the angry

* *New Lanark,* Cole, 109-110.

passions entertained by individuals and nations towards each other.

Second—That the affections are at the command of the individual.

Hence insincerity and degradation of character. Hence the miseries of domestic life, and more than one half of the crimes of mankind.

Third—That it is necessary that a large portion of mankind should exist in ignorance and poverty, in order to secure the remaining part such a degree of happiness as they now enjoy.

Hence a system of counteraction in the persuits of man, a general opposition among individuals to the interests of each other, and the necessary effects of such a system—ignorance, poverty, and vice.

Facts prove, however—

First—that character is universally formed *for,* and not *by* the individual.

Second—That *any* habits and sentiments may be given to mankind.

Third—That the affections are *not* under the control of the individual.

Fourth—That every individual may be trained to produce far more than he can consume, while there is a sufficiency of soil left for him to cultivate.

Fifth—That nature has provided means by which populations may be at all times maintained in the proper state to give the greatest happiness to every individual, without one check of vice or misery.

Sixth—That any community may be arranged, on a due combination of the foregoing principles, in such a manner, as not only to withdraw vice, poverty, and, in a great degree, misery, from the world, but also to place *every* individual under such circumstances in which he shall enjoy more permanent happiness than can be given to *any* individual under the principles which have hitherto regulated society.

Seventh—That all the assumed fundamental principles on which society has hitherto been founded are erroneous, and may be demonstrated to be contrary to fact. And—

Eighth—That the change which would follow the abandonment of these erroneous maxims which bring misery to the world, and the adoption of principles of truth, unfolding a system which shall remove and for ever exclude that misery, may be effected without the slightest injury to any human being.

## 3* CONDITIONS FOR HAPPINESS

A rational government . . . will know that the following conditions are requisite to the attainment of happiness by human nature:

1st. To have a good organisation at birth; and to acquire an accurate knowledge of its organs, faculties, propensities, and qualities.

2nd. To have the power of procuring at pleasure whatever is necessary to preserve the organisation in the best state of health; and to know the best mode by which to produce and distribute these requisites, for the enjoyment of all.

3rd. To receive from birth the best cultivation of our natural powers—physical, mental, moral, and practical—and to know how to give this training and education to others.

4th. To have the knowledge, the means, and the inclination, to promote continually, and without exception, the happiness of our fellow-beings.

5th. To have the inclination and means to increase continually our stock of knowledge.

6th. To have the power of enjoying the best society—

* *Revolution,* 53-4.

and more especially of associating, at pleasure, with those for whom we feel the greatest regard and affection.

7th. To have the means of travelling at pleasure, with pleasure.

8th. To have full liberty to express our thoughts upon all subjects.

9th. To have the utmost individual freedom of action, compatible with the permanent good of society.

10th. To have the character formed for us to express the truth only, in look, word, and action, upon all occasions—to have pure charity for the feelings, thoughts and conduct of all mankind—and to have a sincere good-will for every individual of the human race.

11th. To be without superstition, supernatural fears, and the fear of death.

12th. To reside in a society well situated, well organised, and well governed, whose laws, institutions, and arrangements, are all in unison with the laws of human nature; and to know the best means by which, in practice, to combine all the requisites to form such society.

### 4* OWEN'S MILLENNIUM

What ideas individuals may attach to the Millennium I know not; but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any, misery, and with happiness increased a hundred-fold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment, except ignorance, to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal.

### 5** OWEN'S ENLIGHTENMENT

Causes, over which I have no control, removed in my early days the bandage which covered my mental sight. If I

* *New Lanark,* Cole, 108. ** *New Lanark,* Cole, 106.

have been enabled to discover this blindness with which my fellow-men are afflicted, to trace their wanderings from the path which they were most anxious to find, and at the same time to perceive that relief could not be administered to them by any premature disclosure of their unhappy state, it is not from any merit of mine; nor can I claim any personal consideration whatever for having been myself relieved from this unhappy situation. But, beholding such truly pitiable objects around me, and witnessing the misery which they hourly experienced by falling into the dangers and evils by which, in these paths, they were on every side surrounded, could I remain an idle spectator? Could I tranquilly see my fellow-men walking like idiots in every imaginable direction, except that alone in which the happiness they were in search of could be found?

## 6* CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT: A PRISON EXPERIENCE

Having heard from various quarters what highly beneficial effects had been produced by Mrs. Fry, of St. Mildred's Court, Poultry, among the female prisoners in Newgate, I yesterday by previous appointment, accompanied that Lady, and was conducted by her through all the apartments of the prison occupied by the unfortunate females of every description. I shall not easily, if ever, forget the impressions I experienced; they were of a mixed and very opposite nature. In passing from room to room we were met in every instance (there was not one exception) with kind looks and the most evident feelings of affection in every prisoner towards Mrs. Fry. Not a feature in the countenance of any, however hardened they might have been on entering the prison, that did not evince, in strongest expression than language can define, their love and admiration for what she had done for them. With an

* *Catechism,* Cole, 185-7.

alacrity and pleasure that could be commended in the best-trained children in attending to parental requests, they were ready and willing to comply with her advice. It was evidently a heartfelt consolation to these poor creatures to know her wishes, that they might show their gratitude by an immediate compliance with them. She spoke in manner and voice the language of confidence, kindness, and commiseration to each; and she was replied to in such accordant feelings as are, and ever will be, produced in human beings, whenever they shall be spoken to and treated thus rationally. On quitting the prison the eyes of all were directed towards her until she was no longer in their sight. The apartments and the persons of the prisoners were clean and neat; order, regularity, decency and almost cheerful content pervaded the whole of these heretofore miserable and degraded wretches! With the constant habit, for years, of reading the mind in the countenance among the lower classes, I could not discover, throughout the numerous apartments we visited, one line of feature that denoted any inclination to resist, in the slightest degree, Mrs. Fry's wishes; but, on the contrary, the looks and manner of each female prisoner strongly indicated a full acquiescence in this new government of well-directed kindness. The only regret I heard expressed was by those who were unemployed, 'that they had no work'. All who had something to do were far more cheerful than I had previously supposed human beings could be in the situation, with the accommodation and under the circumstances here described. We next proceeded to the female school; and, on entering, every eye was fixed on their benefactress. The little girls, children of the prisoners and convicts, looked on her as human creatures might be imagined to look upon beings of a superior, intelligent, and beneficent nature. They were all clean and neat; and some of their countenances very interesting. The school was in excellent order, and appeared to be under good management.

I could not avoid contrasting the present with the former situation of all these poor unfortunates. What a change they must have experienced! from filth, bad habits, vice, crime—from the depth of degradation and wretchedness—to cleanliness, good habits, and comparative comfort and cheerfulness! Had not certain experience long made known to me the simplicity and certain effects of the principles which had here been carried into practice, I might have been led to inquire what profound statesman had been here? What large sums had been expended, How many years of active and steady perseverance had been necessary to accomplish this extraordinary improvement, which had foiled even the British Government and Legislature to effect during the centuries they have existed? And what would have been my astonishment at the simple narrative which was told me? That this change, from the depth of misery to the state described, was effected by Mrs. Fry and a few benevolent individuals of the Society of Friends, in three months, without any increased expense, and with feelings of high gratification to herself!

We left the female side of the prison, and passed to the rooms, courts, &c., occupied by the males. We went first to the boys' court, and found the school, which was formed at Mrs. Fry's request, had just been dismissed. The person acting as master asked if he should muster the boys; to which she consented, and it was instantly done. What a melancholy sight did they offer! A collection of boys and youths with scarcely the appearance of human beings in their countenance; the most evident sign that the Government to which they belong had not performed any part of its duty towards them. For instance; there was one boy, only sixteen years of age, double-ironed! Here a great crime has been committed, and a severe punishment has been inflicted, which under a system of proper training and prevention would not have taken place.

Lord Sidmouth will forgive me, for he knows I intend no personal offence. His dispositions are known to be

when so taught, hunt them like beasts of the forests, until they are entangled beyond escape in the toils and nets of the law? when, if the cxircumstances of those poor unpitied sufferers had been reversed with those who are even surrounded with the pomp and dignity of justice, these latter would have been at the bar of the culprit, and the former would have been at the judgement seat.

Had the present Judges of these realms been born and educated among the poor and profligate of St. Giles, or some similar situation, is it not certain, inasmuch as they possess native energies and abilities, that ere this they would have been at the head of their *then* profession, and, in consequence of that superiority and proficiency, would already have suffered imprisonment, transportation or death? Can we for a moment hesitate to decide, that if some of those men whom the laws dispensed by the present Judges have doomed to suffer capital punishments, had been born, trained and circumstanced as these Judges were born, trained and circumstanced, that some of those who had so suffered would have been the identical individuals who would have passed the same awful sentences on the present highly esteemed dignitaries of the law.

### 8* WOULD OWEN'S PLAN CREATE PAUPERISM?

[Owen here replies to Cobbett and other critics. Cobbett had described his village communities as 'parallelograms of paupers'. See also XVII, 2.]

I would here beg leave to ask these gentlemen—

If to train a child carefully and well, from earliest infancy, be a likely means to create, increase and perpetuate pauperism?

If to instruct a child in accurate and correct knowledge of facts be a likely means to create, increase and perpetuate pauperism?

* *Catechism,* Cole, 195-6.

If to give a child health, kind and benevolent dispositions, other good habits, and an active and cheerful industry, be a likely means to create, increase and perpetuate pauperism?

If, among the working classes, to instruct each male in the practice and knowlede of gardening, of agriculture, and in at least some one other trade, manufacture or occupation—if to instruct each female in the best method of treating infants and training children, in all the usual domestic arrangements to make themselves and others comfortable—in the practice and knowledge of gardening, and in some one useful, light and healthy manufacture; I ask if all or any of these parts of the plan be a likely means to create, increase and perpetuate pauperism?

If to remove the causes of ignorance, anger, revenge and every evil passion, be a likely means to create, increase and perpetuate pauperism?

If to train the whole population of a country to be temperate, industrious, and moral, be a likely means to create, increase and perpetuate pauperism?

If to unite in cordial union and mutual co-operation, without one feeling of distrust on the part of any, be a likely means to create, increase or perpetuate pauperism?

If to increase the wealth of the world fourfold, perhaps tenfold, not improbably a hundredfold—be a likely means to create, increase or perpetuate pauperism?

But I might proceed to ask these gentlemen many other questions, and to which, perhaps, they would not make so ready a reply as to those now put: one, however, shall suffice.

How do they propose to relieve the people from the ignorance, distress, and immorality with which the country abounds; and which, if not speedily checked, must soon overwhelm all ranks in one general scheme of confusion, disorder, and ruin?

(b)* During my childhood, and for many years afterwards, it never occurred to me that there was anything in my habits, thoughts, and actions different from those of others of my age; but when looking back and comparing my life with many others, I have been induced to attribute my favourable difference to the effects produced at the early period when my life was endangered by the spoonful of scalding flummery. Because from that time I was compelled to notice the effects produced by different kinds of food on my constitution, which had been also deeply injured in its powers of digestion. I could not eat and drink as others of my age, and I was thus compelled to live in some respects the life of a hermit as regards temperance. I entered, however, into the amusements of those of my own standing, and followed the games played by boys of that period in that part of the country—such as marbles, hand and foot ball, etc. I also attended the dancing school for some time, and in all those games and exercises I excelled not only those of my own age, but those two or three years older, and I was so active that I was the best runner and leaper, both as to height and distance, in the school. I attempted also to learn music, and to play upon the clarionet, and during my noviciate, as my father's house was in the middle of the principal street, I fear I must have annoyed all the neighbourhood—for my 'God Save the King' and similar tunes were heard all over the town. But I do not recollect that any formal complaint was ever made. I was too much of a favourite with the whole town for my benefit, and was often pitted against my equals, and sometimes against my superiors in age—sometimes for one thing and sometimes for another. I have often since reflected how unjust such proceedings are in principle, and how injurious in practice. One instance of this made a deep impression on my mind. Some party bet that I could write better than my next eldest

* *Life*, 3-6.

brother John, who was two years older; and upon a formal trial, at which judges were appointed, it was decided that my writing was better, although so far as I could then form an opinion I thought my brothers' was as good as my own. From that day I do not think my brother had as strong an affection for me as he had before this unwise competition.

### 3* APPRENTICE TO FLINT AND PALMER ON LONDON BRIDGE

I was lodged and boarded in the house, and had a salary of twenty-five pounds a year, and I thought myself rich and independent, for I had more than sufficient to supply all my personal wants. Soon, however, as the spring advanced, I found this was a different situation to the one I had enjoyed at Stamford. The customers were of an inferior class—they were treated differently. Not much time was allowed for bargaining, a price being fixed for everything, and, compared with other houses, cheap. . . . But to the assistants in this busy establishment the duties were very onerous. They were up and breakfasted and were ready to receive customers in the shop at eight o'clock; and dressing then was no slight affair. Boy as I then was, I had to wait my turn for the hairdresser to powder and pomatum and curl my hair, for I had two large curls on each side, and a stiff pigtail, and until all this was very nicely and systematically done, no one could think of appearing before a customer. Between eight and nine the shop began to fill with purchasers, and their number increased until it was crowded to excess, although a large apartment, and this continued until late in the evening; usually until ten, or halfpast ten, during all the spring months. Dinner and tea were hastily taken—two or three, sometimes only one, escaping at a time to take what he or she could most

* *Life*, 25-7.

when about nineteen years of age, to begin the world on my own account, having the promise of the machinery named to commence with. . . .

From Jones and his new partner I received *three* out of *six* mule machines which were promised, with the reel and making up machine. . . . Seeing I was not likely to obtain more machinery from my former partner I made up my mind to do as well as I could with that amount which I had obtained. With the three men spinning for me, reeling, and making up that which they spun, and by selling it weekly to Mr. Mitchell, I made on the average six pounds of profit a week and deemed myself doing well for a young beginner. . . .

About this period cotton spinning was so profitable that it began to engage the attention of many parties with capitals.

(b)* [A Mr. Drinkwater advertised for a manager for a big new spinning mill.]

I put on my hat and proceeded straight to Mr. Drinkwater's counting-house, and boy, and inexperienced, as I was, I asked him for the situation for which he had advertised. . . . He said immediately—'You are too young'—and at that time being fresh coloured I looked younger than I was. I said, 'That was an objection made to me four or five years ago, but I did not expect it would be made to me now.' 'How old are you?' 'Twenty in May this year'—was my reply. 'How often do you get drunk in the week?' (This was a common habit with almost all persons in Manchester and Lancashire at that period.) 'I was never', I said, 'drunk in my life'—blushing scarlet at this unexpected question. My answer and the manner of it made, I suppose, a favourable impression; for the next question was—'What salary do you ask?' 'Three hun-

* *Life*, 37.

dred a year'—was my reply. 'What?' Mr. Drinkwater said, with some surprise, repeating the words—'Three hundred a year! I have had this morning I know not how many seeking the situation, and I do not think that all their askings together would amount to what you require.' 'I cannot be governed by what others may ask,' said I, 'and I cannot take less. I am now making that sum by my own business.' 'Can you prove that to me?' 'Yes, I will show you the business and my books.' 'Then I will go with you, and let me see them', said Mr. Drinkwater. [Owen proved his profits, got the job, and made a great success of it.]

(c)* Some idea may be formed of the success of the manufacture in which I was engaged for Mr. Drinkwater from the fact that I gave five shilling a pound for cotton, which, when finished into fine thread for the muslin weaver, extending to near 250 hanks in the pound, I sold for £9/18/6 per pound. This was sold at the commencement of 1792 to Alexander Speirs of Kilbarchan, who made it into muslins, the first piece of which he sent as a present, as the greatest curiosity of British manufacture, to old Queen Charlotte. I extended afterwards the fineness of the thread to upwards of 300 hanks in the pound, and if this had been sold at the same period, it would have brought upwards of thirty-six pounds sterling for one pound of the yarn; but this prosperity in the manufacture was checked by the war with France, and the same high prices were I believe never afterwards obtained for the same fineness or number of hanks.

My name was now up for being the finest cotton spinner in the world, and this was my standing as long as I remained the manager of Mr. Drinkwater's factory.

* *Life*, 48.

# III

# Owen at New Lanark

[Owen went to New Lanark an unknown Manchester manufacturer: it was his work there which made him a nationally famous figure and gave him an audience for his social theories. See also Chapters VI, for pauper apprentices, and VII for the New Lanark schools.]

## 1 WHAT OWEN FOUND AT NEW LANARK

(a)* In the year 1784 the late Mr. Dale, of Glasgow, founded a manufactory for spinning cotton, near the falls of the Clyde, in the county of Lanark, in Scotland; and about that period cotton mills were first introduced into the northern part of the kingdom.

It was the power which could be obtained from the falls of water that induced Mr. Dale to erect his mills in this situation; for in other respects it was not well chosen. The country around was uncultivated; the inhabitants were poor and few in number; and the roads in the neighbourhood were so bad, that the Falls, now so celebrated, were then unknown to strangers. It was therefore necessary to collect a new population to supply the infant establishment with labourers. . . . Those who have a practical knowledge of mankind will readily anticipate the

* *New View,* Cole, 26-7.

character which a population so collected and constituted would acquire.

(b)* I soon found that I had every bad habit and practice of the people to overcome. They were intemperate and immoral, with very few exceptions, throughout the whole establishment. The brother of one of the chief managers was in the frequent practice of taking what is called a *'spree'*—that is being intoxicated day after day weeks together, without attending to his occupation during the whole period. Theft was very general, and was carried on to an enormous and ruinous extent, and Mr. Dale's property had been plundered in all directions, and had been considered almost public property. The population had been collected from anywhere and anyhow, for it was then most difficult to induce any sober, well-doing family to leave their home to go into cotton mills as then conducted.

(c)** The population of New Lanark at this period consisted of about 1,300, settled in the village as families, and between 400 and 500 pauper children, procured from the parishes, whose ages appeared to be from five to ten —but said to be from seven to twelve. These children were by Mr. Dale's directions well lodged, fed, and clothed, and there was some attempt made to teach them to read and to teach some of the oldest to write, after the business of the long day was over. But this kind of instruction, when the strength of the children was exhausted, only tormented them, without doing any real good—for I found that none of them understood anything they attempted to read, and many of them fell asleep during the school hours.

The instructor was a good schoolmaster, on the old mode of teaching, and kind and considerate to the chil-

* *Life*, 79-80. ** *Life*, 83-4.

difficult to attain. My language was naturally different from their Lowland Scotch and the Highland Erse, for they had a large number of Highlanders among them. I therefore sought out the individuals who had the most influence among them from their natural powers or position, and to these I took pains to explain what were my intentions for the changes I wished to effect. . . .

By these means I began slowly to make an impression upon some of the least prejudiced and most reasonable among them; but the suspicions of the majority, that I only wanted, as they said, to squeeze as much gain out of them as possible, were long continued. I had great difficulty also in teaching them cleanly habits, and order and system in their proceedings. Yet each year a sensible general improvement was effected.

The retail shops, in all of which spirits were sold, were great nuisances. All the articles sold were bought on credit at high prices, to cover great risks. The qualities were most inferior, and they were retailed out to the work-people at extravagant rates. I arranged superior stores and shops, from which to supply every article of food, clothing, etc., which they required. I bought everything in the first markets, and contracted for fuel, milk, etc., on a large scale and had the whole of these articles of the best qualities supplied to the people at cost price. . . .

The effect of this soon became visible in their improved health and superior dress, and in the general comfort of their houses.

[In 1806 a trade crisis gave Owen his opportunity. Instead of closing the mills, he says,] I therefore concluded to stop all the machinery, retain the people, and continue to pay them their full wages for only keeping the machinery clean and in good working condition . . . . and during that period the population of New Lanark received more than seven thousand pounds sterling for their unemployed time, without a penny being deducted from the full wages of anyone.

These proceedings won the confidence and hearts of the whole population, and henceforward I had no obstructions from them in my progress of reform, which I continued in all ways, as far as I thought my monied partners would permit me to proceed, and indeed until their mistaken notions stopped my further progress.
[David Dale had acted in a similar manner some years earlier, when part of the mills was destroyed by fire.]

### 3* THE SILENT MONITOR

I was greatly averse to punishments, and much preferred as far as possible simple means to render punishment unnecessary, as it is always unjust to the individual. To prevent punishment by the overlooker and masters of departments who had been accustomed to whip and strap the young people, and who often from ignorance abused their authority, I invented what the people soon called a telegraph.

This consisted of a four-sided piece of wood, about two inches long, and one broad, each side coloured—one side black, another blue, the third yellow, and the fourth white, tapered at the top, and finished with wire eyes, to hang upon a hook with either side to the front. One of these was suspended in a conspicious place near to each of the persons employed, and the colour at the front told the conduct of the individual during the preceding day, to four degrees by comparison. Bad, denoted by black, indifferent by blue, good by yellow and excellent by white.**

This was the preventer of punishment. There was no beating—no abusive language. I passed daily through all the rooms, and the workers observed me always to look at these telegraphs—and when black I merely looked at the person and then a the colour—but never said a word to one of them by way of blame. And if any one

* *Life,* 188-9. ** This paragraph is interpolated from *Life,* 111.

thought the inferior colour was not deserved by him as given, it was desired that complaint should be made to me. But this seldom occurred. Now this simple device and silent monitor began to show its effects upon the character of the workers. At first a large proportion daily were black and blue, few yellow and scarcely any white. Gradually the black were changed for blue, the blues for yellow, and the yellows for white. And for many years the permanent daily conduct of a very large number of those who were employed, deserved and had No. 1 placed as their character on the books of the establishment. Soon after the adoption of this telegraph I could at once see by the expression of the countenance what was the colour which was shown. As there were four colours there were four different expressions of countenance most evident to me as I passed along the rooms.

Never perhaps in the history of the human race has so simple a device created in so short a period so much order, virtue, goodness, and happiness, out of so much ignorance, error, and misery.

[It is often said that in this, and other ways, Owen treated his work-people as if they were children. There is some truth in this, but it must be remembered that a large proportion of them *were* children. And it was always with children that Owen was most successful.]

## 4* OWEN AND HIS PARTNERS

[Owen was constantly frustrated by partners who only wanted the maximum profit. After various changes he found a new group, including Jeremy Bentham the philosopher, and several Quakers, who were ready to give him a free hand. His old partners were unaware of this,

* *Life*, 121-8.

and hoped to buy Owen out at a bargain price. The sale took place in 1813.]

Previous to the sale they took measures to circulate reports to deteriorate the value of my New Lanark establishment, and to lower my character as manager of it. They stated that I had visionary and wild schemes for the education of the children and the improvement of the character of the people—schemes that no one but myself ever thought or believed to be practicable. They said they had given eighty-four thousand pounds for the establishment, and they did not think it now worth forty thousand pounds, and should be too happy to obtain that sum at the coming sale. . . .

I did not meet them until the morning of the sale, to decide upon what should be what is called the upset price [reserve price]. The first question which I asked them was —'What do you propose shall be the upset price?' They said, as I expected, forty thousand pounds. I said—'Will you now take sixty thousand pounds for the property?' 'No—we will not,' was their immediate reply. 'Then it shall be put up at sixty thousand pounds.' And they were under the necessity in consequence of their reply to admit of this decision.

My proposed new partners while we were all met in London asked me the price which I thought the property was now worth. I said we should not let it be purchased from us at less than one hundred and twenty thousand pounds. And it was concluded that I should be empowered to bid to that amount.

[At the auction Owen's agent bought the property for £114,100 much to the disgust of his former partners.]

Mr. John Atkinson, who had been a partner with me in the establishment from the beginning, and who therefore knew its value, went immediately from the sale room, while his feelings were highly excited . . . and said, with great emphasis—'Confound that Owen! He has bought it and twenty thousand pounds too cheap!' There were

the partners who for so many months had been crying down the value of the establishment, and saying they would be glad to get forty thousand pounds for it!

[That night they were dining with a Colonel Hunter.]

The Colonel was a straightforward, bold, honest man and feared no one; and he was determined to make these parties feel the new position in which they had placed themselves. He therefore asked permisson to propose a toast, which was readily acceded to, and he gave 'Success to the parties who had this morning sold a property by public sale for one hundred and fourteen thousand one hundred pounds, which a little time ago they valued only at forty thousand pounds!' adding. 'Fill a bumper to a success so wonderful and extraordinary!' His toast, however, instead of arousing the spirits of my opponents, acted, I was told, as an additional damper.

## 5* THE FINAL LESSON OF NEW LANARK

The real cause of this happiness was unknown to them and to the public; but so obvious were the beneficial results even to passing strangers, that the establishment and its appendages became familiarly known as 'The Happy Valley'. . . .

In a few years I had accomplished for this population as much as such a manufacturing system would admit of; and although the poor work-people were content, and, by contrast with other manufacturing establishments and all other work-people under this old system, deemed themselves so much better treated and cared for, and were highly satisfied, yet I knew it was a miserable existence compared with that which, with the immense means at the control of all governments, might now be created for every population over the world.

I could do no more for mere manufacturing popula-

* *Revolution*, 16-17.

tion, for manufacturers are not the true foundation of society. And, after all, what had I done for these people? —what was their real condition, even with all the expenditure which had been incurred, and the measures which had been adopted to improve it?

The people were slaves at my mercy; liable at any time to be dismissed; and knowing that, in that case, they must go into misery, compared with such limited happiness as they now enjoyed.

And yet the working part of this population of 2,500 persons was daily producing as much real wealth for society, as, less than half a century before, it would have required the working part of a population of 600,000 to create. I asked myself what became of the difference between the wealth consumed by 2,500 persons and that which would have been consumed by 600,000; and the consideration enforced upon me even more powerfully than I had previously appreciated them, the errors and gross irrationality of the present system, in inflicting so much misery upon all, but more especially upon the producing classes, while such enormously superabundant means to produce wealth and happiness for all, are at the control of society and utterly neglected.

## 6* A REPORT ON NEW LANARK

[Owen's claims about the change he made at New Lanark are confirmed by the evidence of many visitors, like the deputation sent in August 1819 by the Guardians of the Poor in Leeds. It reported:]

Mr. Owen's establishment at Lanark is essentially a manufacturing establishment, conducted in a manner superior to any other the deputation ever witnessed, and dispensing more happiness than perhaps any other institu-

* *Life, IA,* 254-6.

tion in the kingdom where so many poor persons are employed; and is founded on an admirable system of moral regulation. . . .

In the education of the children the thing that is most remarkable is the general spirit of kindness and affection, which is shown towards them, and the entire absence of everything that is likely to give them bad habits—with the presence of whatever is calculated to inspire them with good ones; the consequence is, that they appear like one well-regulated family, united together by the ties of the strongest affection. . . .

In the adult inhabitants of New Lanark we saw much to commend. In general they appeared clean, healthy and sober. Intoxication, the parent of so many vices and so much misery, is indeed almost unknown here. The consequence is that they are well clad, and well fed, and their dwellings are inviting. . . .

In this well-regulated colony, where almost everything is made, wanted by either the manufactory or its inhabitants, no cursing or swearing is any where to be heard. There are no quarrelsome men or brawling women.

These effects arise partly out of the moral culture of the place—partly from the absence of public houses, as we have before said—and partly from the seclusion of the inhabitants from the rest of the world, if that can be called seclusion where 2,500 persons are congregated within the narrow compass of a quarter of a square mile.

High wages, it is manifest, are not the cause of the comfort which prevails here. Among us their wages would be thought low. The wages of those under eighteen years of age, per week, are, for the males that work by the day, 4s. 3d.; for the females 3s. 5d.; and for those that work by the piece, 5s. 4d. for the former and 4s. 7d. for the latter. The average weekly wages for those above eighteen years of age are, for men, 9s. 11d.; for women, 6s. by the day; and 14s. 10d. for the former, and 8s. for the latter by the piece.

# IV

## The Industrial Revolution

[Owen was among the first to understand the nature of the Industrial Revolution, with its vast possibilities of increased wealth and the actual misery it brought to the masses. He certainly took too rosy a view of the past, but he knew the England of his day. The strength and weakness of his analysis may best be judged by comparing it with that of *The Communist Manifesto.*]

### 1* CONSEQUENCES OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Not more than thirty years since, the poorest parents thought the age of fourteen sufficiently early for their children to commence regular labour: and they judged well; for by that period of their lives they had acquired by play and exercise in the open air, the foundations of a sound robust constitution; and if they were not all initiated in book learning, they had been taught the far more useful knowledge of domestic life, which could not but be familiar to them at the age of fourteen, and which, as they grew up and became the heads of families, was of more value to them (as it taught them economy in the expenditure of their earnings) than one half of their wages under the present circumstances.

* *Observations,* Cole, 122-7.

It should be remembered also that twelve hours per day, including the time for regular rest and meals, were then thought sufficient to extract all the working strength of the most robust adult; when it may be remarked local holidays were much more frequent than at present in most parts of the kingdom.

At this period, too, they were generally trained by the example of some landed proprietor, and in such habits as created a mutual interest between the parties, by which means even the lowest peasant was generally considered as belonging to, and forming somewhat of a member of, a respectable family. Under these circumstances the lower orders experienced not only a considerable degree of comfort, but they had also frequent opportunities of enjoying healthy rational sports and amusements; and in consequence they became strongly attached to those on whom they depended; their services were willingly performed; and the mutual good offices bound the parties by the strongest ties of human nature to consider each other as friends in somewhat different situations; the servant indeed often enjoying more solid comfort and ease than his master.

Contrast this state affairs with that of the lower orders of the present day—with human nature trained as it now is, under the new manufacturing system.

In the manufacturing districts it is common for parents to send their children of both sexes at seven or eight years of age, in winter as well as summer, at six o'clock in the morning, sometimes of course in the dark, and occasionally amidst frost and snow, to enter the manufactories, which are often heated to a high temperature, and contain an atmosphere far from being the most favourable to human life, and in which all those employed in them very frequently continue until twelve o'clock at noon when an hour is allowed for dinner, after which they return to remain, in the majority of cases, till eight o'clock at night.

The children now find they must labour incessantly for

their bare subsistence: they have not been used to innocent, healthy, and rational amusements; they are not permitted the requisite time, it they had been previously accustomed to enjoy them. They know not what relaxation means, except by the actual cessation from labour. They are surrounded by others similiarly circumstanced with themselves; and thus passing on from childhood to youth, they become gradually initiated, the young men in particular, but often the young females also, in the seductive pleasures of the pot-house and inebriation; for which their daily hard labour, want of better habits, and the general vacuity of their minds, tend to prepare them.

Such a system of training cannot be expected to produce any other than a population weak in bodily and mental faculties, and with habits generally destructive of their own comforts, of the well-being of those around them, and strongly calculated to subdue all the social affections. Man so circumstanced sees all around him hurrying forward, at a mail coach speed, to acquire individual wealth, regardless of him, his comforts, his wants, or even his sufferings, except by way of a *degrading parish charity* fitted only to steel the heart of man against his fellows, or to form the tyrant and the slave. Today he labours for one master, tomorrow for a second, then for a third, and a fourth, until all the ties between employers and employed are frittered down to the consideration of what immediate gain each can derive from the other.

[Owen goes on to propose, as remedy, an Act of Parliament to regulate factory hours and conditions.]

Those measures, when influenced by no party feelings or narrow mistaken notions of immediate self-interest, but considered solely in a national view, will be found beneficial to the child, to the parent, to the employer, and to the country. . . .

I do not anticipate any objection from employers to the age named [ten years] for the admittance of children into

their manufactories; or to the children being previously trained in good habits and the rudiments of common learning; for upon an experience abundantly sufficient to ascertain the fact, I have uniformly found it to be more profitable to admit children to constant daily employment at ten years old than at any earlier period; and that those children, or adults, who had been the best taught, made the best servants, and were by far the most easily directed to do everything that was right and proper for them to perform. The proprietors of expensive establishments may object to the reduction of the *now* customary hours of labour. The utmost extent, however, of their argument is, that the rent or interest of the capital expended in forming the establishment is chargeable on the quantity of its produce—and if, instead of being permitted to employ their work-people within their manufactories so long as fourteen or fifteen hours per day, they shall be restricted to twelve hours of labour per day from their work-people, then the prime cost of the article which they manufacture will be increased by the greater proportion of the rent or interest which attaches to the smaller quantity produced. If, however, this law shall be, as it is proposed, general over England, Scotland, and Ireland, whatever difference may ultimately arise in the prime cost of the articles produced in these manufactories, will be borne by the consumers, and not by the proprietors of such establishments. And, in a national view, the labour which is exerted twelve hours per day will be obtained more economically than if stretched to a longer period.

I doubt, however, whether any manufactory, so arranged as to occupy the hands employed in it twelve hours per day, will not produce its fabric, even to the immediate proprietor, nearly if not altogether as cheap as those in which the exertions of the employed are continued to fourteen or fifteen hours per day.

Should this, however, not prove to be the case to the extent mentioned, the improved health, the comforts, use-

ful acquirements of the population, and the diminution of the poor-rates, naturally consequent upon this change in the manners and habits of the people, will amply compensate the country for a mere fractional addition to the prime cost of any commodity.

And is it to be imagined that the British Government will ever put the chance of a trivial pecuniary gain to a few, in competition with the solid welfare of so many millions of human beings?

[Owen's arguments have proved correct, but he was soon to discover that he was wrong in thinking the manufacturers would not object to such regulations, or that the Government would put the welfare of the workers before the employer's demand for unlimited profit. So stubborn was the opposition that it was some half century before the measures Owen proposed could be secured. See Chapter VI.]

## 2* THE PHILOSOPHY OF HIGH WAGES

Every master manufacturer is most anxious to have his work cheaply performed, and as he is perpetually exerting all his faculties to attain this object, he considers low wages to be essential to his success. By one master or another, every means are used to reduce wages to the lowest possible point, and if one succeeds the others must follow in their own defence. Yet when the subject is properly considered, no evil ought to be more dreaded by master manufacturers than low wages of labour, or a want of means to procure reasonable comfort among the working class. These, in consequence of their numbers, are the greatest consumers of all articles; and it will always be found that when wages are high the country prospers;

* *Manufacturers*, Cole, 143-4.

and when they are low, all classes suffer, from the highest to the lowest, but more particularly the manufacturing interest; for food must be first purchased and the remainder only of the labourer's wages can be expended in manufactures. It is therefore essentially the interest of the master manufacturer that wages of the labourer should be high, and that he should be allowed the necessary time and instruction to enable him to expend them judiciously —which is not possible under the existence of our present practices. . . .

The most substantial support of the trade, commerce and manufactures of this and of any other country are the labouring classes of its population: and the real prosperity of any nation may be at all times accurately ascertained by the amount of wages, or the extent of the comforts which the productive classes can obtain in return for their labour. . . .

But when ignorance, overwork and low wages are combined, not only is the labourer in a wretched condition, but all the higher classes are essentially injured, although none will suffer in consequence more severely than the master manufacturer, for the reason which has been before stated.

### 3* CAUSES OF THE POST-WATERLOO CRISIS

The immediate cause of the present distress is the depreciation of human labour. This has been occasioned by the general introduction of mechanism into the manufactures of Europe and America, but principally into those of Britain, where the change was greatly accelerated by the inventions of Arkwright and Watt.

The introduction of mechanism into the manufacture of objects of desire in society reduced their price; the reduc-

* *Relief of Poor,* Cole, 156-8.

tion of price increased the demand for them, and generally to so great an extent as to occasion more human labour to be employed after the introduction of machinery than had been employed before.

The first effects of these new mechanical combinations were to increase individual wealth, and to give a new stimulus to further inventions.

Thus one mechanical improvement gave rise to another in rapid succession; and in a few years they were not only generally introduced into the manufactures of these kingdoms, but were eagerly adopted by other nations of Europe, and by America. . . .

The war itself, when it had extended its ravages over Europe, to Asia and to America, seemed but a new stimulus to draw forth our endless resources; and in its effects the war did so operate. The destruction of human life in its prime, which it caused throughout the world, and the waste of all the materials necessary for war on so large a scale—perhaps unparalleled in ancient or modern times—created a demand for various productions, which the overstrained industry of British manufacturers, added by all the mechanism they could invent and bring into action, was hardly competent to supply.

But peace at length followed, and found Great Britain in possession of a new power in constant action, which, it may be safely stated, exceeded the labour of *one hundred millions* of the most industrious human beings, in the full strength of manhood. . . .

Thus our country possessed, at the conclusion of the war, a productive power, which operated to the same effect as if her population had been actually increased fifteen or twentyfold; and this has been chiefly created within the preceding twenty-five years. The rapid progress made by Great Britain, during the war, in wealth and political influence, can therefore no longer astonish: the cause was quite adequate to the effect.

Now, however, new circumstances have arisen. The

war demand for the productions of labour having ceased, markets could no longer be found for them; and the revenues of the world were inadequate to purchase that which a power so enormous in its effects did produce: a diminished demand consequently followed. When, therefore, it became necessary to contract the sources of supply, it soon proved that mechanical power was much cheaper than human labour; the former, in consequence, was continued at work, while the latter was superseded; and human labour may now be obtained at a price far less than is absolutely necessary for the subsistence of the individual in ordinary comfort.

# V

# Economic Theory

[In Owen's writings we can find the first expression of many ideas which were elaborated by such English socialists as Gray, Hodgskin and Thompson and were to play a great part in the development of socialist theory. Among them were the ideas of labour as the source of wealth and the measure of value, and of the abolition of the opposition between town and country. Owen's refutation of Malthus is also notable.]

## 1* LABOUR THE SOURCE OF WEALTH

The evil for which your Reporter has been required to provide a Remedy, is the general want of employment at wages sufficient to support the family of a working man benefically to the community.

After most earnest consideration of the subject he has been compelled to conclude that such employment cannot be procured through the medium of trade, commerce, or manufactures, or even of agriculture, until the Government and the Legislature, cordially supported by the country, shall previously adopt measures to remove obstacles which, without their interference, will now permanently deteriorate all the resources of the empire.

* *Report,* Cole, 245-8.

Your reporter has been impressed with the truth of this conclusion by the following considerations:

First—That manual labour, properly directed, is the source of all wealth, and of national prosperity.

Second—That, when properly directed, labour is of far more value to the community than the expense necessary to maintain the labourer in considerable comfort.

Third—That manual labour, properly directed, may be made to continue this value in all parts of the world, under any supposable increase in its population, for many centuries to come.

Fourth—That, under a proper direction of manual labour, Great Britain and its dependencies may be made to support an incalculable increase of its population, most advantageously for all its inhabitants.

Fifth—That when manual labour shall be so directed, it will be found that population cannot, for many years, be stimulated to advance as rapidly as society might be benefitted by its increase. . . .

Your reporter directed his attention to the consideration of the possibility of devising arrangements by means of which the whole population might participate in the benefits derivable from the increase of scientific productive power; and he has the satisfaction to state to the meeting, that he has strong grounds to believe that such arrangements are practicable.

His opinion on this important part of the subjects is founded on the following considerations:

First—It must be admitted that scientific or artificial aid to man increases his productive powers, his natural wants remaining the same; and in proportion as his productive powers increase he becomes less dependent on his physical strength and on the many contingencies connected with it.

Second—That the direct effect of every addition to scientific or mechanical and chemical power is to increase wealth; and it is found, accordingly, that the immediate

causes of the present want of employment for the working classes is an excess of production of all kinds of wealth, by which, under the existing arrangements of commerce, all markets of the world are overstocked.

Third—That, could markets be found, an incalculable addition might yet be made to the wealth of society, as is most evident from the number of persons who seek employment, and the far greater number who, from ignorance, are inefficiently employed, but still more from the means we posses of increasing, to an unlimited extent, our scientific powers of production.

Fourth—That the deficiency of employment for the working classes cannot proceed from a want of wealth or capital, or of the means of greatly adding to that which now exists, but from some defect in the mode of distributing that extraordinary addition of new capital throughout society, or, to speak commercially, from the want of a market, or means of exchange, co-extensive with the means of production.

Were effective measures devised to facilitate the distribution of wealth after it was created, your Reporter could have no difficulty in suggesting the means of beneficial occupation for all who are unemployed, and for a considerable increase to their number.

## 2* LABOUR AS THE TRUE STANDARD OF VALUE

One of the measures which he thus ventures to propose, *to let prosperity loose on the country* (if he may be allowed the expression) is *a change in the standard of value.*

It is true that in the civilized parts of the world gold and silver have long been used for this purpose; but these metals have been a mere artificial standard, and they have performed the office very imperfectly and inconveniently. . . .

* *Report,* Cole, 248-51.

A temporary expedient was thought of and adopted, and Bank of England paper became the British legal standard of value—a convincing proof that society may make any artificial substance, whether possessing intrinsic worth or not, a legal standard of value. . . .

Your Reporter, then, after deeply studying these subjects, practically and theoretically, for a period exceeding thirty years, and during which his practice without a single exception has confirmed the theory which practice first suggested, now ventures to state, as one of the results of this study and experience,

THAT THE NATURAL STANDARD OF VALUE IS, IN PRINCIPLE, HUMAN LABOUR, OR THE COMBINED MANUAL AND MENTAL POWERS OF MEN CALLED INTO ACTION.

And that it would be highly benefical, and has now become absolutely necessary, to reduce this principle into immediate practice.

It will be said, by those who have taken a superfical or mere partial view of the question, that human labour or power is so unequal in individuals, that its average amount cannot be estimated.

Already, however, the average physical power of man as well as of horses (equally varied in the individuals), has been calculated for scientific purposes, and both now serve to measure inanimate powers.

On the same principle the average of human labour or power may be ascertained, and as it forms the essence of all wealth, its value in every article of produce may also be ascertained, and its exchangeable value with all other values fixed accordingly; the whole would be permanent for a given period.

Human labour would thus acquire its natural or intrinsic value, which would increase as science advanced; and this is, in fact, the only really useful object of science.

The demand for human labour would no longer be subject to caprice, nor would the support of human life be made, as at present, a perpetually varying article of commerce, and the working classes made the slaves of an artificial system of wages, more cruel in its effects than any slavery ever practised by society, either barbarous or civilized.

### 3* UNITY OF AGRICULTURE AND MANUFACTURE

Society, ever misled by closet theorists, has committed almost every kind of error in practice, and in no instance perhaps a greater, than in separating the workman from his food, and making his existence depend upon the labour and uncertain supplies of others, as is the case under our present manufacturing system; and it is a vulgar error to suppose that a single individual more can be supported by such a system than without it; on the contrary, a whole population engaged in agriculture, with manufactures as an appendage, will, in a given district, support many more, and in a much higher degree of comfort, than the same district could do with its agriculture separate from its manufacturing population.

Improved arrangements for the working classes will, in almost all cases, place the workman in the midst of his food, which it will be as beneficial for him to create as to consume.

Sufficient land, therefore, will be allotted to these cultivators, to enable them to raise an abundant supply of food and the necessaries of life for themselves, and as much additional agricultural produce as the public demands may require from such a portion of the population.

Under a well-devised arrangement for the working classes they will all procure for themselves the necessaries

* *Report*, Cole, 266-7.

and comforts of life in so short a time, and so easily and pleasantly, that the occupation will be experienced to be little more than a recreation, sufficient to keep them in the best health and spirits for rational enjoyment of life.

The surplus produce from the soil will be required only for the higher classes, those who live without manual labour, and those whose nice manual operations will not permit them at any time to be employed in agriculture and gardening.

Of the latter, very few, if any will be necessary, as mechanism may be made to supersede such operations, which are almost always injurious to health.

## 4* PRINCIPLES OF EXCHANGE

Society has been hitherto so constituted that all parties are afraid of being over-reached by others, and, without great care to secure their individual interests, of being deprived of the means of existence. This feeling has created a universal selfishness of the most ignorant nature, for it almost *ensures* the evils which it means to prevent.

These new associations can scarcely be formed before it will be discovered that by the most simple and easy regulations all the natural wants of human nature may be abundantly supplied; and the principle of selfishness (in the sense in which the term is here used) will cease to exist for want of an adequate motive to produce it.

It will be quite evident to all, that wealth of that kind which will alone be held in any estimation amongst them may be so easily created to exceed all their wants, that every desire for individual accumulation will be extinguished. To them individual accumulation of wealth will appear as irrational as to bottle up or store water in

* *Report*, Cole, 288-90.

situations where there is more of this invaluable fluid than all can consume.

With this knowledge, and the feelings that will arise from it, the existing thousand counteractions to the creation of new wealth will also cease, as well as those innumerable motives to deception which now pervade all ranks in society. A principle of equity and justice, openness and fairness, will influence the whole proceedings of these societies. There will, consequently, be no difficulty whatever in the exchange of the products of labour, mental or manual, among themselves. . . .

The peculiar produce to be raised in each establishment, beyond the general supply of the necessaries and comforts of life, which, if possible, will be abundantly created in each, will be adapted to afford the greatest variety of intrinsically valuable objects to exchange with each other; and the particular surplus products which will serve to give energy and pleasure to the industry of the members of each association will be regulated by the nature of the soil and climate and other local capabilities of the situation of each establishment. In all these labour will be the standard of value, and as there will always be a progressive advance in the amount of labour, manual, mental, and scientific, if we suppose population to increase under these arrangements, there will be in the same proportion a perpetually extending market or demand for all the industry of society, whatever may be its extent. Under such arrangements what are technically called 'bad times' can never occur. . . .

A paper representative of the value of labour, manufactured on the principle of the new notes of the Bank of England, will serve for every purpose of their domestic commerce or exchanges, and will be issued only for intrinsic value received and in store.

Many of you have long experienced in your manufacturing operations the advantages of substantial, well-contrived, and well-executed machinery.

Experience has also shown you the difference of the results between mechanism which is neat, clean, well arranged, and always in a high state of repair; and that which is allowed to be dirty, in disorder, and without the means of preventing unnecessary friction, and which therefore becomes, and works, much out of repair.

In the first case the whole economy and management are good, every operation proceeds with ease, order, and success. In the last, the reverse must follow, and a scene be presented of counteraction, confusion, and dissatisfaction among all the agents and instruments interested or occupied in the general process, which cannot fail to create great loss.

If, then, due care as to the state of your inanimate machines can produce such beneficial results, what may not be expected if you devote equal attention to your vital machines, which are far more wonderfully constructed?

When you shall acquire a right knowledge of these, of their curious mechanism, of their self-adjusting powers; when the proper mainspring shall be applied to their various movements—you will become conscious of their real value, and you will readily be induced to turn your thoughts more frequently from your inanimate to your living machines; and you will discover that the latter may be easily trained and directed to procure a large increase of pecuniary gain, while you may also derive from them a high and substantial satisfaction.

Will you then continue to expend large sums of money

* *New View* (Dedication to the Superintendents of Manufacturers), Cole, 8-9.

to procure the best devised mechanisms of wood, brass, or iron; to retain it in perfect repair; to provide the best substance for the prevention of unnecessary friction, and to save it from falling into premature decay? Will you also devote years of intense application to understand the connection of the various parts of these lifeless machines, to improve their effective powers, and to calculate with mathematical precision all their minute and combined movements? And when in these transactions you estimate time by minutes, and the money expended for the chance of increased gain by fractions, will you not afford some of your attention to consider whether a portion of your time and capital would not be more advantageously applied to improve your living machines? From experience which cannot deceive me, I venture to assure you, that your time and money so applied, if directed by a true knowledge of the subject, would return you, not five, ten, or fifteen per cent, for your capital so expended, but often fifty, and in many cases a hundred per cent.

## 6 THE FALLACY OF MALTHUSIANISM

(a)* All men may, by judicious and proper laws and training, readily acquire knowledge and habits which will enable them, if they be permitted, to produce far more than they need for their support and enjoyment: and thus any population, in the fertile parts of the earth, may be taught to live in plenty and happiness, without the checks of vice and misery.

Mr. Malthus is, however, correct when he says that the population of the world is ever adapting itself to the quantity of food raised for its support; but he has not told us how much more food an intelligent and industrious

* *New View,* Cole, 85-6.

people will create from the same soil, than will be produced by one ignorant and ill-governed. It is, however, as one to infinity.

For man knows not the limit of his power of creating food. How much has that power been latterly increased in these islands? And in them such knowledge is in its infancy. Yet compare even this power of raising food with the efforts of the Bosgemens or other savages, and it will be found, perhaps, as one to a thousand.

Food for man may also be considered as a compound of the original elements, of the qualities, combinations, and control of which, chemistry is daily adding to our knowledge; nor is it yet for man to say to what this knowledge may lead or where it may end.

The sea, it may be remarked also, affords an inexhaustible source of food. It may then be safely asserted that the population of the world may be allowed naturally to increase for many thousand years; and yet, under a system of government founded on the principles for the truth of which we contend, the whole may continue to live in abundance and happiness, without one check of vice or misery; and under the guidance of these principles, human labour properly directed, may be made far more than sufficient to enable the population of the world to live in the highest state of human enjoyment.

(b)* Every agriculturalist knows that each labourer now employed in agriculture can produce five or six times more food than he can eat; and therefore, even if no other facilities were given to him than those we now possess, there is no necessity in nature for 'the population to press against subsistence', until the earth is fully cultivated. There can be no doubt that it is the artificial law of supply and demand, arising from the principles of individual gain in opposition to the general well-being of society,

* *Catechism,* Cole, 181.

which has hitherto compelled population to press upon subsistence. The certain effect of acting upon the principle of individual gain is, ever to limit the supply of food, in an average season, to a sufficiency, according to the customs of the times, for the existing inhabitants of the earth.

# VI

## Owen and the Factory Children

[Owen's first great public campaign was for the regulation of the condition of children employed in the factories. His experiences of the system of pauper apprenticeship, and other evils, had shown him the necessity for this. The first passage describes the situation at New Lanark.]

### 1* PAUPER APPRENTICES

It is not to be supposed that children so young could remain, with the intervals of meals, from six in the morning until seven in the evening, in constant employment, on their feet within cotton mills, and afterwards acquire much proficiency in education. And so it proved; for many of them became dwarfs in body and mind, and some were deformed. Their labour throughout the day and their education at night became so irksome, that numbers of them continually ran away, and almost all looked forward with impatience and anxiety to the expiration of their apprenticeship of seven, eight, and nine years, which generally expired when they were from thirteen to fifteen years old. At this period of life, unaccustomed to provide for themselves, and unacquainted with the world, they usually went to Edinburgh or Glasgow, where boys and girls were soon assailed by the innumerable temptations

* *New View,* Cole, 28.

which all large towns present, and to which many of them fell sacrifices.

Thus Mr. Dale's arrangements, and his kind solicitude for the comfort and happiness of these children, were rendered in their ultimate effects almost nugatory. They were hired by him and sent to be employed, and without their labour he could not support them; but, while under his care, he did all that any individual circumstanced as he was, could do for his fellow-creatures. The error proceeded from the children being sent from the workhouses at an age much too young for employment. They ought to have been detained four years longer, and educated; and then some of the evils which followed would have been prevented.

If such be a true picture, not overcharged, of parish apprentices to our manufacturing system, under the best and most humane regulations, in what colours must it be exhibited under the worst?

## 2 THE BILL OF 1815

[In 1815 Owen prepared a Bill to regulate the labour of children in textile mills. Sir Robert Peel, father of the future Prime Minister and himself a leading spinner, promised to introduce it into Parliament. Owen visited mills throughout the country, collecting evidence.]

(a)* I thus saw the importance of the machinery employed in these manufactures and its rapid annual improvements. I also became vividly alive to the deteriorating conditions of the young children and others who were made slaves of these new mechanical powers. And whatever may be said to the contrary, bad and unwise as American slavery is and must continue to be, the white

* *Life,* 155-6.

slavery in the manufactories of England was at this unrestricted period far worse than the house slaves whom I afterwards saw in the West Indies and in the United States, and in many respects, as regards health, food, and clothing, the latter were much better provided for than were these oppressed and degraded children and work-people in the home manufactories of Great Britain.

(b)* At the commencement of these proceedings I was an utter novice in the manner of conducting the business of this country in Parliament. But my intimate acquaintance with these proceedings for the four years during which this Bill was under the consideration of both Houses, opened my eyes to the conduct of public men, and to the ignorant vulgar self-interest, regardless of the means to accomplish their object, of trading and mercantile men, even of high standing in the commercial world. No means was left untried by these men to defeat the object of the Bill, in the first session of its introduction, and through four years in which, under one futile pretext and another, it was kept in the House of Commons.

Children at this time were admitted into the cotton, wool, flax, and silk mills, at six and sometimes even at five years of age. The time of working, winter and summer, was unlimited by law, but usually it was fourteen hours per day—in some fifteen, and even, by the most inhuman and avaricious, sixteen hours—and in many cases the mills were artificially heated to a high state most unfavourable to health.

The first plea of the objectors to my Bill was, that masters ought not to be interfered with by the legislators in any way in the management of their business.

After long useless discussions, kept up to prolong time, this was at length overruled.

The next attempt was to prove that it was not injurious

* *Life*, 161-2.

to employ these young children fourteen or fifteen hours per day in overheated close rooms, filled often with the fine fibre of the material used, particularly in cotton and flax spinning mills. Sir Robert Peel most unwisely consented to a committee being appointed to investigate this question, and this committee was continued for two sessions of Parliament before these wise and honest men, legislating for the nation, could decide that such practices were detrimental to the health of these infants.

The Bill as I prepared it was assented to by all the leading members of both Houses, except the trading and manufacturing interests, including cotton, wool, flax, and silk mill-owners. Sir Robert yielding to the clamour of the manufacturers, first gave up wool, flax, and silk, and they were struck out, although at that time flax spinning was the most unhealthy of the four manufactures.

(c)* I was so disgusted at the delays created by these interested members, and at the concessions made to them by Sir Robert Peel during the progress of the Bill through the House of Commons, that after attending the committee every day of its sitting during two long sessions, I took less interest in a Bill so mutilated and so unlike the Bill which had been prepared by me. . . .

It may be remarked here, that this Bill has since been almost continuously before Parliament for improvement after improvement, and yet it has not been suffered by the master cotton-spinners to attain the full benefits contained in the Bill when first introduced at my instance. . . . But in this and all other cases between the tyranny of the masters and the sufferings of their white slaves, the error is in reality in the system of society, which creates the necessity for tyrants and slaves, neither of which could exist in a true and rational state of society.

* *Life,* 167-8.

[Owen took his son, Robert Dale Owen, then fourteen, on his tour of the mills. What he saw left a lasting impression on the boy.]

The facts we collected seemed to me terrible almost beyond belief. Not in exceptional cases, but as a rule, we found children of ten years old worked regularly fourteen hours a day, with but half an hour's interval for the midday meal, which was eaten in the factory. In fine yarn cotton mills they were subjected to this labour in a temperature usually exceeding seventy-five degrees; and in all the cotton factories they breathed atmosphere more or less injurious to the lungs, because of the dust and minute cotton fibres that pervaded it. . . . It need not be said that such a system could not be maintained without corporal punishment. Most of the overseers openly carried stout leather thongs, and we frequently saw even the youngest children severely beaten. We sought out the surgeons who were in the habit of attending these children, noting their names and the facts they attested. Their stories haunted my dreams. In some large factories, from one-fourth to one-fifth of the children were cripples or otherwise deformed, or permanently injured by excessive toil, sometimes by brutal abuse. The younger children seldom held out more than three or four years without serious illness, often ending in death. When we expressed surprise that parents should voluntarily condemn their sons and daughters to slavery so intolerable, the explanation seemed to be that many of the fathers were out of work themselves, and so were, in a measure, driven to the sacrifice for lack of bread; while others, imbruted by intemperance, saw with indifference an abuse of the infant faculties compared to which the infanticide of China may almost be termed humane.

* *T.M.W.*, 125-6.

I have no doubt the honourable member who first introduced this Bill into Parliament, and who has devoted so much time to the subject, is aware that these enactments are very inadequate to meet the existing evils.

He is probably afraid to ask more, lest he should increase the opposition of those who think themselves interested in perpetuating an oppression of their fellow creatures, worse than any slavery of the same extent with which the human race has been hitherto afflicted. . . .

I am fully aware of the clamour these propositions will at first call forth from the blind avarice of commerce; for commerce, my Lord, trains her children to see only their immediate or apparent interest; their ideas are too contracted to carry them beyond the passing week, month, or year at the utmost.

They have been taught, my Lord, to consider it to be the essence of wisdom to expend millions of capital, and years of extraordinary scientific application, as well as to sacrifice the health, morals, and comforts of the great mass of the subjects of a mighty empire, that they may uselessly improve the manufacture of and increase the demand for, pins, needles, and threads—that they may have the singular satisfaction, after immense care, labour, and anxiety on their own parts, to destroy the real wealth and strength of their country by gradually undermining the morals and physical vigour of its inhabitants, for the sole end of relieving other nations of their due share of this enviable process of pin, needle, and thread making.

I trust, my Lord, it is not by such men that our great national concerns are henceforth to be directed.

* *Children* (To the Earl of Liverpool), Cole, 37-8.

[Owen published some of the objections raised by the factory owners to his Bill.]

This Bill might be characterised as one to reduce the productive labour of the country; to prevent large families from supporting themselves by their joint industry; as lessening their independence and comforts; as directly increasing the Poor's Rates (one of the most alarming features of this Bill is the certainty of its increasing the Poor's Rates in every district where it will operate), by compelling such families to resort to them to make up defective earnings; as injuring their morals, by throwing them idle and disorderly on the community too early in the evenings; as depriving the heads of families of their natural control over their children, and of their proper discretion as to their employment; and as superseding parental by legislative authority; and finally, as burdening the counties with additional Rates altogether unnecessary.

[But the feature most bitterly opposed by the owners was the proposal to appoint Factory Inspectors.]

The appointment of Stipendiary Visitors would expose the secrets of every man's business; his premises would become public; he would be liable to continual intrusions and informations; the more intrusive and litigious a Visitor might be, the more merit would he lay claim to in the discharge of his duty—a duty, the very nature of which is repulsive to those who are qualified to discharge, and attractive only to such as are unfit for it. The power to be given to them would fix a deep and unmerited stigma on the principal employers of the national industry.

* *Life, IA.*, 30.

# VII

## Pioneer of Education

[Though Owen's theories of education were not original, he was the first to put them into practice on a large scale —and they proved brilliantly successful. At New Lanark, as in his later communities of New Harmony and Queenwood, the schools were the most outstanding and successful feature. And schools feature largely in all his plans for proposed Villages of Co-operation.]

### 1 THE NEW LANARK SCHOOLS

(a)* I had before this period acquired the most sincere affection of all the children. I say all—because every child above one year old was daily sent to the schools. I had also the hearts of all their parents, who were highly delighted with the improved conduct, extraordinary progress, and continually increasing happiness of their children. . . .

It was in vain to look to any old teachers upon the old system of instruction by books . . . and I had to seek among the population for two persons who had a great love for and unlimited patience with children, and who were thoroughly tractable and willing unreservedly to follow my instructions. The best to my mind in these respects that I could find in the population of the village

* *Life*, 191-4.

was a poor, simple-hearted weaver, named James Buchanan, who had been previously trained by his wife to a perfect submission to her will, and who could gain but a scanty living by his now dying trade of weaving common plain cotton goods by hand. But he loved children strongly by nature and his patience with them was inexhaustible. [Owen found for the infants a young woman] about seventeen years of age, known familiarly among the villagers as 'Molly Young', who of the two, in natural powers of the mind, had an advantage over her companion in an office perfectly new to them both.

The first instruction which I gave them was, that they were on no account ever to beat any one of the children, or to threaten them in any manner of word or action, or to use abusive terms; but were always to speak to them with a pleasant countenance, and in a kind manner and tone of voice. That they should tell the infants and children (for they had all from one to six years old under their charge) that they must on all occasions do all they could to make their playfellows happy—and that the older ones, from four to six years of age, should take especial care of the younger ones, and should assist to teach them to make each other happy. . . .

The schoolroom . . . was furnished with paintings, chiefly of animals, with maps, and often supplied with natural objects from the gardens, fields, and woods—the examination and explanation of which always excited their curiosity and created an animated conversation between the children and their instructors, now themselves acquiring new knowledge by attempting to instruct their young friends, as I always taught them to think their pupils were, and to treat them as such. . . .

It was most encouraging and delightful to see the progress which these infants and children made in real knowledge without the use of books. And when the best means of instruction or forming character shall be known, I doubt whether books will be ever used before children

attain their tenth year. And yet without books they will have a superior character formed for them at ten, as rational beings, knowing themselves and society in principle and practice, far better than the best-informed now know these subjects at their majority, or the mass of the population of the world ever know them at any age.

(b)* I said to the public—'Come and see, and judge for yourselves.' And the public came—not by hundreds but by thousands annually. I have seen as many at once as seventy strangers attending the early morning exercises of the children in the school. At this period the dancing, music, military discipline, and geographical exercise were especially attractive to all except 'very pious' Christians. Yet even these latter could not refrain from expressing their wonder and admiration at the unaffected joyous happiness of these young ones—children of the common cotton spinners.

Being always treated with kindness and confidence, and altogether without fear, even of a harsh word from any of their numerous teachers, they exhibited an unaffected grace and natural politeness, which surprised and fascinated strangers, and which new character and conduct were for most of them so unaccountable, that they knew not how to express themselves, or how to hide their wonder and amazement.

These children, standing up, seventy couples at a time, in the dancing room, and often surrounded with many strangers, would with the utmost ease and natural grace go through all the dances of Europe, with so little direction from their master, that strangers would be unconscious that there was a dancing master in the room.

In their singing lesson, one hundred and fifty would sing at the same time—their voices being trained to harmonize; and it was delightful to hear them sing the

* *Life*, 197-9.

old popular Scotch songs, which were great favourites with most strangers, from the unaffected simplicity and heart feeling with which these songs were sung by the children, whose natures had been naturally and rationally cultivated.

In their military exercises they went through their evolutions with precision equal, as many officers of the army stated, to some regiments of the line; and at the head of their marchings were six and sometimes eight young fifers, playing various marches. The girls were thus disciplined, as well as the boys, and their numbers were generally nearly equal. And it may be here remarked, that being daily brought up together, they appeared to feel for and treat each other as brothers and sisters of the same family; and so they continued until they left the day schools at the age of twelve.

Their lessons in geography were no less amusing to the children themselves and interesting to strangers. At a very early age they were instructed in classes on maps of the four quarters of the world. . . . The lookers on were as much amused, and many as much instructed, as the children, who thus at an early age became so efficient, that one of our Admirals, who had sailed round the world, said he could not answer many of the questions which some of these children not six years old readily replied to, giving the places most correctly.

## 2* AN EXPERIMENT THAT FAILED

[A number of eminent men, including Lord Brougham and James Mill, decided to open a school in London on Owen's model.]

They asked me whether I would give them James Buchanan to be the master of their school. I replied—

* *Life*, 196, 210.

'Most willingly, for I have pupils who can take his place without any injury to my school.' . . .

But great were my surprise and horror when I visited the second infant school, which was situated in Westminster, and was under the auspices of great names and good men, but who themselves knew nothing of the requisite practice, and could not therefore give poor Buchanan the aid and support which he required, and without which it was now evident to me that he could do little or nothing that was efficient. On entering the school, the first object I saw was *Mrs.* Buchanan, whom I had never seen in the New Lanark School, brandishing a whip, and terrifying the children with it! Buchanan I saw in another part of the room, apparently without authority or influence, and as much subject to his wife as the children. Upon my unexpected appearance an attempt was made to hide the whip, but the countenances of the children were so different from the open, frank, and happy expressions of my children at New Lanark, that they at once told me of their position, and the extent of the ignorant management to which they had to submit.

### 3* CHILDREN CAN BE MOULDED

Children are, without exception, passive and wonderfully contrived compounds; which, by an accurate previous and subsequent attention, *founded on a correct knowledge of the subject,* may be formed collectively to have any human character. And although these compounds, like all the other works of nature, possess endless varieties, yet they partake of that plastic quality, which, by perseverance under judicious management, may be ultimately moulded into the very image of rational wishes and desires.

In the next place, these principles cannot fail to create feelings which, without force or the production of any

* *New View,* Cole, 22-3.

counteracting motive, will irresistably lead those who possess them to make due allowance for the difference of sentiments and manners, not only among their friends and countrymen, but also among the inhabitants of every region of the earth, even including their enemies.

## 4* EDUCATION – A PREPARATION FOR LIFE

Whatever knowledge may be attained to enable man to improve the breed of his progeny at birth, facts exist in endless profusion to prove to every mind capable of reflection, that men may now possess a most extensive control over those circumstances which affect the infant after birth; and that, as far as such circumstances can influence human character, the day has arrived when the existing generation may so far control them, that the rising generations may become in character, without any individual exceptions, whatever man can now desire them to be, that is not contrary to human nature.

It is with reference to this important consideration that your Reporter, in the forming of these new arrangements, has taken so much pains to exclude every circumstance that could make an evil impression on the infants and children of this new generation.

And he is prepared, when others can follow him, so to combine new circumstances, that vice, or that conduct which creates evil and misery in society, shall be utterly unknown in these villages, to whatever number they may extend.

Proceeding on these principles, your Reporter recommends arrangements by which the children shall be trained together as though they were literally all of one family.

For this purpose two schools will be required within the interior of the square, with spacious play and exercise grounds.

* *Report,* Cole, 279-84.

These schools may be conveniently placed in the line of the buildings to be erected across the centre of the parallelograms, in connexion with the church and places of worship.

The first school will be for the infants from two to six years of age. The second for children from six to twelve. . . .

The children in these schools should be trained systematically to acquire useful knowledge through the means of sensible signs, by which their powers of reflection and judgement may be habituated to draw accurate conclusions from the facts presented to them. This mode of instruction is founded in nature, and will supersede the present defective and tiresome system of book learning, which is ill calculated to give either pleasure or instruction to the minds of children. When arrangements founded on these principles shall be judiciously formed and applied to practice, children will, with ease and delight to themselves, acquire more real knowledge in a day than they have attained under the old system in many months. They will not only thus acquire valuable knowledge, but the best habits and dispositions will be at the same time imperceptibly created in every one; and they will be trained to fill every office and to perform every duty that the well-being of their associates and the establishments can require. It is only by education, rightly understood, that communities of men can ever be well governed, and by means of such education every object of human society will be attained with the least labour and the most satisfaction.

It is obvious that training and education must be viewed as intimately connected with the employments of the association. The latter, indeed, will form an essential part of education under these arrangements. Each association, generally speaking, should create for itself a full supply of the usual necessaries, conveniences and comforts of life. . . .

It has been a popular opinion to recommend a minute division of labour and a division of interests. It will presently appear, however, that this minute division of labour and division of interests are only other terms of poverty, ignorance, waste of every kind, universal opposition throughout society, crime, misery, and great bodily and mental imbecility.

To avoid these evils, which, while they continue, must keep mankind in a most degraded state, each child will receive a general education, early in life, that will fit him for the proper purposes of society, making him the most useful to it, and the most capable of enjoying it.

Before he is twelve years old he may with ease be trained to acquire a correct view of the outline of all the knowledge which men have yet attained.

By this means he will early learn what he is in relation to past ages, to the general period in which he lives, to the circumstances in which he is placed, to the individuals around him, and to future events. *He will then only have any pretension to the name of a rational being. . . .*

Instead of being the unhealthy pointer of a pin—header of a nail—piecer of a thread—or clodhopper, senselessly gazing at the soil around him, without understanding or rational reflection, there would spring up a working class full of activity and useful knowledge, with habits, information, manners and dispositions that would place the lowest in the scale many degrees above the best of any class which has yet been formed by the circumstances of past or present society.

# VIII

## Owen as a Public Figure

[Owen's success at New Lanark gave him a reputation that ensured his views on social questions wide attention, though not acceptance. For a number of years after 1817 he became an internationally celebrated public figure, on friendly terms with the most distinguished men of the time. His great failure to see that reason has a class basis, which led him to imagine that the ruling class could be persuaded to inaugurate socialism, is dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter.]

### 1* OWEN PREACHES HIS GOSPEL

I have now to narrate the public proceedings which by my means were set in action in 1817, and which aroused the attention of the civilized world, alarmed the governments, astounded the religious sects of every denomination, and created an excitement in all classes, such as seldom occurs, except in cases of revolution. It was the public announcement of a new and strange system of society, by an ordinarily educated cotton-spinning manufacturer. It was a proceeding unprecedented in the annals of history, and its consequences have been fermenting to this day, and are continuing to ferment, throughout society, and will now advance without retrogression until they shall so regenerate

* *Life*, 212-3.

the human mind, that it shall be 'born again', and will entirely change society all over the world, in spirit, principle, and practice, giving new surroundings to all nations, until not one stone of the present surroundings of society shall be left upon another. For in consequence of this change 'old things will entirely pass away and all will become new'.

The proceedings which first publicly announced to the world the rational and only true system of society for the human race, occupied the excited attention of the civilized world especially during the summer and autumn of 1817, and to a considerable extent afterwards, until I left this country in 1824, to go to the United States to sow the seeds of it in that new fertile soil—new for material and mental growth—the cradle of the future liberty of the human race—a liberty yet so little understood by the present population of the United States, as well as by that of *all the old states. Liberty* is a word continually used, but nowhere yet understood. For true liberty can exist only in a society based on a true knowledge of humanity, and constructed to be consistent with that foundation, in all its parts and as a whole. This will constitute the rational system of society, which is to give practically the greatest individual liberty that human nature can enjoy. Because it will of necessity make each one good, wise, and happy; and such only can ever be trusted with the full amount of individual liberty.

### 2* HIS ASSURANCE OF SUCCESS

It is an extraordinary fact, that under the innumerable contests in which I was destined to encounter the prejudices or superstition of all parties for so many years, I never once felt the slightest misgiving or doubt that I should in the course of time overcome every obstacle, and

* *Life*, 263.

that sooner or later the population as one man would admit the great and all-important truth for the permanent progress and happiness of all the human kind, 'that the character of man is before and from birth formed for him', and that, with this knowledge, comprehended in all its bearing, a good, useful, and most valuable character might with ease and pleasure be formed by society for everyone from birth, and to some important extent even before birth, in an increasing ratio through every succeeding generation.

With this impression deeply seated in the inmost recesses of my mind, no obstacle, no temporary defeat, no abuse from the press or religions, created the slightest discouragement to my onward progress. Knowing how the characters of all were formed *for* them, their abuse and violence only created a sympathy for them in proportion to their ignorance, and to the misery which that ignorance necessarily inflicted upon them.

## 3 OWEN AND THE POLITICIANS

[Owen never lost his belief that the Tory Government, headed by such arch-reactionaries as Castlereagh, Sidmouth and Lord Liverpool (Prime Minister, 1812—27), were genuinely eager to support his proposals and were only prevented from doing so by some unaccountable accident. The extracts which follow illustrate some of his views and experiences of the ruling class in England and abroad.]

(a)* The Government had been on all occasions most friendly to me, and afterwards learned from the Dean of Westminster, who had been private secretary to Lord Liverpool for some time, that his Lordship and many of

* *Life*, 217.

his Cabinet were converts to the New Views which I advocated.

(b)* Lord Liverpool gave me a seat, and with a considerable diffidence and agitation in his manner, said, 'Mr. Owen, what is your wish?'—in a tone of voice and with an expression of countenance as much as to say, 'Your wishes shall be gratified.' And I believe the Government would have given me any place or station, or almost anything I should ask; for it was evident that they felt they were at my mercy. . . . I therefore replied to his Lordship's question, that all I desired was, that his Lordship and his Cabinet would allow their names to be upon the committee of investigation which I should propose at the meeting the next day, with an equal number of disunion, to saturate society at all times with wealth, if my proposed resolutions should be carried.

On my saying this I never saw anyone so immediately relieved from an apparent great anxiety—and his Lordship replied in the most confiding manner, 'Mr. Owen, you shall have full liberty to make any use of our names you desire and which you may think useful to your views, short of implicating us as a Government.'

(c)** [At Frankfort Owen met M. Gentz, Secretary to the Congress of Sovereigns to be held at Aix. They discussed Owen's proposals.]

I stated that now, through the progress of science, the means amply existed in all countries, or might easily be made to exist on the principle of union for the foundation of society, instead of its present foundation of disunion, to saturate society at all times with wealth, sufficient to amply supply the wants of all through life. What was my surprise to hear the reply of the learned secretary! 'Yes,' he said, and apparently speaking for the

* *Life*, 218-20. ** *Life*, 253.

governments, 'we know that very well; but we do not want the mass to become wealthy and independent of us. How could we govern them if they were?'

(d)* [Owen attempted to present a copy of his memorials to the Emperor.]

. . . but his dress fitted so tightly to his person, that, having no pockets, he had no place in which he could put so large a packet. He was evidently annoyed by the circumstance, and said, as I thought angrily. 'I cannot receive it—I have no place to put it in. Who are you?' 'Robert Owen,' was my reply. 'Come to me in the evening at Mr. Bethman's,' and he passed on.

I did not like his manner of speaking to me, and did not go; which I afterwards regretted, for he was naturally amiable, and as kind-hearted as the surroundings of despotism would admit, and I might have influenced him to some beneficial purpose, for my influence among European governing parties was, as I learned afterwards, far greater than I was conscious of. . . .

I may here remark, that in all my intercourse with the Ministers of despotic powers, I uniformly found them in principle favourably disposed to the introduction of the new system of society, and that they gave me all the facilities and aid which their position would admit.

(e)** As soon as the Sovereigns met I hastened to Aix-la-Chapelle, and there completed the two memorials to the governments of Europe and America. I then applied to Lord Castlereagh, the representative, with the Duke of Wellington, of the British Government at this Congress. Lord Castlereagh, in the most friendly manner promised to present these documents to Congress under the most favourable circumstances. He did so, and it was stated to

* *Life*, 255-6. ** *Life*, 257.

me in confidence on my return to Paris, by one of the Ministers of the Government, that these two memorials were considered the most important documents which were presented to the Congress.

(f)* In the House of Lords it was evident that Lord Liverpool and the leading members of his Cabinet were favourable to the full investigation of the subject, and the debate was taking that turn, when Lord Lauderdale arose, and with marked emphasis in his manner and tone of voice, said, 'My Lords, I know Mr. Owen, and I have examined his plan for the relief of the working classes, as he has published it to the world, and I tell your Lordships, that if you countenance Mr. Owen and his new views, there is no government in Europe that can stand against them.'

This declaration from a peer of the highest influence in the House, decided the course which the Government must take in both Houses, much to their regret, for they heartily inclined to have the principles and plans I had so openly placed before the public, fairly tried under the auspices of their administration.

### 4 OWEN AND THE DUKE OF KENT

[One of the oddest features of Owen's life was his friendship with the Duke of Kent, son of George III and father of Queen Victoria. In his later years Owen became an ardent spiritualist and claimed to have had many conversations with the dead Duke. See Chapter XVI.]

(a)** The most valuable of [my supporters], while he lived was His Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent, whose real character for the last four years of his life is yet but little known to the public. His letters addressed to me, about thirty of them, will show the power and good-

* *Life*, 299. ** *Life*, 266-7.

ness of that mind which, had he lived to reign, would have given all his influence to have peaceably established truth in principle, spirit, and practice throughout the British Empire, and by the success of such a change in governing, would have induced all the other governments to imitate his. . . .

Their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Kent and Sussex, who at this period were much united in affection and pursuits, occasionally looked in upon me to study the model I had, of the first new surroundings in which I proposed to place the poor and working classes, to train them out of their inferior habits and to give good and superior ones to their children; and also to see and draw their own conclusions from inspecting the cubic proportions of the different classes of society, which I had directed to be made to exhibit to the eye the contrast between the amount in numbers of the governing and the governed classes.

On some of these visits the royal dukes would bring with them some members of the higher nobility. On one occasion the Duke of Kent observed one of them to point very significantly to the great difference between the very small cube which represented the governing powers (the Royal Family and the House of Peers), and the various classes governed by them, and looking at the Duke, as much as to say, 'Is not this rather a dangerous and levelling exhibition?' The Duke caught the expression, and said, 'I see you imagine I have not studied this subject, and that I do not foresee its ultimate results. I know these will be a much more just equality of our race, and an equality that will give much more security and happiness to all, than the present system can give to any; and it is for this reason that I so much approve of it and give it my support.'

(b)* [Owen claimed to have had 'communications with the spirits of many past worthies'.]

* *Life*, 275.

Among these, in an especial manner, I have to name the apparent very anxious feelings of the spirit of His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent (who early informed me there were no titles in the spiritual spheres into which he had entered), to benefit, not a class, a sect, a party, or any particular country, but the whole of the human race throught futurity. And in this feeling he seemed to be strongly united with the spirit of my friend and warm disciple President Jefferson, and his particular friend the celebrated Benjamin Franklin. These three spirits have frequently come together to communicate to me the most interesting and valuable knowledge, with occasional notices of persons who when living were dear to these superior spirits. But never upon any occasion was there a trivial idea expressed by either of them.

At one important *seance* these three spirits came in company with the spirits of Channing, Chalmers, Shelley, Byron, and several of the old prophets; and on this occasion the spirits of eight of my deceased relatives were also present.

(c)* The Duke of Kent's whole spirit proceeding with me has been most beautiful; making his own appointments; meeting me on the day, hour, and minute he named; and never in one instance (and these appointments were numerous as long as I had mediums near me upon whom I could depend) has this spirit not been punctual to the minute he had named.

## 5 OWEN AND THE WORKERS

[Owen was indifferent, and even hostile, to the proposals for political reform advocated by the Radicals and Chartists of the time.]

* *Life*, 316.

(a)* At this period [about 1817] I had had no public intercourse with the operatives and working classes in any part of the two Islands—not even in the metropolis. They were at this time strangers to me and to all my views and future intentions. I was at all periods of my progress, and from my earliest knowledge and employment of them, their true friend. While their democratic and much mistaken leaders taught them that I was their enemy, a friend to all in authority, and that I desired to make slaves of them in these villages of unity and mutual co-operation.

On the other hand, my opponents had been most industrious in marshalling their forces, and they were led to the meeting by the popular orators of the day, and these were encouraged in their opposition by the leading active members of the then popular school of modern political economy.

(b)** As you proceed in these inquiries, you will find that mankind cannot be improved or rendered reasonable by force or contention; that it is absolutely necessary to support the old systems and institutions under which we now live, until another system and another arrangement of society shall be proved by practice to be essentially superior. You will, therefore, still regard it as your duty to pay respect and submission to what is established. For it would be no mark of wisdom to desert an old house, whatever may be its imperfections, until a new one shall be ready to receive you, however superior to the old that new one may be when finished.

Continue to obey the laws under which you live; and although many of them are founded on principles of the grossest ignorance and folly, you obey them—until the government of the country (which I have reason to believe is in the hands of men well disposed to adopt a

* *Life*, 221. ** *New Lanark*, Cole, 118-9.

system of general improvement) shall find it practicable to withdraw those laws which are productive of evil, and introduce others of an opposite tendency.

### 6* OWEN AND THE REFORMERS

Among the leading Radical reformers who were personally very friendly, but yet were opposed to my *New View of Society,* were Sir Francis Burdett, M.P.; Major Cartwright; Henry Hunt, M.P.; William Cobbett, M.P.; Feargus O'Connor, M.P.; Mr. John Frost; Mr. Ernest Jones; and many others.

My knowledge of the formation of character enabled me to know how their characters were formed, and therefore enabled me to differ from them in opinion and yet do justice to their good intentions, although their measures always appeared to me to arise from want of a comprehensive knowledge of human nature and society, and from their supposing that violence and force could effect any permanent good, while mind remained unconverted.

### 7** A VISIT TO FRANCE, 1817

Shortly after this came Professor Pictet, the celebrated savant of Geneva . . . to invite me to France and to Switzerland and the Continent generally. He said that his particular friend Cuvier, the celebrated French naturalist, and secretary to the French Academy in Paris, would come over and meet us in London, and we could return with him to Paris. . . .

My first visit was to the Duke of Orleans, to whom the Duke of Kent's letter gave me a ready and welcome introduction. The Duke received me more as a friend than a stranger . . . and then entered familiarly into a narrative,

* *Life,* 292. ** *Life,* 229-35.

confidential at that period, of the delicate position which he held in relation to the other and then reigning branch of the Bourbon family.

The Duke said—'The reigning family are jealous of me. They are afraid of my liberal principles. I am watched, and I feel it necessary to be guarded in my private and public conduct. I therefore live very quietly and take no active part in any of the movements of the day. But I observe all that takes place, and the day may come when I may have more liberty to act according to my views of the necessities of the times.' He was at this time a thoughtful, watchful character and rather timid than otherwise. My views were too well known, he said, to allow him to appear openly to countenance me. . . .

I was next introduced by my friends, Cuvier and Pictet, to La Place, the wide-world-known astronomer. And then to Alexander von Humboldt, who was then in Paris pursuing his scientific investigations.

And we four—La Place, Cuvier, Pictet, and myself—afterwards often met at the house of one or other of the two first to converse freely upon public affairs interesting to the population of all countries. . . . And I was now considered by these men as the advanced mind in a practical knowledge of human nature and the science of society. It was to me at first astonishing to discover, in La Place and Cuvier especially, but less so in Pictet, their childish simplicity on all subjects relative to human nature and to the science of society. They sought my society eagerly, to question me on these subjects, apparently quite new to their study, they having so long had their minds fixed on their own respective sciences, that they had never entered the field of investigation of these subjects, so familiar to me.

Professor Pictet seemed to be much respected by all parties, and he was on friendly terms with the leaders of the more liberal view. . . . Some of these names I especially remember. One was Count de Boissy d'Anglas,

who, upon my being introduced to him, received me, to my no little surprise, with open arms and a salute on each cheek, from a rougher chin than I had ever so encountered —for he was the first man from whom I received such a salute. I found he was a warm and ardent disciple of mine—open, frank, and honest in his avowal of his principles, and in his adherence to rational liberty.

Another was Camille Jourdain, so well known through all the stages of the Revolution. . . .

A third on my memory was the Duke de la Rochefoucault, who had from patriotic motives established on his estate in the country, what at that time in France was considered a large cotton-spinning manufactory. He wished me to see it, and took me with him into the country. I examined the whole business as then carried on at the Duke's risk and with his capital. I found by this investigation, that I was manufacturing the same number of fineness of thread, but of much better quality, at the New Lanark establishment in Scotland, at fourpence a pound cheaper than the Duke's. One penny per pound upon the annual produce at that time at New Lanark, was £8,000 sterling—which sum multiplied by four gives a gain upon the same quality, of the Duke's, of thirty-two thousand pounds per year. Evidently therefore the Duke required a high duty on British cottons to enable him, and all similarly situated to proceed. But it was equally evident that the French people had to pay this duty to their own manufacturers to enable them to continue their work. . . .

And thus for six weeks did the Professor and myself luxuriate amidst the *élite* of the most distinguished men then in Paris; and I lost no opportunity of obtaining the best thoughts of these superior characters. . . . And from one cause or another I was made during this period, through the Professor's means and others, the lion of Paris. Knowing the defects of my early education, the little instruction I had received from others, of the little

I really knew of the mind, habits, and manners of the great world, and being then and for a long time afterwards unconscious of the deep and widespread impressions which had been made by my publications on the formation of character, my practical measures, so long pursued at New Lanark, and latterly my public meetings and proceedings in London—I was continually at a loss to account for the extraordinary deference and respect which was paid to me by all these parties. But so it was.

### 8* IN GENEVA

Among many others, I was introduced during this visit to Madame Necker, the sister of Mademe de Staël. . . . The Professor had made my *New View of Society* very popular at Geneva, and they were always the favourite topic of conversation with Madame Necker and the Professor's daughters, who were never tired of pursuing it through all its ramifications, to its beautiful results, ending in the practice of the Millennium over the Earth, and the cordial union of the race as one superior and enlightened family.

### 9** INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS OF OWEN'S WRITINGS

These works had also been translated into foreign languages, and very many editions were published in the United States, where also they had prepared for me a warm national reception. For, as I have already stated, in 1816, when John Quincey Adams was the United States Ambassador in London, he applied to me . . . to know if I wished them to be introduced into the United States, for if I did, he would shortly return there, and if I would entrust him with copies for the President and his Cabinet,

* *Life*, 237. ** *Life*, 278-9.

and for the Governor of each State in the Union, he would assure me that they should be faithfully delivered. . . . They gave me a ready introduction to all the Presidents of the Republic, from John Adams downwards, and with him Jefferson, Madison, Munroe, John Quincey Adams, General Jackson, and Mr. Van Buren, by all of whom I was admitted into their confidence, and from whom I obtained their best thoughts, and the unbiased results of their valuable experience.

These works, imperially bound, were also gladly received by every sovereign in Europa, and by Napoleon the First when in the Island of Elba, in which he had time to study them, and did so, as I was afterwards informed by Major-General Sir Neil Campbell. . . . It was stated that these works, in which the erroneous warlike proceedings of Napoleon were animadverted upon, had so far changed his views, that he said, should he be allowed by the other European powers to remain quiet on the throne of France, he would do as much for peace as he had previously done in war.

### 10* OWEN IN THE U.S.A.

[This passage illustrates both the attention which Owen received in official circles and his tendency to mistake polite interest for conviction.]

My first visits were to John Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, to James Madison and to James Munroe—the two latter, the fourth and fifth presidents. George Washington, the first president of the republic, had died before my first visit to the United States. . . .

After a full explanation of my views to the four Presidents of the United States, they regularly, one after

* *Millennial Gazette,* 52-6.

the other, admitted the truth of the fundamental principle on which the new dispensation must be raised. But they one and all said, we do not see how these principles, true and beautiful as they are, can be applied to practice. . . .

I then stated in what manner I had then for thirty years applied them to practice. . . .

They said you have now so much practical knowledge of the application of these new principles to practice that our want of experience must yield to your experience. . . .

There was at this period a friendship established between the ex-President, the existing President, Mr. Munroe, and his successor John Quincey Adams, the son of President Adams; and I had every reason to suppose that the ex-President, whom I had thus visited, communicated his ideas and impressions to all of them; for from that period I had the full confidence of the United States Government, through the administrations of Mr. Munroe, Mr. John Quincey Adams, General Jackson, and Mr. Van Buren; the interesting particulars of which will be given in detail in my life which I am now engaged in writing.

## 11 ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

[On February 25th and March 7th, 1825, Owen gave two lectures in Washington to an audience including members of both Houses of Congress, the President of the U.S.A., members of the Cabinet and other distinguished persons. These were published under the title *A Discourse on a New System of Society*. Much Owen said dealt with his general ideas and the details of his Plan along lines covered elsewhere in this volume. I give a few extracts in which he discusses the special application of the Plan to American conditions and a short account of New Harmony which was opened a few months later.

My quotations are made from a typescript copy of the

very rare original edition, for the use of which I am much indebted to the American Institute for Marxist Studies.]

(a) Man, through ignorance, has been, hitherto, the tormentor of man.

He is *here,* in a nation deeming itself possessed of more privileges than all other nations, and which pretensions, in many respects, must be admitted to be true. . . .

If the leading men of these states, forgetting every little and unworthy party and sectarian distinction, will now cordially unite, they may, with ease, break asunder the bonds of ignorance, superstition, and prejudice, and, by thus acting, they could not fail to dispel error, and to give and secure mental freedom and happiness to the world. . . .

The Government and Congress of this new empire have only, now, as I have previously stated, to will this change, and it will be at once effected; and, by such act, they will give and secure liberty, affluence, and happiness, to America and to the world.

I have said, give liberty to America; but the natives of this empire have been taught to believe, that they already possess full liberty. I know it is *not* so; and, in proof of this denial, permit me to ask, how many present feel they possess the power to speak their real sentiments, freely and openly, on subjects the most important to themselves and to the well being of society? Until this can be done, and done without any disadvantages whatever to those who do it, liberty has not been attained, and you have yet to work out for yourselves this, the most precious and valuable part of liberty. . . . By a hard struggle you have attained political liberty, but you have yet to acquire real mental liberty, and if you cannot possess yourselves of it, your political liberty will be precarious and of much less value. The attainment of political liberty is however, a necessary step towards the acquirement of real mental liberty, and as you have obtained the former, I have come

here to assist you to secure the latter. For, without mental liberty, there can be no sincerity; and without sincerity devoid of all deception, there can be no real virtue or happiness among mankind.

(b) With this view, I have purchased from the Harmonite Society, the settlement and property of Harmony, in the states of Indiana and Illinois. The settlement, or town of Harmony, is upon the Wabash, in Indiana; it is composed of log, weather boarded, and brick dwelling houses of infant manufactures, of wool, cotton, leather, hats, pottery, bricks, machinery, grain, distilleries, breweries &c. &c. with granaries and two large churches, and other public buildings, laid out in regular squares like all the modern American towns. It does not, however, form such a combination as the model before you represents, and, therefore, it will serve only a temporary, but yet a useful temporary purpose, for the objects which I have in view. It will enable me to form immediately a preliminary society in which to receive a new population, and to collect, prepare, and arrange the materials for erection of several such combinations, as the model represents, and of forming several independent, yet united associations, having common property, and one common interest. These new establishments will be erected upon the highlands of Harmony, from two to four miles from the river, and its Island, of which the occupants will have a beautiful and interesting view, there being several thousand acres of well cultivated land, on a rich second bottom, lying between the highlands and the river. And here it is, in the heart of the United States, and almost the centre of its unequalled internal navigation, that that power which directs and governs the universe and every action of man, has arranged circumstances which were far beyond my control, to permit me to commence a new empire of peace and good will to man, founded on other principles, and leading to other practices than those of the

past or present, and which principles, in due season, and in the allotted time, will lead to that state of virtue, intelligence, enjoyment and happiness, in practice, which as has been foretold by the sages of past times, would, at some distant period, become the lot of the human race!

# IX

## Revolution by Reason

[When Owen spoke of Revolution by Reason he meant a revolution in which class and class conflict had no part. This chapter gives something of his attitude to the popular movements and demands of his time, and of his views about the relation of classes.]

### 1* FORCE OR REASON

[Owen seldom referred directly to Chartism, but his views can be inferred indirectly from this Proclamation issued by the Congress of the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists in May 1840.]

The progress of machinery and of scientific knowledge has made a revolution, either by force or reason, unavoidable in the whole business of life.

A revolution by *force* will be *injurious to all.*

A revolution by *reason* will be *beneficial to all.*

The British Empire is the most advanced in the *progress of machinery and in scientific knowledge;* and, in consequence, now experiences the strongest necessity for this change; and it should, therefore, lead the revolution by reason, that the revolution by force may be avoided. . . .

* *Address,* 7-8.

It is most irrational to suppose that the millions will continue to starve in the midst of plenty, and in the midst of means permanently to ensure that plenty for all. . . .

Nor is it now practicable to maintain this degraded and miserable state of existence; for, unless a wise direction shall be given to machinery and scientific knowledge, and attention paid to the better formation of the character of individuals and of society, the masses—the millions—will be goaded on by desperation to the commission of acts of the most frightful violence. For it is impossible to suppose that men can longer submit to be kept in ignorance and poverty, and in the midst of every vicious and injurious external circumstance; while now, with so much ease, they may be filled with the most useful and valuable knowledge, and be made permanently wealthy, and surrounded with the most virtuous, elevating, and beneficial external circumstances that the human mind, in its highest and best state, can desire.

But, it will be asked, how can this change be made by reason, when the history of man declares that hitherto all revolutions have been effected by force?

We reply, that the world has advanced to an entirely new position; that a benefical revolution cannot now be effected by violence, and that all the means are prepared to accomplish this mighty change in the condition of the human race, without force or fraud of any kind, and without injury to a single individual.

## 2 TWO DEDICATIONS

[Owen's book *The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race,* contains two introductory addresses, the first, 'To Her Majesty, Victoria, Queen of the British Empire, and to Her Responsible Advisers', the second, 'To the Red Republicans, Communists and Socialists of Europe'. The date—1849—gives them a special interest.]

(a)* The extended and increasing misery of the human race, arising from the want of requisite knowledge to trace its cause, and provide a remedy, calls loudly for the simple and plain language of truth, in the spirit of charity and kindness, to declare both cause and remedy to the authorities of the world. . . .

The enormous power of the British Empire, for good or for evil, and its present peaceful and secure position, compared with other nations, call upon it to take a friendly direction to assist those nations out of the miserably entangled state into which they have fallen. . . .

The British Empire is now generally admitted to be the most advanced, and next to the United States, the most secure, of all nations; but all nations at this crisis, are subject to manifold casualties at home and abroad.

Great Britain is now, with the most ample means to create illimitable wealth, and to make its dominions an example of high prosperity and wealth, involved, like other nations, in a complicated system of error in principle and practice; which makes it a glaring example of poverty, crime, disease, and misery among the majority of its population, while the few are deeply injured by an excess of wealth and luxury, and of injustice to the many. . . .

Will you now investigate this all-important subject, and, if you find that I have declared that only which is true, good, and practical, will you adopt the principles and practices now recommended?

(b)** Friends and Fellow Men—The excited feelings aroused by the sufferings of the industrious masses, and now existing throughout Europe, between the Aristocracy and Democracy, are producing a desolating conflict between parties whose real interests are the same.

The existing system of society, in all its varieties

* *Revolution,* xi-xvi.

** *Revolution,* xvii-xxiii.

throughout the world, is based on falsehood—is, therefore artificial, and opposed to the eternal laws of humanity; it has always been degrading, unjust, and cruel, to the mass of mankind; and the sooner it can be made to terminate, the better it will be for all now living and those who will live hereafter. . . .

It is this impulse to overcome evil which now agitates the populations of Europe, and alarms the governing powers.

This was the true cause of the French revolution in February last, and of all the revolutions which have previously or since occurred over the world. Nor will these revolutions now cease until there shall be an entire change in the whole system of society, both in principle and practice. . . .

You desire to change to a better system, but see no mode of succeeding, except through violence.

I equally desire to see the change for the better accomplished; but it seems to me impossible to effect a beneficial, permanent change, through violence. . . .

Last year you had the power of Europe at your control; you lost it, not from the power of your opponents, but, from your want of knowing how to use power, when, through great difficulties, you had attained it. Were you again to acquire it, you would, from your want of knowledge of human nature, and of the true science of society, again allow it to be taken from you by the present aristocracy, who are experienced in governing, although upon false, injurious, and most cruel principles; but, taught as they have been, they know no other system. . . .

Without this knowledge you cannot proceed one step rationally towards the construction of a permanently prosperous and happy state of society.

The want of this knowledge was *alone* the cause of the failure of your efforts last year in France; it is the only cause of the present involved state of Europe, and of the irrational, or truly insane, conduct of so many contending

nations at this moment; all of which are acting in direct opposition to their own well-being, interest and happiness.

While you know not the true mode of forming a good character for all; or the means to obtain these results—to form revolutions will be useless and injurious to all. For, when successful, they will only increase the miseries of the mass, and make democrats into aristocrats, and thus keep society in a continual circle of contention and turmoil.

### 3* MANHOOD SUFFRAGE – A BAUBLE

Public attention has long been directed to a reform in Parliament as a panacea for all political evils, in which the expectants will be sadly disappointed, for it can effect no good or evil. A Parliament elected by manhood suffrage, things remaining as they are, would make little or no change for the better to the working classes, but would create perhaps more useless debates on subjects little understood by the new debaters. It would, however, be wisdom in the government to bring in and pass a bill for reform on the most liberal conditions—however liberal it will be harmless, and it will prevent more waste of invaluable time.

As members elected to the House of Commons have been prejudiced from birth by their erroneous training, education, and surroundings, they can see and comprehend private interests only; they are unprepared to legislate for the general public good; and such would be the case with the elected members under the full manhood suffrage. This result is demonstrated by the manhood elected members of the Congress of the United States, where an entire reform in the character and condition of the mass of the

* *Life, IA.*, xxi-xxii. (Memorial to the Right Honourable the Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury. 1858.)

people is quite as much required as in the British dominions.

But as manhood suffrage is at present a popular bauble, that will do neither good nor harm in its practical results, it will satisfy the most energetic but least experienced of the population of these islands to have it made a law of the constitution of this country, and it may now be safely granted to them.

### 4* THE RICH MUST ALWAYS GOVERN

*Stranger:* What hope have you then of a change, seeing that the rich and powerful will always, in the nature of things, govern the world?

*Founder:* My sanguine expectation of a speedy and extensive change rests upon the knowledge that the rich and powerful must always govern the world, and that they will govern it in accordance with what they are taught to believe will contribute most to their interest and happiness.

*Stranger:* Have they not always acted upon this principle, are they not now acting upon it? And if they must always persevere in this course, whence is this unheard-of change to proceed, and who are they who are to effect this mighty revolution in all human affairs?

*Founder:* This great change . . . must and will be accomplished by the rich and powerful. There are no other parties to do it, for those who can obtain the direction of public affairs, must be the most powerful, and the most powerful will soon make themselves the most wealthy. . . .

*Stranger:* Then you think that it is a waste of time, talent and pecuniary means, for the poor to contend in opposition to the rich and powerful?

*Founder:* I do; because if these who are poor today become powerful and succeed to the government tomor-

* *Dialogue,* 18-20.

row, these same individuals, who were poor, will, through their power, become rich, and they will then oppress those who may become poor by the change, and act just as the rich and powerful have always done to the poor from the beginning to the present moment.

### 5* WORKERS MUST ABANDON CLASS HATE

Yet before this change, so much to be desired by you and every other class, from the highest to the lowest, can be permitted to take place, one formidable obstacle must be removed. From infancy you, like others, have been made to despise and to hate those who differ from you in manners, language, and sentiments. You have been filled with all uncharitableness, and in consequence cherish feelings of anger towards your fellow-men who have been placed in opposition to your interests. Those feelings of anger must be withdrawn before any being who has your real interests at heart can place power in your hands. You must be made to know yourselves, by which means alone you can discover what other men are. You will then distinctly perceive that no rational ground for anger exists, even against those who by the errors of the present system have been made your most bitter enemies. An endless multiplicity of circumstances over which you had not the smallest control, placed you where you are, and as you are. In the same manner, others of your fellow-men have been formed by circumstances, equally uncontrollable by them, to become your enemies and grievous oppressors. In strict justice they are no more to be blamed for these results than you are; nor you than they; and, splendid as their exterior may be, this state of matters often causes them to suffer more poignantly than you. They have therefore an interest, strong as yours, in the change that is about to commence for the more equal

* *Working Classes,* Cole, 149-52.

benefit of all, provided *you* do not create any more formidable counteracting interest on *their* parts; of which the result must be to prolong the existing misery of both classes, and to retard the public good.

The existing order of things has placed some of your fellow-men in situations of power and emolument, and in the possession of privileges on which they have been taught to set a value. While you show by your conduct any desire violently to dispossess them of this power, these emoluments, and privileges—is it not evident that they must continue to regard you with jealous and hostile feelings, that the contention between the rich and the poor will never have an end, and that, whatever relative changes may take place among you, there will ever be the same oppression of the weak by the party who has attained to power? Before your condition can be ameliorated this irrational and useless contest must cease, and measures must be adopted in which both parties may have a substantial interest. Then will anger and opposition subside, and those arrangements which now appear impracticable to the inexperienced be carried most easily into practice. And these changes are at hand; for a crisis has arrived, new in the history of mankind. . . .

You will regard all your fellow-men, without distinction, as beings who are soon to become your friends and active co-operators in the attainment of the substantial happiness to which human nature is evidently destined. You will say to those who are now in possession of riches, honours, power, and privileges—'Retain these in perfect security as long as you can hold them in estimation. Our whole conduct and proceedings shall be a pledge to you that we will never attempt to dispossess you from any part of them; nay, while you can derive pleasure from additional wealth, we will add to that which you now possess. The cause of contest between us will henceforth cease. We have discovered its irrationality and utter uselessness. We will not, except to acquire experience from

it, recur to the past, in which all have been compelled to act an irrational part; but we will earnestly apply ourselves to the future; and having discovered the light of true knowledge, we will henceforth walk by it.'

### 6* TO WHOM CAN MY PLANS BE SUBMITTED?

Not to the mere commercial character, in whose estimation to forsake the path of immediate individual gain would be to show symptoms of a disordered imagination; for the children of commerce have been trained to direct all their faculties to buy cheap and sell dear; and consequently, those who are the most expert and successful in this wise and noble art, are, in the commercial world, deemed to possess foresight and superior acquirements; while such as attempt to improve the moral habits and increase the comforts of those whom they employ, are termed wild enthusiasts.

Nor yet are they to be submitted to the mere men of the law; for these are necessarily trained to endeavour to make wrong appear right, or to involve both in a maze of intricacies, and to legalize injustice.

Nor to the mere political leaders or their partizans, for they are embarrassed by the trammels of party, which mislead their judgement, and often constrain them to sacrifice the real well-being of the community and of themselves, to an apparent but most mistaken self-interest.

Nor to those termed heroes and conquerors, or to their followers; for their minds have been trained to consider the infliction of human misery, and the commission of military murders, a glorious duty, almost beyond reward.

Nor yet to the fashionable or splendid in their appearance; for these are from infancy trained to deceive and to be deceived, to accept shadows for substances, and to

* *New View*, Cole, 61-2.

live a life of insincerity, and of consequent discontent and misery.

Still less are they to be exclusively submitted to the official expounders and defenders of the various opposing religious systems throughout the world; for many of these are actively engaged in propagating imaginary notions, which cannot fail to vitiate the rational powers of man, and to perpetuate his misery.

These principles, therefore, and the practical systems which they recommend, are not to be submitted to the judgement of those who have been trained under, and continue in, any of these unhappy combinations of circumstances. But they are to be submitted to the dispassionate and patient investigation and decision of those individuals of every rank and class and denomination of society, who have become in some degree conscious of the errors in which they exist; who have felt the thick mental darkness by which they are surrounded; who are ardently desirous of discovering and following truth wherever it may lead; and who can perceive the inseparable connexion which exists between individual and general, between private and public good!

## 7* OWEN'S OPPONENTS

[Owen's refutation of Malthus is given in Chapter V. Here it may be noted that on the whole he has more confidence in the Tories than in either Whigs or Radicals. His attitude to the Radicals, and later to the Chartists, was one of the main barriers between him and the working class.]

Those who opposed the principles and plan I advocated were some of the younger disciples of the much-dreaded

* *Catechism*, Cole, 205-7.

notions respecting the evils of a too rapid population; the advocates of reform, not founded on previous training, instruction, and productive employment of the people; and some of the opposers of all the measures of Government.

A reform of our great national institutions, without preparing and putting into practice means to well-train, instruct, and advantageously employ, the great mass of the people, would inevitably create immediate revolution, and give new and extensive stimulus to every bad passion: violence would follow; every party, whether more or less virtuous, ignorant, or intelligent, would equally suffer in their turn; and in a short period this Empire, and all Europe and the Americas, would be plunged into one general scene of anarchy and fearful confusion, of which the late French Revolution will give but a faint anticipation.

The remaining opposition was on the part of those who have long been in the habit of systematically opposing the measures of the existing Administration; supposing, as I have no doubt they do sincerely, that they could direct matters, under the existing circumstances, better than they are now managed: but hitherto, nothing really beneficial, that is practical, has been advanced by them. I have for years very coolly and dispassionately observed both these parties, and put their professions and practices to the test. There are some exceptions on both sides to the following conclusions; but as parties, and acting as a body, I cannot, after so many years' intimate experience of the conduct of both, be now mistaken. These conclusions are: That the present Ministers are thoroughly satisfied that the principles on which, from previously existing circumstances, they have been compelled to act, are erroneous, and that the system they support is full of error, and productive of many serious and grievous evils: that they heartily and sincerely wish to remove the latter, if they know how; but they do not, as a Ministry, possess sufficient knowledge to enable them to carry their wishes and inclinations

into execution. They are in search of it; and ultimately they will find it. . . .

The opposition have involved themselves in a maze of false intelligence; something gratifying to discourse about, because it possesses the appearance of much learning; but when examined accurately it possesses no substance, it cannot be rendered of any practical use whatever.

## 8* A NEW ERA MUST COMMENCE

[Opening an 'Institution for the Formation of Character', including schools, reading and recreation rooms at New Lanark on January 1st, 1816, Owen addresses his assembled work-people.]

From this day a change must take place; a new era must commence; the human intellect, through the whole extent of the earth, hitherto enveloped by the grossest ignorance and superstition, must begin to be released from its state of darkness; nor shall nourishment henceforth be given to the seeds of disunion and division among men. For the time has come, when the means may be prepared to train all the nations of the world—men of every colour and climate, of the most diversified habits—in that knowledge which shall impel them not only to love but to be actively kind to each other in the whole of their conduct, without a single exception. I speak not an unmeaning jargon of words, but that which I know—that which has been derived from a cool and dispassionate examination and comparison, during a quarter of a century, of the facts which exist around us. And however averse men may be to resign their early-taught prejudices, I pledge myself to prove to the entire satisfaction of the world, the truth of all I have stated and all that I mean to state. Nay, such

* *New Lanark*, Cole, 97-8.

is my confidence in the truth of the principles on which the system I am about to introduce is founded, that I hesitate not to assert their power heartily to incline all men to say, 'This system is assuredly true, and therefore eminently calculated to realize those invaluable percepts of the Gospel—universal charity, goodwill, and peace among men. Hitherto we must have been trained in error; and we hail it as the harbinger of that period when our swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning-hooks; when universal love and benevolence shall prevail; when there shall be but one language and one nation; and when fear of want or of any evil among men shall be known no more.'

Acting, although unknown to you, uniformly and steadily upon this system, my attention was ever directed to remove as I could prepare means for their removal, such of the immediate causes as were perpetually creating misery amongst you, and which, if permitted to remain, would to this day have continued to create misery. I therefore withdrew the most pernicious incitements to falsehood, theft, drunkenness, and other pernicious habits, with which many of you were familiar: and in their stead I introduced other causes, which were intended to produce better *external* habits. I say better *external* habits, for to these alone have my proceedings hitherto been intended to apply. What has yet been done I consider as merely preparatory.

## 9* ENTIRELY RIGHT OR ENTIRELY WRONG

*Stranger:* Since we parted I have had time to reflect upon our last conversation, and reflection has only increased the magnitude of the importance which I attach to a right consideration of those principles which you ad-

* *Dialogue,* 8-9.

vocate. I, therefore, repeat, that you are entirely wrong in the foundation and superstructure of your New Moral World, or we of the old world must be so; for principles and practices more opposed to each other the human mind cannot conceive.

*Founder:* This is the view of the subject which I wish you to take; for I, at once, admit that I am entirely wrong or entirely right; and that, if I am right, you of the old world are wrong in all your views of human nature and of society; that is, of man in his individual state, and as a being associated with his fellows to promote their mutual happiness.

# X

# Owen's Plan

[The next two chapters deal with Owen's positive socialist proposals. Chapter X contains the general principles on which his villages of industry, or co-operative communities were to be founded, and their structure and main features. Chapter XI a variety of administrative details and related features. A certain amount of overlapping is unavoidable.]

## 1* PLAN FOR A VILLAGE OF INDUSTRY

I now beg leave to solicit the attention of the Committee to the drawings and explanations which accompany this report.

The drawing exhibits, in the foreground, an establishment, with its appendages and appropriate quantity of land; and at due distances, other villages of a similar description.

Squares of buildings are here represented sufficiently to accommodate about 1,200 persons each; and surrounded by a quantity of land, from 1,000 to 1,500 acres.

Within the squares are public buildings, which divide them into parallelograms.

The central building contains a public kitchen, messrooms, and all the accommodation necessary to economical and comfortable cooking and eating.

* *Relief of Poor,* Cole, 161-2.

To the right of this is a building, of which the ground-floor will form the infant school, and the other a lecture-room and a place of worship.

The building to the left contains a school for the elder children, and a committee-room on the ground-floor; above, a library and a room for adults.

In the vacant space are enclosed grounds for exercise and recreation: these enclosures are supposed to have trees planted in them.

It is intended that three sides of each square shall be lodging houses, chiefly for the married, consisting of four rooms in each; each room to be sufficiently large to accommodate a man, his wife, and two children.

The fourth side is designed for dormitories for all children exceeding two in a family, or above three years of age.

In the centre of this side of the square are apartments for those who superintend the dormitories: at one extremity of it is the infirmary; and at the other a building for the accommodation of strangers who may come from a distance to see their friends and relatives.

In the centres of the two sides of the square are apartments for general superintendents, clergymen, schoolmasters, surgeon, &c.; and in the third are store-rooms for all articles required for the use of the establishment.

On the outside, and at the back of the houses around the squares, are gardens, bounded by roads.

Immediately behind these, on one side, are buildings for mechanical and manufacturing purposes. The slaughter-house, stabling, &c., to be separated from the establishment by plantations.

At the other side are offices for washing, bleaching, &c., and at a still greater distance from the squares, are some of the farming establishments, with conveniences for malting, brewing, and cornmills, &c.; around these are cultivated enclosures, pasture-land, &c., the hedges of which are planted with fruit-trees.

The plan represented is on a scale considered to be sufficient to accommodate about 1,200 persons.

And these are to be supposed men, women, and children, of all ages, capacities and dispositions; most of them very ignorant; many with bad and vicious habits, possessing only the ordinary bodily and mental faculties of human beings, and who require to be supported out of the funds appropriated to the maintenance of the poor—individuals who are at present not only useless and a direct burden on the public, but whose moral influence is highly pernicious, since they are the medium by which ignorance and certain classes of vicious habits and crimes are fostered and perpetuated in society.

It is evident that while the poor are suffered to remain under the circumstances in which they have hitherto existed, they and their children, with very few exceptions, will continue unaltered in succeeding generations.

In order to effect any radically beneficial change in their character, they must be removed from the influence of such circumstances, and placed under those which, being congenial to the natural constitution of man and the well-being of society, cannot fail to produce that amelioration in their condition which all classes have an interest in promoting.

## 2* HOW CAN SUCH VILLAGES BE ESTABLISHED

[Owen estimated the initial cost of setting up one of these villages at about £100,000.]

There are several modes by which this plan may be effected.

It may be accomplished by individuals—by parishes—by counties—by districts, &c., comprising more coun-

* *Relief of Poor,* Cole, 164-5.

ties than one—and by the nation at large through its Government. Some may prefer one mode, some another; and it would be advantageous certainly to have the experience of the greatest variety of particular modes, in order that the plan which such diversified practice should prove to be the best might afterwards be generally adopted. It may therefore be put into execution by any parties according to their own localities and views.

The first thing necessary is, to raise a sum of money adequate to purchase the land (or it may be rented)—to build the square, manufactories, farm-houses, and their appendages—to stock the farm—and to provide everything to put the whole in motion.

Proper persons must be procured to superintend the various departments, until others should be trained in the establishment to supply their places.

The labour of the persons admitted may then be applied to procure a comfortable support for themselves and their children and to repay, as might be required, the capital expended on the establishment.

When their labour shall be thus properly and temperately directed, under an intelligent system, easy of practice, it will soon be found to be more than sufficient to supply every reasonable want of man. . . . The period is also arrived when the state of society imperiously requires the adoption of some measures to relieve the wealthy and industrious from the increasing burdens of the poor's rate, and the poor from their increasing misery and degradation.

### 3* GOVERNMENT OF THE COMMUNITIES

The peculiar mode of governing these establishments will depend on the parties who form them.

Those formed by landowners and capitalists, public

* *Report,* Cole, 287.

companies, parishes, or counties, will be under the direction of the individuals whom those powers may appoint to superintend them, and will, of course, be subject to the rules and regulations laid down by their founders.

Those formed by the middle and working classes, upon a complete reciprocity of interests, should be governed by themselves, upon principles that will *prevent* divisions, opposition of interests, jealousies, or any of the common and vulgar passions, which a contention for power is certain to generate. Their affairs should be conducted by a committee, composed of all the members of the association between certain ages—for instance, of those between thirty-five and forty-five, or between forty and fifty. Perhaps the former will unite more of the activity of youth with the experience of age than the latter; but it is of little moment which period of life may be fixed upon. In a short time the ease with which these associations will proceed in all their operations will be such as will render the business of government a mere recreation; and as the parties who govern will in a few years become the governed, they must always be conscious that at a future period they will experience the good or evil effect of the measures of their administration.

By this equitable and natural arrangement all the numberless evils of elections and electioneering will be avoided.

### 4* ADVANTAGES OF CO-OPERATION OVER INDIVIDUALISM

I admit that to purchase a cottage, and let it to a labourer, with land sufficient to support an industrious family, would do much to relieve and improve society; but when all the details of such arrangements shall be known, it will be found very difficult of execution, very expensive, and very defective in all the results which are now required

* *Catechism,* Cole, 212-5.

to remoralize and improve the working classes. As we advance in this interesting inquiry, it will be discovered that a limited knowledge only of our physical and intellectual powers could induce any parties to recommend this mode in preference to a united labour, expenditure and instruction, in conformity to a practical plan suggested 120 years ago by John Bellers, in complete unison with the soundest principles of political economy. . . .[1]

The new villages would combine within them all the advantages of the largest town, without one of its innumerable evils and inconveniences; and with all the benefits of the country without any of the numerous disadvantages that secluded residences now present.

In fact, the entire labour of the country, by the proposed arrangements, would be directed under all the advantages that science and experience could give; while now it is wasted in the most useless efforts, and generally exerted under the grossest ignorance. This difference in the application of human powers will soon produce an advantageous result in favour of the new system, far exceeding the annual amount in value of all the taxes and Government expenditure. *But who is yet prepared to understand this kind of political arithmetic?*

The Cottage system renders each individual of every family subject to those evils which all have witnessed and experienced, or are hourly liable to experience—the husband suddenly deprived of his wife, the wife of her husband—parents bereft of their children, children deprived of their parents. The ties of endearment are separated in a moment, and, under your system, what remains to the survivors? A wreck, and desolation of all that before made life desirable; often anguish not to be described or imagined, for the irreparable loss of the only loved object in existence; no friend remaining that feels, or can feel,

[1] John Bellers, *Proposals for Raising a College of Industry of all useful Trades and Husbandry.* 1696. (Reprinted by Owen, 1817.)

one particle of interest in all those nameless associations which had been formed by and with the departed object; and at the same time liable to insult, poverty, and every kind of oppression, and no one inclined to help or relieve. All are individualized, cold, and forbidding; each being compelled to take an hundred-fold more care of himself than would be otherwise necessary; because the ignorance of society has placed him in direct opposition to the thousands around him.

Under the proposed scheme, what a reverse will take place in practice when any of these dispensations of life occur! In these happy villages of unity, when disease or death assail their victim, every aid is near; all the assistance that skill, kindness and sincere affection can invent, aided by every convenience and comfort, are at hand. The intelligent resigned sufferer waits with cheerful patience, and thus effectually parries every assault of disease, when unaccompanied by his fell companion, death; and when death attacks him, he submits to a conqueror who he knew from childhood was irresistible, and whom for a moment he never feared! He is gone! The survivors lose an intelligent, a sincere and truly-valued friend; a beloved child; they feel their loss, and human nature must ever regret it; but the survivors were not unprepared, or unprovided, for this natural event. They have, it is true, lost one endeared and beloved object; and endeared and beloved in proportion as it was intelligent and excellent; but they have consolation in the certain knowledge that within their own immediate circle they have many, many others remaining; and around them on all sides, as far as the eye can reach, or imagination extend, thousands on thousands, willing to offer them aid and consolation. No orphans left without protectors; no insult or oppression can take place, nor any evil result whatever, beyond the loss of one dear friend or object among thousands who remain, dear to us as ourselves. Here may it be truly said, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'

## 5* THE CHANGE MUST BECOME UNIVERSAL

It may be useful here to remark, that the plan developed in my Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, and of the House of Commons on the Poor Laws, was intended for the parish poor *only;* and of course no part of society will long continue in a worse condition than the individuals within such proposed establishments. Under these arrangements the parish poor will soon lose their ignorant and vulgar habits, and acquire such an improved character as the new circumstances will imperceptibly and speedily give them. When these results irresistibly force themselves on the minds of all, the meanest and most miserable beings now in society will thus become the envy of the rich and indolent under the existing arrangements. The change from the *old* system to the *new* must become universal. To resist the introduction of this plan, in any part of the world, will *now* be as vain and useless, as for man by his puny efforts to preclude from the earth the vivifying rays of the sun.

## 6** A TEN YEARS' PLAN

All the means requisite to effect this change over Europe and America in five years from its commencement, and over the world in less than ten, are now at the control of society; and they will be thus applied as soon as measures shall be adopted to make society so far rational as to understand their own permanent interest.

And if the governments and peoples of Europe and America will now enter cordially into these measures, the populations of both continents may with ease, through a right direction of the daily and other periodical publica-

* *Development,* Cole, 231-2.

** *Revolution,* 48-9.

tions, and by other teachings, be made to become rational; and the dark glass of error, through which everything is now seen and mystified, will be removed, and they may be enabled to see things as they are, and prepared to act rationally, in less than one year.

Such is the simplicity and power of truth.

### 7* THE SYSTEM WILL BE WORLD WIDE

It is the interest of each one of the human race that there should be but one interest, one language, one general code of laws, and one system of administering them. These unions offer the most natural, easy, and speedy mode of effecting these great and always to be desired results. The federative connection of these Townships, by tens for more limited local objects, by fifties or hundreds for more enlarged operations, and by thousands for the most extended interests, to ensure peace and goodwill through every district and clime, will be effected without difficulty. For it will be discovered that the highest and most permanent interest of each one over the world, will be most effectually secured by these Townships and federations of Townships, without limit, until the population of the globe shall be cordially united as members of one family, all actively engaged in promoting the happiness of each other. These Townships, thus separate and united, will form palaces, surrounded with gardens, pleasure-grounds, and highly cultivated estates, on each side of all the railways, which will traverse each country in the most convenient directions for all general purposes.

* *Revolution,* 74.

# XI

## Some Features of the Plan

### 1* RELATION TO THE STATE IN PEACE AND WAR

Under this head are to be noticed, the amount and collection of the revenue, and the public or legal duties of the associations in peace and war.

Your Reporter concludes that whatever taxes are paid from land, capital, and labour under the existing arrangements of society, the same amount for the same proportion of each may be collected with far more ease under those now proposed. The Government would, of course, require its revenue to be paid in the legal circulating medium, to obtain which, the associations would have to dispose of as much of their surplus produce to common society for the legal coin or paper of the realm as would discharge the demands of Government.

In time of peace these associations would give no trouble to Government; their internal arrangements being founded on principles of prevention, not only with reference to public crimes but to the private evils and errors which so fatally abound in common society. Courts of law, prisons, and punishments would not be required. These are requisite only where human nature is greatly misunderstood; where society rests on the demoralizing system of individual competition, rewards, and punishments—they are necessary only in a stage of existence

* *Report,* Cole, 291-2.

previous to the discovery of the science of the certain and overwhelming influence of circumstances over the whole character and conduct of mankind. Whatever courts of law, prisons, and punishments have yet effected for society, the influence of other circumstances, which may now be easily introduced, will accomplish infinitely more; for they will effectually prevent the growth of those evils of which our present institutions do not take cognizance till they are already full formed and in baneful activity. In times of peace, therefore, these associations will save much charge and trouble to Government.

In reference to war also, they will be equally beneficial. Bodily exercises, adapted to improve the dispositions and increase the health and strength of the individual, will form part of the training and education of the children. In these exercises they may be instructed to acquire facility in the execution of combined movements, a habit which is calculated to produce regularity and order in time of peace, as well as to aid defensive and offensive operations in war. The children, therefore, at an early age, will acquire, *through their amusements,* those habits which will render them capable of becoming, in a short time, at any future period of life, the best defenders of their country, if necessity should ever arise to defend it; since they would, in all possibility, be far more to be depended upon than those whose physical, intellectual, and moral training had been less carefully conducted. In furnishing their quotas for the militia or common army they would probably adopt the pecuniary alternative; by which means they would form a reserve that, in proportion to their numbers, would be a great security to the nation's safety. They would prefer this alternative, to avoid the demoralizing effects of recruiting.

But knowledge of the science and influence of circumstances over mankind will speedily enable all nations to discover not only the evils of war, but the folly of it. Of all modes of conduct adopted by mankind to obtain

advantages in the present stage of society, this is the most certain to defeat its object. It is, in truth, a system of direct demoralization and of destruction; while it is the highest interest of all individuals and of all countries to *remoralize and conserve.* Men surely cannot with truth be termed rational beings until they shall discover and put in practice the principles which shall enable them to conduct their affairs without war. The arrangements we are considering would speedily show how easily these principles and practices may be introduced into general society.

From what has been stated it is evident that these associations would not subject the Government to the same proportion of trouble and expense that an equal population would do in old society; on the contrary, they would relieve the Government of the whole burthen; and by the certain and decisive influence of these arrangements upon the character and conduct of the parties, would materially add to the political strength, power, and resources of the country into which they shall be introduced.

### 2* WAR AND MILITARY TRAINING: A CITIZEN ARMY

Were all men trained to be rational, the art of war would be rendered useless. While, however, any part of mankind shall be taught that they form their own characters, and shall continue to be trained from infancy to think and act irrationally—that is, to acquire feelings of enmity, and to deem it a duty to engage in war against those who have been instructed to differ from them in sentiments and habits—even the most rational must, for their personal security, learn the means of defence; and every community of such characters, while surrounded by men who have been thus improperly taught, should acquire a

* *New View,* Cole, 57-8.

knowledge of this destructive art, that they may be enabled to over-rule the actions of irrational beings, and maintain peace.

To accomplish these objects to the utmost practical limit, and with the least inconvenience, every male should be instructed how best to defend, when attacked, the community to which he belongs. And these advantages are only to be obtained by providing proper means for the instruction of all boys in the use of arms and the arts of war.

As an example how easily and effectually this might be accomplished over the British Isles, it is intended that the boys trained and educated at the Institution at New Lanark shall be thus instructed; that the person appointed to attend the children in the playground shall be qualified to drill and teach the boys the manual exercise, and that he shall be frequently so employed; that afterwards, fire-arms, of proportionate weight and size for the age and strength of the boys, shall be provided for them, when also they might be taught to practise and understand the more complicated military movements.

This exercise, properly administered, will greatly contribute to the health and spirits of the boys, give them an erect and proper form, and habits of attention, celerity, and order. They will, however, be taught to consider this exercise, an art rendered absolutely necessary by the partial insanity of some of their fellow-creatures, who by the errors of their predecessors, transmitted through preceding generations, have been taught to acquire feelings of enmity, increasing to madness, against those who could not avoid differing from them in sentiments and habits; that this art should never be brought into practice except to restrain the violence of such madmen; and, in these cases, that it should be administered with the least possible severity, and solely to prevent the evil consequences of those rash acts of the insane, and, if possible, to cure them of their disease.

Thus, in a few years, by foresight and arrangement, may almost the whole expense and inconvenience attending the local military be superseded, and a permanent force created, which in numbers, discipline and principles, would be superior, beyond any comparison, for the purpose of defence; always ready in case of need, yet without the loss which is now sustained by the community of efficient and valuable labour. The expenditure which would be saved by this simple expedient, would be far more than competent to educate the whole of the poor and labouring classes of these kingdoms.

### 3* ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNAL MEALS

It is upon these principles that arrangements are now proposed for the new agricultural villages, by which the food of the inhabitants may be prepared in one establishment, where they will eat together as one family.

Various objections have been urged against this practice; but they have come from those only who, whatever may be their pretensions in other respects, are mere children in the knowledge of the principles and economy of social life.

By such arrangements the members of these new associations may be supplied with food at far less expense and with far more comfort than by any individual or family arangements; and when the parties have been once trained and accustomed, as they easily may be, to the former mode, they will never afterwards feel any inclination to return to the latter.

If a saving in the quantity of food—the obtaining of a superior quality of prepared provisions from the same materials—and the operation of preparing them being effected in much less time, with far less fuel, and with greater ease, comfort, and health to all the parties

* *Report,* Cole, 275.

employed—be advantages, these will be obtained in a remarkable manner by the new arrangements proposed.

And if to partake of viands so prepared, served up with every regard to comfort, in clean, spacious, well-lighted and pleasantly-ventilated apartments, and in the society of well-dressed, well-trained, well-educated, and well-informed associates, possessing the most benevolent dispositions and desirable habits, can give zest and proper enjoyment to meals, then will the inhabitants of the proposed villages experience all this in an eminent degree.

When the new arrangements shall become familiar to the parties, this superior mode of living may be enjoyed at far less expense and with much less trouble than are necessary to procure such meals as the poor are now compelled to eat, surrounded by every object of discomfort and disgust, in the cellars and garrets of the most unhealthy courts, alleys, and lanes, in London, Dublin, and Edinburgh, or Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham.

### 4 RATIONAL DRESS

(a)* Food and lodging being thus provided for, the next consideration regards dress.

This, too, is a subject, the utility and disadvantages of which seem to be little understood by the Public generally; and, in consequence, the most ridiculous and absurd notions and practices have prevailed concerning it.

Most persons take it for granted, without thinking on the subject, that to be warm and healthy it is necessary to cover the body with thick clothing and to exclude the air as much as possible; and first appearances favour this conclusion. Facts, however, prove that under the same circumstances, those who from infancy have been the most lightly clad, and who, by their form of dress, have

* *Report,* Cole, 276-7.

been the most exposed to the atmosphere, are much stronger, more active, in better health, warmer in cold weather, and far less incommoded by heat, than those who from constant habit have been dressed in such description of clothing as excludes the air from their bodies. The more the air is excluded by clothing, although at first the wearer feels warmer by each additional covering he puts on, yet in a few weeks, or months at most, the less capable he becomes of bearing cold than before.

The Romans and the Highlanders of Scotland appear to be the only two nations who adopted a national dress on account of its utility, without, however, neglecting to render it highly becoming and ornamental. The form of the dress of these two nations was calculated first to give strength and manly beauty to the figure, and afterwards to display it to advantage. The time, expense, thought, and labour now employed to create a variety of dress, the effects of which are to deteriorate the physical powers, and to render the human figure an object of pity and commiseration, are a certain proof of the low state of intellect among all classes in society. The whole of this gross misapplication of the human faculties serves no one useful or rational purpose. On the contrary, it essentially weakens all the physical and mental powers, and is, in all respects, highly pernicious to society.

All other circumstances remaining the same, sexual delicacy and virtue will be found much higher in the nations among whom the person, *from infancy,* is the most exposed, than among those people who exclude from sight every part of the body except the eye.

(b)* [Nearly all Owen's theories arise directly from personal experience. This is illustrated by a comparison between the passage above and the following from his Autobiography.]

* *Life,* 8-9.

My cousin and I read and thought much, and yet we were both generally very active. But one very hot day in hay-harvest time we both felt ourselves, being overclothed, quite overcome with heat while we sauntered from the house towards a large field where numerous haymakers were actively at work. They appeared to us, who had been doing nothing and yet were overcome with heat, to be cool and comfortable. I said 'Richard! how is this? These active work-people are not heated, but are pleasantly cool, and do not suffer as we do from the heat. There must be some secret in this. Let us try to find it out. Let us do exactly as they do, and work with them.' He willingly agreed. I was, I suppose, between nine and ten years of age, and he was between eight and nine. We observed that all the men were without their coats and waistcoats, and had their shirts open. We adopted the same practice, procured the lightest rakes and forks—for both were used occasionally—and Richard and I, unburthened of our heavy clothing, led the field for several hours, and were cooler and less fatigued than when we were idle and wasting our time. This became ever afterwards a good *experience* and lesson to both; for we found ourselves much more comfortable with active employment than when we were idle.

## 5 OTHER ASPECTS OF THE PLAN

### (a)* *No Government Will Resist*

Let a rational plan, in principal and practice, be now proposed to the existing governments, in a rational manner and a right spirit, by their peoples, and let governments be requested to carry the proposed plan into practice, with order, in peace, and consistently or rationally, and it will be found that no government can or will resist such application; and because, as previously stated,

* *Revolution*, 36.

it will be obviously for the interests of the governors as well as of those whom they govern, to adopt such plans without contest or delay.

(b)* *How to Begin*

To proceed rationally with the practical measures of transition, the existing governments, remaining undisturbed, like the old roads during the formation of the railways which were to supersede them, should select a certain number—say seven, more or less—of the most intelligent practical men they can find, to be called a committee, or council, or by any other name, who should have entrusted to them the creation of the new arrangements, under which, in the new state of society, all the business of life is to be conducted. . . .

This committee should begin the change by appointing competent officers, properly instructed, to direct the domestic, educational, mechanical, agricultural, and all other required operations.

They should enlist from the unemployed, or inefficiently employed, of the working classes, those who are willing to support themselves by their own properly directed industry, under the newly created superior arrangements; to be formed into a civil army, to be trained under the new arrangements, in order that they may create their own supplies of every description, be reeducated, become defenders of their country in case of invasion, and maintain peace and order at home; while the regular army shall be employed abroad, as long as a regular army shall be necessary.

(c)** *Forming New Townships*

When the numbers increase in any given Township beyond the population that it will maintain in the highest state of comfort, a new Township must be commenced

* *Revolution,* 36-7. ** *Revolution,* 39.

upon a new site; and this process must be continued until all the land of the earth shall be covered with these federative Townships. This period will probably never arrive; but if it should, as the population of the world will be then highly good, intelligent, and rational, they will know far better than the present most irrational generation, how to provide for the occurrence. But for men now, when the earth is comparatively a waste and a forest for want of people to drain and cultivate it, to suppose that population is already, or is likely for ages to become, superabundant, is one of the thousand insanities with which the present generation is afflicted.

### (d)* *Self-Sufficiency*

Each of these Townships should be devised to be self-educating, self-employing, self-supporting, and self-governing. Any arrangements short of this result will be inefficient, and not in accordance with the fundamental principle of the new system of universality, and will be deficient in forming the superior independent character which should be given to these Townships.

### (e)** *Equality of Condition*

Every member of the Township must be *well and equally accommodated according to age.* For there must be, as a leading principle for practice, perfect equality of condition, according to age, throughout the whole proceedings of each Township; for without this equality properly carried out among all the members of each Township, there can be no justice, no unity, no virtue, no permanent happiness. But as long as external arrangements are made to be unequal, there can be no equality in practice.

Those who have been trained in a system of inequality, have no conception of the unnecessary misery which it in-

* *Revolution,* 40. ** *Revolution,* 42.

flicts upon rich and poor; or of the enormous injustices which it creates, or of the endless irrationalities to which it gives rise.

(f)* *All or None*

It is an Almighty decree, '*that all of the human race shall be happy, or none*'. . . . 'All or none' will ere long become, first the watchword of democracy, and then the universal motto of men of every country or clime.

* *Revolution*, 57-8.

# XII

## The Trades Union

[When Owen returned from the U.S.A. in 1829 he found a growing co-operative movement stemming from his own principles. This brought him for the first time into contact with the workers except as their employer. When the great upsurge of Trade Unionism began in 1833 he welcomed it as a possible means of putting his Plan into practice. Yet this involved him in a class struggle, of which, as we have seen, he disapproved in principle, and he soon came into conflict with the left wing of the movement, represented by James Morrison and J. E. Smith. This conflict is reflected in the fourth and last extracts in this Chapter.]

### 1* AN APPEAL TO THE RICH

We, *the producers of all real wealth,* have been, and now are, held in disesteem; while the *unproductive,* useless and injurious members of society, riot to their own hurt in riches, and are trained to consider us their servants and slaves. By these ignorant and unnatural proceedings, the Earth and his own nature have been made the perpetual source of evil instead of good to men.

* *A manifesto of the productive classes of Great Britain and Ireland, to the governments and people of the continents of Europe, and of North and South America. May 13, 1833.* Buonarroti, 446-8.

We *will,* that this irrational state of society shall now cease, and that, henceforth, *all* except those of the present generation too far advanced in life for the change, shall be trained to become producers of physical wealth or of intellectual gratification, and that none shall maintain who are not occupied in producing or acquiring that which will benefit society, or be deemed equivalent to their consumption of its productions.

We know that all will become far better and happier, by being made to be producers, physically or intellectually, or both, of the means of gratification to society, than they can be by living a life of idleness and uselessness. . . .

Come then, and for your own happiness, co-operate with us as friends. We are the producers of all the wealth and means of comfort you have hitherto possessed—we can make arrangements by which, in future, you may enjoy these good things in safety, and without fear; but, were we so inclined, we could effectually withhold them from you and your children; and force applied to us would demonstrate only the weakness and folly of our mistaken opponents. The reign of terror, of carnal arms, or of physical force of any kind or description in opposition to public opinion, has for ever ceased. It is now useless to speak of these old wornout means to effect any great or permanent object. We discard them as being worse than useless; as means of power gone by, never more to be called into action by *beings* claiming a rational nature.

We call upon you to discard them also, and to turn your thoughts from the destruction of your fellow men, and of their wealth, to the acquisition of that knowledge which will enable you to assist materially to improve the former, and greatly increase the latter. To act thus is your duty and your interest, for it is the only course that can insure your permanent satisfaction, or that can now give you a chance of happiness.

## 2* THE GREAT CHANGE REQUIRED

The turn-out of the building operatives, and the existing differences with their masters, will, I doubt not, tend to effect a permanent good for both parties. It affords a fair opportunity to you, the producing classes (and masters and men are producers), quietly, calmly, and most effectively, to make a stand, at once, and put yourselves in your right position, and thereby gradually accomplish the great change required; that is, that individual competition, the bane of the producing class, shall cease among you. . . .

Now as you perceive that you alone have been taught to do anything beneficial for society, decide at once to form new arrangements, to reorganise yourselves, to produce and obtain a full supply of the best of everything for the whole population of Great Britain and Ireland, yourselves enjoying, as well as the upper and middle classes, superior food, houses, furniture, clothes, instruction for yourselves and children, and daily rational recreation, such as will improve your health and contribute to your happiness.

This you may now do and you can accomplish this change for the whole population of the British Empire in less than five years, and *essentially* ameliorate the condition of the producing class *throughout Great Britain and Ireland* in less than *five months.*

## 3** THE BUILDERS' GUILD

[While we cannot be certain that this Manifesto was written by Owen, both ideas and style are essentially his.]

* 'Address to the Operative Builders', August 26, 1833, from R. W. Postgate, *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 90.

** 'Friendly declaration of the Delegates of the Lodges of the Building Branches of the United Kingdom, held in Manchester. . . . Addressed to their Fellow Subjects throughout the British Dominions', September, 1833, from R. W. Postgate, *The Builders' History*, 463-6.

After the most mature and grave deliberation in Council among ourselves, we have come to the conclusion that we and you are in false positions and that the real interests of all parties are sacrificed to the errors of those who do not understand the resources of our country or the means of advantageously calling them into action. . . .

It is now evident to us that those who have hitherto advised the Authorities of these realms in devising the Institutions of our country were themselves ignorant of the first principles requisite to be known to establish and maintain a prosperous and superior state of society.

Knowing this and seeing no prospects of any improvement in our condition, being also conscious that our most valuable materials are ignorantly wasted by being senselessly scattered throughout the four quarters of the world and that our industry and skill and unlimitable powers of invention are now most grossly misdirected; we, without any hostile feelings to the government or any class of persons, have been compelled to come to the conclusion that no party can or will relieve us from the tremendous evils which we suffer and still greater which are coming upon us, until we begin in good earnest to act for ourselves and at once adopt the recommendation of Sir Robert Peel, 'to take our affairs into our own hands.'

[The Manifesto announces the formation of a National Building Guild of Brothers, including among its objectives the following:]

9th—We will exhibit to the world, in a plain and simple manner, by our quiet example, how easily the most valuable wealth may be produced in superfluity beyond the wants of the population of all countries; also how beneficially, for the Producing Classes (and all classes will soon perceive their interest on becoming superior producers) the present artificial, inaccurate and therefore injurious circulating medium for the exchange of our riches,

may be superseded by an equitable, and therefore rational representation of real wealth, and as a consequence of these important advances the causes which generate the bad passions and all the vices and corruptions attributed to human nature, shall gradually diminish until they all die a natural death and be known no more, except as matter of past history, and thus by contrast, be the cause of everlasting rejoicing.

10th—We shall by these and other means now easy of adopting speedily open the road to remove the causes of individual and national competition, of individual and national contests, jealousies and wars, and enable all to discover their true individual interests and thereby establish peace, goodwill and harmony, not only among the Brethren of the Building Guild, but also by their example among the human race for ever.

### 4* AT THE HEIGHT OF THE CRISIS

[Owen issued this statement when the struggle of the Consolidated Trades Union had reached a climax with the conviction and sentence of the Tolpuddle labourers. This event is the 'circumstances' to which Owen refers in the fourth paragraph.]

*Under this system, the idle, the useless, and the vicious govern the population of the world;* whilst the useful and truly virtuous, so far as such a system will permit men to be virtuous, are by them degraded and depressed. . . .

*Men of industry, and good and virtuous habits! this is the last state to which you ought to submit,* nor would I advise you to allow the ignorant, the idle, the presumptuous, and the vicious, any longer to lord it over the well-

* *The Legacy of Robert Owen, To the Population of the World,* Buonarroti, 435-6.

being, the lives, and happiness, of yourselves and families, when by *three days* of such idleness as constitutes the whole of their lives, you would for ever convince each of these mistaken individuals that you now possess the power to compel *them* at once to become the abject slaves, and the oppressed portion of society, as they have hitherto made *you.*

But all the individuals now living are the suffering victims of this accursed system, and all are objects of pity: you will, therefore, effect this great and glorious revolution without, if possible, inflicting individual evil. You can easily accomplish this most-to-be-desired object. Proceed with your Union on the principles you have latterly adopted; they are wise and just; and wisdom and justice, combined with your Union, will be sure to render it for ever legal.

Men of industry, producers of wealth and knowledge, and of all that is truly valuable in society! *unite your powers to create a new and righteous state of human existence; a state in which the only contest shall be, who shall produce the greatest amount of permanent happiness for the human race.* You have all the requisite materials awaiting your proper application of them to effect this change, and circumstances have arisen within the last week to render delay a dereliction of the highest duty which you have to perform to yourselves, to your families, and to the population of the world.

Men of industrious habits, you who are the most honest, useful, and valuable parts of society, by producing for it all its wealth and knowledge, *you have formed and established the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and it will prove the palladium of the world.* All the intelligent, well-disposed, and superior minds among all classes of society, male and female, will now rally round the Consolidated Union, and become members of it; and if the irrationality of the present degraded and degrading system render it necessary,

you will discover the reasons why you should willingly sacrifice all you hold dear in the world, and life itself, rather than submit to its dissolution or slightest depression.

For your sakes I have become a member of your Consolidated Union; and while it shall be directed with the same wisdom and justice that it has been from its commencement, and its proceedings shall be made known to the public as you intend them to be, my resolve is to stand by your order, and support the Union to the utmost of my power. It is this Consolidated Union that can alone save the British Empire from greater confusion, anarchy, and misery than it has ever yet experienced. It is, it will daily become more and more, *the real conservative power of society;* for its example will be speedily followed by all nations, and through its beneficial example the greatest revolution ever effected in the history of the human race will be commenced, rapidly carried on, and completed over the world, without bloodshed, violence, or evil of any kind, merely by *an overwhelming moral influence;* which influence individuals and nations will speedily perceive the folly and uselessness of attempting to resist.

Experience has forced these important truths into my mind, and I give them now to the population of the world as the *most valuable legacy that man can give to man.*

March 30, 1834.

## 5* AGAINST CLASS ANTAGONISM

It is time the official organ of the Consolidated Union [*The Pioneer*] should cease uselessly to irritate other classes of society: this is not the mode to serve any cause, but to create unnecessarily greater obstacles to retard the progress of the sacred cause of human amelioration, under-

* 'A Lecture': April 27th, 1834 from R. W. Postgate, *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 100.

taken by the National Consolidated Union. No man, who understands what human nature is, and how in each individual, it is formed to become what we find it at maturity, and who comprehends the elements of which all society is formed, and how they must be combined to produce any permanent good for the mass of the people, can continue to write to irritate. . . .

Let, therefore, reason and sound argument, and not passion and prejudice, or party or petty proceedings of any kind, be now the characteristic of the official and public organ of the Consolidated Union. Not an article should be in it which ought not to be calmly considered by the Executive and marked as having received their deliberate sanction.

# XIII

## Owen on Religion

### 1 OWEN DENOUNCES ALL RELIGIONS

[Owen always regarded the moment when, at a meeting in the City of London Tavern, on August 21st, 1817, he publicly declared all religions to be erroneous, as one of the turning points in his life, and, indeed, in the history of the world. Below is the text of his statement, and an account, from his Autobiography, of its reception.]

(a)* On this day—in this hour—even now—shall these bonds be burst asunder, never more to reunite while the world shall last. What the consequences of this daring deed shall be to myself, I am as indifferent about as whether it shall rain or be fair tomorrow. Whatever may be the consequences, I shall now perform my duty to you, and to the world; and should it be the last act of my life, I shall be well content, and know that I have lived for an important purpose.

Then, my friends, I tell you, that hitherto you have been prevented from even knowing what happiness really is, solely in consequence of the errors—gross errors—that have been combined with the fundamental notions of every religion that has hitherto been taught to men. And, in consequence, they have made man the most in-

* *Catechism,* Cole, 216.

consistent, and the most miserable being in existence. By the errors of these systems he has been made a weak, imbecile animal; a furious bigot and fanatic; or a miserable hypocrite; and should these qualities be carried, not only into the projected villages, but *into Paradise itself, a Paradise would no longer be found!*

In all the religions which have hitherto been forced on the minds of men, deep, dangerous, and lamentable principles of disunion, division and separation have been fast entwined with all their fundamental notions; and the certain consequences have been all the dire effects which religious animosities have, through all the past periods of the world, inflicted with such unrelenting stern severity or mad and furious zeal!

If, therefore, my friends, you should carry with you into these proposed villages, of intended unity and unlimited mutual co-operation, one single particle of *religious intolerance,* or sectarian feelings of *division* and *separation*—maniacs only would go there to look for harmony and happiness; or *elsewhere,* as long as such insane errors shall be found to exist!

I am not going to ask impossibilities from you—I know what you *can* do; and I know also what you *cannot* do. Consider again on what grounds each man in existence has a full right to the enjoyment of the most unlimited liberty of conscience. I am not of your religion, nor of any religion yet taught in the world! to me they all appear united with much—yes, with very much—error!

(b)* I commenced my address, and continued amidst much applause and cheering from the friends of the cause which I advocated, until I approached that part in which I denounced all the religions of the world as now taught; when by my manner I prepared the audience for some extraordinary proceeding. . . .

* *Life,* 222-7.

The meeting here became excited to the highest pitch of expectation as to what was to follow; and a breathless silence prevailed, so that not the slightest sound could be heard. I made a slight pause, and, as my friends afterwards told me, added a great increase of strength and dignity to my manner, of which at the time I was wholly unconscious, and in that state of mind I finished my statement and I then again paused for some seconds, to observe the effects of this unexpected and unheard-of declaration and denouncement of all existing religions, in one of the most numerous public meetings of all classes ever held in the British metropolis under cover and at midday.

My own expectations were, that such a daring denouncement in opposition to the deepest prejudices of every creed, would call down upon me the vengeance of the bigot and superstitious, and that I should be torn to pieces at the meeting. But great was my astonishment at what followed. A pause ensued, of the most profound silence, but of noiseless agitation in the minds of all—none apparently knowing what to do or how to express themselves. All seemed thunderstruck and confounded. My friends were taken by surprise, and were shocked at my temerity, and feared for the result. Those who came with the strongest determination to oppose me, had, as they afterwards stated to me, their minds changed as it were by some electric shock, and the utmost mental confusion seemed to pervade the meeting, none venturing to express their feelings; and had I not purposely paused and waited for some demonstration from the audience, I might have continued my address in the astonished silence which I had produced. [Some clergymen attempted] to lead the meeting by a few low hisses. But these, to my great astonishment, were instantly rebutted by the most heartfelt applause from the whole of the meeting, with the exception stated, that I ever witnessed, before or since, as a public demonstration of feeling.

I then said to the friends near me—'The victory is gained. Truth openly stated is omnipotent.' . . .

My friend Henry Brougham, since known as Lord Brougham, and Lord Chancellor of England, saw me the day after the meeting walking in the streets of the metropolis, and came to me, saying—'How the devil, Owen, could you say what you did yesterday at your public meeting! If any of us (meaning the then so-called Liberal party in the House of Commons) had said half as much, we should have been burnt alive—and here are you quietly walking as if nothing had occurred!'

## 2 THE RATIONAL RELIGION

[Owen was often accused of atheism: in fact he was a deist, much as Tom Paine was, and his deism, like Paine's, allowed of a thorough-going materialism. He lays down the following Laws for his Townships on religious matters.]

(a)* 1st. Eweryone shall have an equal and full liberty to express the dictates of his conscience on religious and all other subjects.

2nd. No one shall have any other power than fair and friendly argument to control the opinions and beliefs of another.

3rd. No praise or blame, no merit or demerit, no reward or punishment shall be awarded for any opinions or belief.

4th. But all, af every religion, shall have equal right to express their opinions respecting the Incomprehensible Power which moves the atoms and controls the universe; and to worship that power under any form or in any manner agreeable to their consciences—not interfering with any others.

* *Revolution*, 108.

(b)* [Owen sets out 'The Principles and practices of the Rational Religion' in ten 'Laws'. The first three, which contain the main substance of his views, are given below.]

*Law* 1. That all facts yet known to man, indicate that there is an external or internal Cause of all existences, by the fact of their existence; that this all-pervading Cause of motion and change in the universe, is that Incomprehensible Power which the nations of the world have called, God, Jehovah, Lord, etc.; but that the facts are yet unknown to man which define what that Power is.

*Law* 2. That it is a law of nature, obvious to our senses, that the internal and external character of all that have life upon the earth, is formed *for* them and not *by* them; that, in accordance with this law, the internal and external character of man is formed *for* and *not by* him, as hitherto most erroneously imagined; and therefore, he cannot have merit or demerit, or deserve praise or blame, reward or punishment, in this life, or in any future state of existence.

*Law* 3. That the knowledge of this fact, with its all-important consequences, will necessarily create in everyone a new, sublime, and pure spirit of charity, for the convictions, feelings and conduct of the human race, and dispose them to be kind to all that have life—seeing that this varied life is formed by the same Incomprehensible Power that has created human nature, and given man his peculiar faculties.

## 3** SUNDAY – A DAY FOR ENJOYMENT

Those, then, who desire to give mankind the character which it would be for the happiness of all that they should possess, will not fail to make careful provision for their amusement and recreation.

* *Revolution,* 109-13. ** *New View,* Cole, 42.

The Sabbath was originally so intended. It was instituted to be a day of universal enjoyment and happiness to the human race. It is frequently made, however, from the opposite extremes of error, either a day of superstitious gloom and tyranny over the mind, or of the most destructive intemperance and licentiousness. The one has been the cause of the other; the latter the certain and natural consequence of the other. Relieve the human mind from useless and superstitious restraints; train it on those principles which facts, ascertained from the first knowledge of time to this day, demonstrate to be the only principles which are true; and intemperance and licentiousness will not exist; for such conduct in itself is neither the immediate nor the future interest of man; and he is ever governed by one or other of these considerations, according to the habits which have been given him from infancy.

The Sabbath, in many parts of Scotland, is not a day of innocent and cheerful recreation to the labouring man; nor can those who are confined all the week to sedentary occupations, freely partake, without censure, of their air and exercise to which nature invites them, and which their health demands.

## 4* AN ATTEMPTED CONVERSION

[Owen's children were brought up in orthodoxy by their pious mother, and Robert Dale Owen describes an attempt to convert his free-thinking father in a passage that tells us much both about Owen's religion and his attitude to his children.]

I sounded my father by first asking him what he thought about Jesus Christ. His reply was to the effect that I would do well to heed his teachings, especially those relating to charity and to our loving one another.

* *T.M.W.*, 83-4.

This was well enough, as far as it went; but it did not at all satisfy me. So, with some trepidation, I put the question direct, whether my father disbelieved that Christ was the Son of God?

He looked a little surprised and did not answer immediately. 'Why do you ask that question, my son?' he said at last.

'Because I am sure—' I began eargerly.

'That he *is* God's Son?' asked my father, smiling.

'Yes, I am.'

'Did you ever hear of the Mahometans?' said my father, while I paused to collect my proofs.

I replied that I had heard of such people who live somewhere, far off.

'Do you know what their religion is?'

'No.'

'They believe that Christ is not the Son of God, but that another person, called Mahomet, was God's chosen prophet.'

'Do they not believe the Bible?' asked I, somewhat aghast.

'No. Mahomet wrote a book called the Koran; and Mahometans believe it to be the word of God. That book tells them that God sent Mahomet to preach the gospel to them and to save their souls.'

Wonders crowded fast upon me. A rival Bible and a rival Saviour. Could it be? I asked. 'Are you *quite* sure this is true, papa?'

'Yes, my dear, I am quite sure.'

'But I suppose there are very few Mahometans: not near—*near* so many as there are of Christians.'

'Do you call Catholics Christians, Robert?'

'O no, papa. The Pope is Antichrist.'

My father smiled. 'Then by Christians you mean Protestants.'

'Yes.'

'Well, there are many more Mahometans than Protes-

tants in the world: about a hundred and forty million Mahometans and less than a hundred million Protestants.'

'I thought almost everyone believed in Christ, as mama does.'

'There are probably twelve hundred millions of people in the world. So, out of every twelve persons only one is a Protestant. Are you quite sure that the one is right and the eleven wrong?'

My creed, based on authority, was toppling. I had no answer ready. . . . And so ended this notable scheme of mine for my father's conversion.

# XIV

## Marriage and the Family

[Owen's denunciation of bourgeois marriage, often rather violently expressed, exposed him to even more unscrupulous abuse than his attacks on religion. Yet, as may be seen from Extract 7, his practical proposals were both moderate and sensible.]

### 1* EVIL EFFECTS OF THE MARRIAGE SYSTEM

And now I tell you, and through you, the population of all the nations of the earth, that the present marriages of the world, under the system of moral evil in which they have been devised and are now contracted, are the sole cause of all the prostitution, of all its incalculable grievous evils, and of more than one half of all the vilest and most degrading crimes known to society. And that, until you put away from among you and your children for ever, *this accursed thing,* you will never be in a condition to become chaste or virtuous in your thoughts and feelings, or to know what real happiness is. For now almost all who are in the married state are daily and hourly practising the deepest deception, and living in the grossest prostitution of body and mind; and misery is multiplied by it beyond any of your feeble powers, in your present irrational state, to estimate. . . . It is a Satanic device of

* *Marriages,* 7-8.

the Priesthood to place and keep mankind within their slavish superstitions, and to render them subservient to all their purposes; and until you can acquire fortitude and moral courage to look this subject fairly in the face and meet it fully on the ground of common sense and right reason, and can show it to be, as it is, in direct opposition to the laws of your Organization, it is eminently calculated to make you, in the greatest extreme, ignorantly selfish, wretchedly vicious, and most unhappy. . . . It is now ascertained that you have not been organized to feel or not to feel at your pleasure. You, therefore, commit a crime against the everlasting laws of your nature when you say that you will 'love and cherish' what your organization may compel you to dislike and loathe, even in a few hours.

### 2 CELIBACY A CRIME

(a)* *Let it now be known to all,* that when the mind of man shall be regenerated, and he shall enter upon the state of moral good, in an association of sufficient numbers to support and protect itself, and its rising generation, against the ignorance and consequent prejudices of moral evil; that *celibacy,* beyond the period plainly indicated for its termination by nature (although esteemed a high virtue under the reign of moral evil), will be known to be a great crime, necessarily leading to disease of body and mind. . . .

Also, in the present state of moral evil, it is esteemed a high and superior virtue to be chaste, according to the unnatural notions of a most degraded order of men, called the Priesthood, who, in various parts of the world, have taken upon themselves to direct the opinions and feelings of the human race, as though they were themselves divinities. . . . This order of men, to whose oppres-

* *Marriages,* 10-11.

sions of body and mind no rational being will longer submit, have chosen to make chasity to consist in having sexual intercourse in accordance only with *their* most fantastic whims and unnatural notions; and whom they discordantly join, *'let'* say they *'no man put asunder!'* This human decree of the Priesthood is the origin of all prostitution, and of all the endless crimes, evils, and sufferings; and of all impure thoughts and desires, and of all the known and unknown, and almost unimagined crimes and miseries of the present married life.

(b)* The priest's and the rich man's laws of chastity are very different to Nature's laws of chastity. . . .

The chastity of Nature, then, or real chastity—that chastity which alone is virtuous—consists in the intercourse of the sexes when there is a pure and genuine sympathy or sincere affection between the parties; when the physical, intellectual, and moral feelings of the one are in perfect accordance with those of the other; when, in fact, their natures are so happily blended, that together they form but one harmonious whole, and become, when thus united in heart and soul, or body and mind, one being, whose feelings and interests are identified, and who are thus made capable of enjoining these sympathies and affections so long as Nature has designed them to remain, and thus to experience the full happiness of their nature, or of a virtuous mode of existence.

### 3 THE FAMILY IN BOURGEOIS SOCIETY

(a)** The first effect of these artificial marriages is to make it necessary for the newly married couple to have a single-family establishment, varied in detail, according to the class or rank of life of the parties. Within these new arrangements the husband and wife place themselves,

* *Marriages*, 75-6. ** *Marriages*, 26-7.

to provide for their family, to the utmost extent of their powers and capacities to advance themselves and children towards the highest pinnacles of society, and thus they are at once placed in direct or indirect contest with all other families having the same laudable object, as it is now termed, in view.

Now this single-family arrangement is one of the most unfortunate and vicious for the husband and wife, for the children, and for society, that could be devised. It is calculated, in the first place, to make the husband, wife, children, and the public, most ignorantly selfish, and to make the greatest mistakes relative to their individual interest. It next places the husband and wife under such unfavourable circumstances relative to each other, that there are many, many chances, considering the erroneous notions respecting themselves and human nature, which they have been forced from infancy to receive, that they will speedily create an unfavourable difference of feeling for each other, on account of some of these single-family arrangements, or daily and hourly transactions and proceedings. Then this mode of life is highly injurious for the well training and educating of the children. The family arrangements are made to be as convenient as the parties know how, for the adult part of it, and they thus become most inconvenient for the children. The whole furniture of the house of a single-family establishment, in all ranks of life, is itself a most vicious and undesirable circumstance placed around the children from their birth.

(b)* The single-family arrangements are hostile to cultivation in children of any of the superior and ennobling qualities of human nature. They are trained by them to acquire all the most mean and ignorant selfish feelings that can be generated in human character. The children within those dens of selfishness and hypocrisy are taught

* *Marriages*, 36.

to consider their own little individual family their own world, and that it is the duty and interest of all within that little orb to do whatever they can to promote the advantages of all the legitimate members of it. Within these persons, it is *my* house, *my* wife, *my* estate, *my* children, or *my* husband; *our* estate, and *our* children; or *my* brothers, *my* sisters; and *our* house and property. This family party is trained to consider it quite right, and a superior mode of acting, for each member of it to seek, by all fair means, as almost any means, except *direct* robbery, are termed, to increase the wealth, honour, and privileges of the family, and every individual member of it.

Now, all other families are so placed and taught that they also feel a similar desire to promote, by the same *fair* means, as they are called, the interests of every individual relative within the family circle.

### 4* END SECRECY AND SHAME

Then now I tell you, and through you, the whole of the human race, that man and woman have been made perfect; that each part of them is an essential part of their existence; that nature never intended that they should always remain ignorant of each other; or that secrecy, or mystery of any kind, should permanently exist between the two sexes: that the time is arrived when whatever secrecy and mystery have been engendered between the sexes, through ignorance of their real nature, should now terminate for ever; and that arrangements should be formed, as speedily as possible, to enable them to return, in all their ideas and feelings, to the innocency and simplicity of their former condition, in these respects, before the priesthood of the world introduced their ignorant mysteries, which created the real fall of man.

* *Marriages*, 43-5.

The fall of man from innocency and from the plain and direct road of intelligence and happiness occurred when the priesthoods of the world induced some of our ignorant ancestors to feel ashamed of any part of their nature. That this feeling is altogether an artificial and false shame may be ascertained by observing how difficult it is to impress the necessity for it upon all children, and to notice the different habits respecting it which obtain among various nations and tribes, and how much the people of our country condemn the notions of others upon the practices which, in these respects, are national in various districts of the world. . . .

And will this change from gross ignorance to real knowledge, respecting ourselves and human nature, destroy true delicacy of feeling in man and woman, for themselves and for each other?

It is only those who have been grossly irrational, that imagine this false shame is necessary to create true delicacy of feeling, or insure a virtuous or healthy and happy intercourse between the sexes.

## 5* MARRIAGE AND PROSTITUTION

It is said that the chastity of woman could not be secured without the legal bond of marriage. It may with much greater truth be said, that it can never be secured with the legal bond of marriage. Has this bondage hitherto secured it? Was there ever a period in the history of man when the vilest prostitution was so universal over the world as at present? And is there a single vice in the whole catalogue of crimes which so degrades the human character, or inflicts the same extent of misery on its votaries, and upon society in general, as prostitution? No: but the miseries engendered by prostitution, and suffered by individuals and their families, friends, and connections, are

* *Marriages*, 49.

generally hidden from public gaze and inspection, and are covered by the darkness of night, or concealed in dens of wretchedness. No security for the chastity of woman! What blasphemy against nature which has provided the most ample security in the innocent affections of the female and in the cultivated feelings of the male, whenever ignorant inexperienced men shall permit these virtues their free and natural course of action.

The pure and genuine chastity of nature is to have connection only with affection; and prostitution arises only when connection is induced or forced without affection; and it is always induced or forced by artificial causes, or forced by some necessity of law or custom, when it takes place without affection.

### 6* MONOGAMY AND POLYGAMY

Now we have had great experience of the two first artificial customs, and probably the population of the world is at present nearly equally divided between these two very opposite practices; and yet both modes are said by their respective priests to be of God's appointment. . . .

The human law which binds one man to the same woman, and the woman to the man through life, whether or not they can retain an affection for each other, has produced more hatred, and destroyed more love between these parties than would otherwise have taken place, probably many thousand-fold.

Then the Eastern legal custom of one man having permission to have as many wives as he can maintain, although, perhaps, less injurious in some respects than the customs of Christians, especially as it materially diminishes promiscuous intercourse, is, nevertheless, a most unfortunate device for mankind. It tends powerfully to make men and women weak, jealous, irrational beings. It destroys

* *Marriages,* 66-8.

the confidence of man in woman, and woman in man; and makes woman a mere slave to man's sexual propensity; it tends to perpetuate woman in a state of mental childhood.

### 7* OWEN'S PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

In the present absence of real knowledge, derived from experience, and with the existing irregular feelings of the population of the world, created by a false education, we propose that the union and disunion of the sexes should take place under the following regulations—

#### MARRIAGE

*Announcement*—'Persons having an affection for each other, and being desirous of forming a union, first announce such intention publicly in our Sunday assemblies.

*Preliminary Period*—'If the intention remain at the end of *three months,* they make a second public declaration.

*Marriage*—'Which declarations being registered in the books of the Society will constitute their marriage.'

#### OBJECT OF MARRIAGE

'Marriages will be solely formed to promote the happiness of the sexes; and if this end be not obtained, the object of the unions is defeated.'

#### DIVORCE
#### FIRST — WHEN BOTH PARTIES DESIRE TO SEPARATE

*Announcement*—'Should both parties, after the termination of *twelve months at the soonest,* discover that their dispositions and habits are unsuited to each other, and that there is little or no prospect of happiness being

* *Marriages,* Appendix, 88-9.

derived from their union, they are to make a public declaration as before, to that effect.

*Preliminary Period*—'After which they return and live together *six months longer;* at the termination of which, if they still find their qualities discordant, and both parties unite in the declaration, they make a second declaration.

*Divorce*—'Both of which being duly registered and witnessed, will constitute their legal separation.'

SECOND—WHEN ONE ONLY DESIRES A SEPARATION

*Preliminary Period*—'Should one alone come forward upon the last declaration, and the other object to the separation, they would be required to live together another *six months,* to try if their feelings and habits could be made to accord, so as to promote happiness.

*Divorce*—'But if at the end of *the second six months,* the objecting party shall still remain of the same mind, the separation shall then be final.'

POSITION OF THE PARTIES AFTER DIVORCE

'The parties may, without diminution of public opinion, form new unions more suited to their dispositions.'

PROVISION FOR THE CHILDREN

'As all the children of the new world will be trained and educated under the superintendance and care of the Society, the separation of the parents will not produce any change in the condition of the rising generation.'

# XV

## A Plan for India

[The following proposals* were put forward in January 1858, during the War of Independence. While certainly in advance of much that was being said at the time, they may also be compared with the full support for the Indian struggle that Ernest Jones was giving in *The People's Paper*.]

1st. That India be made an empire or kingdom, under one of our young princes, with an upper and lower house of assembly, the members of both to be elected after the model of the United States.

2nd. That this empire or kingdom be hereditary, and the king or governor be assisted by a cabinet, not exceeding twelve appointed by the crown, but made strictly responsible to the two houses of legislation for their proceedings.

3rd. That until the young sovereign shall attain the age of twenty-one, India shall be governed by the British Government, on the principles afterwards stated, and that when the sovereign shall have attained his majority, British Rule shall cease, and a treaty of federation on equal terms be made between Great Britain and this new Indian government.

* 'Memorial to the Right Honourable the Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury,' *Life, IA.*, xx-xxi.

4th. That from the majority of the sovereign of India, its government shall be independent and self-supported, except being federatively united with Great Britain in peace and war and commerce.

5th. That, for a period to be fixed, the bank notes of the Bank of England shall be legal tender in all payments; but as soon as the new Indian government shall be sufficiently established, it shall establish a Bank of the Indian Empire, based on the credit of India.

6th. That British subjects in India shall have all the rights of Indian subjects, while all Indian subjects shall have the full rights of British subjects throughout the British Empire.

7th. That the officers and soldiers employed to regain, and to retain India until the Indian government can support itself, shall be entitled according to rank and service to certain portions of land in India—their proportions to be decided by the British Parliament.

8th. That the government of India shall be by British born subjects, until the sovereign shall be of age; after which period the natives of India to have the full rights of subjects, except to the high offices of government and to the two houses of assembly,—and to these also in ten years from the time when they give their adhesion to the new government.

9th. That the directors of the East India Company and its shareholders shall be amply compensated for their present interests in the company; but all their rights to rule India to cease for ever.

10th. That during the period while the sovereign shall be attaining his twenty-first year, the British government shall take into its most grave consideration the best practical means, as the opportunity is so peculiarly favourable for the purpose, to arrange new surroundings in which to place the native subjects of the new Indian Empire while under the British rule. These surroundings to be scientifically combined through a knowledge of the

social science, in such a manner as shall secure to all, by their own well-directed industry within these surroundings, the means by which they shall all, at all times, be well-fed, clothed, lodged, trained, educated, occupied, amused, and locally well governed by themselves.

# XVI

## Eccentricities

[In many ways Owen was a man of outstandingly good sense, but, as was the case with many of the Utopians, this sense was oddly streaked with a dogmatic crankiness, which increased as he grew older. It must be noted that all the eccentricities quoted below belong to his last years —and that even at his wildest, good sense keeps breaking in.]

### 1* AS IN THE BEST ASYLUMS

[Owen's inability to see the people as a positive historical force finds striking expressions here. It was perhaps his greatest single weakness.]

The good effects of the decrease of punishment in lunatic asylums and schools, are beginning to be seen and acknowledged. In the best of both, physical punishments now scarcely exist. The time approaches when it will be discovered that the speediest mode to terminate the innumerable diseases—physical, mental, and moral—created by the irrational laws invented and introduced by men during their irrational state of existence in progress towards rationality, will be to govern or treat all society as the most advanced physicians govern and treat

* *Revolution,* 71-2.

their patients in the best arranged lunatic hospitals, in which forbearance and kindness, and full allowance for every paroxysm of the peculiar disease of each, govern the conduct of all who have the care of these unfortunates—unfortunates made to become so through the irrationality and injustice of the present most irrational system of society.

## 2* THE TRUE SECOND COMING

[The next two extracts have a peculiar interest because of the large part played by Millennial speculation in English Radical thought from the time of the Revolution in the seventeenth century. Owen's language here, and especially his use of the Jerusalem symbolism, is strikingly similar both to that of many of the left-wing sects of the seventeenth century and of his great contemporary William Blake.]

Thus, in the due order of nature, will *truth,* or pure Christianity reconcile man to man, overcome all evil, establish the reign of peace and harmony, and happiness will prevail and reign over the earth for ever.

Say not that these heavenly results are unattainable on earth. They are only so under the Satanic system of individual selfishness, ignorance of the laws of humanity, and obstruction to the practice of universal love and charity for all men, the divine principles taught by Jesus of Nazareth, or the Great and Glorious *Truth* which was the *First Coming* of Christ among men.

The *Second Coming* is the yet greater and more glorious Truth, given in this our day, of the science by which to make the *First Truth* universal in practice. And thus will be fulfilled the promise to the Jews of the Coming Messiah to overcome and conquer the world of evil; and to

* *Millennial Gazette,* 39.

the Christians, of the Second Coming of Christ to overcome and conquer all error. Thus will be united Jew and Gentile and all the nations of the earth, into one family of good, wise, and happy, well-formed men and women, having one language, interest, and feeling, all superior in their individual qualities, yet no two the same, but the combined distinct qualities of all contributing to constitute the one great humanity of the earth.

### 3* THE NEW JERUSALEM

The population at the termination of this period will be actively engaged in extending the City of the New Jerusalem, which will extend over the earth, and in which there will be no streets, lanes, courts, or alleys—all these being inferior or injurious surroundings. . . .

The earth will be laid out to form, over its whole extent, one City, to be composed of separate townships with their required appliances; and each will be a paradise of a township, connected with all other such townships over the globe, until they will form the earth gradually into this one great city, which may be called the New Jerusalem, or united earthly paradise.

The spaces between the townships will be laid out in gardens, groves, fertile fields, to be as beautiful as human knowledge and scientific means can make them.

The City, containing all the inhabitants of the earth, will be occupied by a thoroughly developed and regenerated race of human beings, governed solely by God's Laws, speaking the same language, and that, the language of truth only ['The Anglo-Saxon language, improved to the utmost, will be taught to all in its purity from birth.' *Millennial Gazette, 127.*] having one interest and one feeling, to promote each other's happiness; all filled from birth with the spirit of universal charity and love for one

* *Millennial Gazette,* 117-19.

another, and applying those divine qualities to their everyday practice through life. . . .

The travelling over seas and oceans will be on well constructed large islands, formed by men, and navigated by the aid of steam, if better and superior motive powers may in future not be discovered and brought into use. Thus travelling will always be performed on dry land, unless the means for superior safe arrival by *aerial navigation* may be discovered and introduced into practice; and this discovery, under the new dispensation of unity of mind and interests, may, indeed, be reasonably anticipated; for under the united system of truth and goodness for forming the character and governing the world, men will be enabled not only to remove mountains and fill up valleys, when useful, but to do far greater things than these.

### 4 SPIRITUALISM

(a)* This great change, the wonder of all nations and people, will be effected through the medium of the, to many, strange and yet little understood *Spiritual Manifestations.*

The spirits of just men made perfect, will assist, guide, and direct the way to the full and complete reformation and regeneration from ignorance to the wisdom of the races of man, thus preparing, through a new practical religion, a new earth, and a new sphere in heaven for those thus reformed and thus regenerated.

There are Spirits now round and about us, Spirits who, through the aid of superior intelligence and power, have been purified and perfected, who are now deeply interested in forming and carrying forward various measures in different parts of the world, to bring about this great and glorious change of humanity—this new dispensa-

* *Millennial Gazette,* 83.

tion, and permanent happy existence of man upon the earth, to prepare him at once for the higher enjoyments of superior spheres in heaven.

(b)* I have received communications from various influences calling themselves the Spirits of departed friends and relatives, in whom when living I had full and perfect confidence in their integrity, and as each made their communications to me in the character, strongly exhibited, which they possessed when living on the earth, I am compelled to believe their testimony as thus given; and as these communications have a good and high character in testifying now to the active exertions made by superior Spirits to assist developed man now to reform and regenerate the human races, I think their direct and uniform statements respecting themselves, are far more worthy of credit, than the random suppositions of those who are evidently ignorant of the whole subject of Spiritualism, and who by their previously acquired prejudices are strongly opposed to admit the existence of spirits, against any evidence that can be testified by human means to the contrary.

But as this is yet a subject which is generally so little understood, and which in irrational minds excites only irrational feelings of anger and ridicule, let it remain in abeyance until experience shall give us more facts and knowledge on this complex subject, and let us apply our attention to practical measures of deep and lasting interest to all of our race. This is *now our* business; and the Spirits, by the unchanging laws of their *will power,* shall ceaselessly take care of their own, and certainly perform their duties to us.

* *Millennial Gazette,* 95-6.

## 5* SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS

The new Spiritual Manifestations are now powerfully influencing the ruling earthly powers to stand still their irrational and evil career, to look around them to know what they should do to avert a storm such as men have not yet encountered, and fearful to contemplate. . . .

The Spirits are more especially occupied in preparing the British, Russian and French governments to this change. The British to commence now in India; the Russians and Indians being well prepared for this new mode of domestic colonising. And the French population has for some time had a strong liking for some such change. Her British Majesty and Royal Consort, with their Imperial Majesties of Russia and France, are at this time much under the influence and inspiration of superior Spirits, to induce them to unite and lead in this great change, and then to induce all other governments to follow their example.

## 6** PHRENOLOGY

[The pseudo-science of phrenology was, in Owen's time, and long after, taken very seriously, especially in 'advanced' circles. Owen's attitude to it was less uncritical than that of many of his contemporaries.]

*Stranger:* Pray inform me what you consider to be the practical utility of phrenology.

*Founder:* Most willingly. But first I must do justice to the founders of phrenology, and especially to Dr. Spurzheim, who I knew from his first arrival in this country, and for whom I have always entertained the greatest regard. I believe he was a most conscientious, estimable

* 'Second Letter to the Ruling Powers of the World,' Jan., 1, 1858, *Life, IA.*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

** *Dialogue*, 11-12.

man, and most certainly he has done much, in connexion with Dr. Gall, to promote a knowledge of the structure of the brain, and to remove much rubbish that was in the way of a fair investigation of the human powers, physical, intellectual, and moral. . . . Dr. Spurzheim, however, knew little compared with what should be known of either the theory or practice of education to enable any one to instruct the human race upon the formation of character, the most important and least known of all subjects.

*Stranger:* But surely his followers and disciples in this and other countries have done much to elicit additional facts relative to this subject, and have reasoned well and fairly respecting them?

*Founder:* They have elicited important facts, and reasoned as well respecting them as could have been anticipated from their want of higher knowledge, and of extensive experience in practice upon the subject; but owing to their deficiency in these essential qualifications, they are, at this moment, unintenionally leading the public much astray. . . .

*Stranger:* I am desirous of learning your opinion of the present state of phrenology.

*Founder:* It is easily given. Those among the professors of it who have the soundest judgements and most experience, can give a shrewd guess, by examination of the head, of what nature at birth, and the impressions of external objects from birth, have effected in forming the character of the individual; but from such an examination, it can never give more than a shrewd guess. For, where the organs of the brain are so numerous, and varied as they are in the human subject, and being, as they are, in a different combination of proportions in each individual, no man from external appearances alone, can ever do more than make a probable conjecture of the real internal character of the individual, and, to form this conjecture is the province of phrenology.

# XVII

## Some Contemporary Estimates of Robert Owen

[The writers quoted in this chapter are all in their way representative of some section of the Radical or Socialist movements. Place and Cobbett are outstanding in the earlier Radical movement, Place in its philosophical, Benthamite wing, Cobbett in the more practical and empirical popular field, with even some vestiges of Tory thinking. Lovett and O'Brien were leaders of Chartism, Lovett of the right wing among the London artisans, O'Brien the theoretician of the left, at any rate in the early days of Chartism. Buonarroti was a survivor of the extreme socialist left of the French Revolution. Holyoake was in his youth an Owenite 'missionary' and survived to play a leading part in the Co-operative movement for another fifty years. The two passages from Engels are interesting as having been written in very different times and under very different circumstances.]

### 1 FRANCIS PLACE

He introduced himself to me, and I found him a man of kind manners and good intentions, of an imperturbable temper and an enthusiastic desire to promote the happiness of mankind. A few interviews made us friends. . . .

Mr. Owen then was, and is still, persuaded that he was the first who had ever observed that man was the creature

of circumstances. On this supposed discovery he founded his system. Never having read a metaphysical book, not held a metaphysical conversation, nor having even heard of the disputes concerning freewill and necessity, he had no clear conception of his subject, and his views were obscure. Yet he had all along been preaching and publishing and projecting and predicting in the fullest conviction that he could command circumstances or create them, and place men above their control when necessary. He was never able to explain these absurd notions, and therefore always required assent to them, telling those who were not willing to take his words on trust that it was their ignorance which prevented them from at once assenting to these self-evident propositions.

From Graham Wallas, *Life of Francis Place,* 63-4.

## 2 WILLIAM COBBETT

A Mr. Owen, of Lanark, has, it seems, been before the committee with his schemes, which are nothing short of a species of *monkery.* This gentleman is for establishing innumerable *communities* of paupers! Each is to be resident in an *inclosure,* somewhat resembling a barrack establishment, only more extensive. I do not clearly understand whether the sisterhoods and brotherhoods are to form distinct communities, like nuns and friars, or whether they are to mix promiscuously; but I perceive that they are all to be under a very *regular discipline;* and that wonderful peace, happiness, and national benefit are to be the result! How the little matters of black eyes, bloody noses, and pulling off of caps are to be *settled,* I do not exactly see, nor is it explicitly stated whether the novices, when once they are confirmed, are to regard their character of paupers as indelible, though this is a point of great importance. Mr. Owen's scheme has, at any rate, the

recommendation of perfect novelty; for of such a thing as a *community of paupers,* I believe no human being ever before heard. *Political Register,* August 2, 1817.

## 3 WILLIAM LOVETT

(a) When Mr. Owen first came over from America he looked somewhat coolly on those 'Trading Associations', and very candidly declared that their mere buying and selling formed no part of his grand 'co-operatice scheme'; but when he found that great numbers among them were disposed to entertain many of his views, he took them more in favour, and ultimately took an active part among them. And here I think it is necessary to state that I entertain the highest respect for Mr. Owen's warm benevolence and generous intentions, however I may differ from many of his views; and this respect, I think, most people will be disposed to accord him, who know that he devoted a large fortune and a long life in reiterated efforts to improve the condition of his fellow men. I must confess, also, that I was one of those who, at one time, was favourably impressed with many of Mr. Owen's views, and, more especially, with those of a community of property. This notion has a peculiar attraction for the plodding, toiling, ill-remunerated sons and daughters of labour.

*Life and Struggles,* 44-5.

(b) And here I must give a couple of anecdotes regarding Mr. Owen, showing how anti-democratic he was notwithstanding the extreme doctrines he advocated. Having resolved to call the Co-operative Congress referred to, we issued, among other invitations, a circular inviting the attendance of Members of Parliament. Mr. Owen, having seen a copy of the circular drawn up, conceived that it did not sufficiently express his peculiar views. He therefore sent an amendment, which he wished added to

it. . . . The committee having discussed the amendment, rejected it. [Owen then, behind the backs of the committee, had the circular printed with his amendment. A deputation was sent to him to protest.]

We went, and were shown into Mr. Owen's room at the bazaar, and after briefly introducing our business, he told us to be seated, as he had something very important to communicate to us. This something was the *proof* of a publication he had just started, called the *Crisis*. After he had read to us a large portion of what he had written in it, I found my patience giving way, and at the next pause I took the opportunity of asking him what that had to do with the business we had come about? I began by telling him of his having submitted an amendment to our circular, of the committee having rejected it by a large majority, and of his taking it upon himself to authorize its insertion in the circular notwithstanding; and concluded by asking him whether such conduct was not highly despotic? With the greatest composure he answered that it evidently was despotic; but as we, as well as the committee that sent us, were all ignorant of his plans, and of the objects he had in view, we must consent to be ruled by despots till we had acquired sufficient knowledge to govern ourselves. After such a vain-glorious avowal, what could we say but to report—in the phraseology of one of the deputation—that we had been flabbergasted by him?

In a previous page I have stated that the proposal to establish an incipient community upon Mr. Thompson's plan was opposed and marred by Mr. Owen. It was in this curious manner. After the proposal had been discussed for some time . . . our friend Owen told us very solemnly, in the course of a long speech, that if we were resolved to go into a community upon Mr. Thompson's plan, we must make up our minds *to dissolve our present marriage connections, and go into it as single men and women.* This was like the bursting of a bomb-shell in the midst of us. . . . Nothing could have been better

devised than this speech of Mr. Owen to sow the seeds of doubt and to cause the scheme to be abortive; and when we retired Mr. Thompson expressed himself very strongly against his conduct. I may add that the reporter of our proceedings, Mr. William Carpenter, thought it wise not to embody this discussion in our printed report.

*Life and Struggles* 49-51.

## 4 GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

(a) He was the first publicist among us who looked with royal eyes upon children. He regarded grown persons as being proprietors of the world—bound to extend the rites of hospitality to all arrivals in it. He considered little children as little guests, to be welcomed with gentle courtesy and tenderness, to be offered knowledge and love, and charmed with song and flowers, so that they might be glad and proud that they had come into a world which gave them happiness and only asked of them goodness. *History of Co-operation,* 1906, I, 43.

(b) It is no part of my object to present him other than he was. Though he was an amiable, he was, doubtless, at times a somewhat tiresome reformer. When he called a meeting together, those who attended never knew when they would separate. He was endowed with great natural capacity for understanding public affairs, and was accustomed to give practical and notable opinions upon questions quite apart from his own doctrines. His society was sought as that of a man who had the key to many state difficulties. Those knew little of him who supposed he owed his distinction to his riches. A man must be wise as well as wealthy to achieve the illustrious friendships which marked his career. He had personally an air of natural nobility about him. . . . He had a voice of great compass, thorough self-possession, and becoming action.

Like many other men, he spoke much better than he wrote. *ibid*, 48-9.

(c) The impression that Mr. Owen made upon workmen of his time is best described by one who won for himself a distinguished name as a working-class poet—Ebenezer Elliott. In an address to him, sent by trade-unionists of Sheffield in 1834, Elliott says: 'You came among us as a rich man among the poor and did not call us a rabble. There was no sneer upon your lips, no covert scorn in your tone.' That this distinction struck Elliott shows us how working men were then treated.

*ibid*, 51

5 PHILLIPPO BUONARROTI

What the Democrats of the Year VI [Babeuf and his associates] were unable to execute in France, a generous man has recently essayed, by other means to put in practice in the British Isles and in America. Robert Owen, the Scotchman [sic], after having established in his own country, and at his own expense, some communities founded on the principles of *equal distribution of enjoyment and labours,* has just formed in the United States sundry similar establishments, where several thousand people live peaceably under the happy regime of perfect equality.

By the counsels of this friend of humanity, the co-operative society, established in London has been for some time at work, propagating the principles of community, and demonstrating, by practical examples, the possibility of their application.

Babeuf attempted to combine a numerous people into one single and grand community; Owen, placed in other circumstances, would multiply in a country small communities, which afterwards united by a general bond, might become, as it were, so many individuals of one great family. Babeuf wished his friends to seize on the

supreme authority, as by its influence he hoped to effectuate the reform they had projected; Owen calculates on success by preaching and by example. May he show to the world that wisdom can operate so vast a good without Great Britain. If successes depended on individual grief of seeing his noble efforts fail, and furnishing, by an unsuccessful experience, the advocates of equality. [*sic*? inequality] with an argument against the possibility of establishing in any manner, a social equality, to which violent passions oppose so formidable a resistance, and which, as appeared in our time, could only be the result of a strong political commotion amongst civilized nations.

## 6 BRONTERRE O'BRIEN

[Commenting on the above remarks]

When Buonarroti penned this remarkable passage, he neither knew the failure of the Owenite experiments in America, nor the successive breaking up of the various co-operative societies established in London and throughout Great Britain. If success depended on individual merit, on generous zeal, on indomitable perseverance, and an unquenchable desire to make men free and happy, at all sacrifices to the individual himself, unquestionably the experiments of Robert Owen would have succeeded. But alas! the materials to work upon forms as essential an element in the calculations of success, as the skill of the architect. Robert Owen brought to the task the necessary skill, but the demoralising effects of our institutions left him no materials to work upon. For my part, while I admire both Babeuf and Robert Owen and agree generally, with both as to the *end* sought, I am obliged to dissent from both as regards *means*.

*Buonarroti's History of Babeuf's Conspiracy.* Translated by Bronterre O'Brien, 1836, 113, note.

## 7 ADIN BALLOU

[Ballou was the founder of Hopedale, one of the more successful of the American Fourierist communities.]

In years nearly seventy-five; in knowledge and experience superabundant; in benevolence transcendental; in honesty without disguise; in philanthropy unlimited; in religion a sceptic; in metaphysics a Necessarian Circumstantialist; in morals a universal excursionist; in general conduct a philosophical non-resistant; in socialism a Communist; in hope a terrestial elysianist; in practical business a methodist; in deportment an unequivocal gentleman.
From Hannah Whitall Smith, *Religious Fanaticism,* ed. Ray Strachey, 69.

## 8 FREDERICK ENGELS

(a) English Socialism arose with Owen, a manufacturer, and proceeds therefore with great consideration towards the bourgeoisie and great injustice towards the proletariat in its methods, although it culminates in demanding the abolition of the class antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat.

The Socialists are thoroughly tame and peaceable, accept the existing order, bad as it is, so far as to reject all other methods but that of winning public opinion. Yet they are so dogmatic that success by this method is for them, and for their principles as at present formulated, utterly hopeless. . . . They acknowledge only a psychological development, a development of man in the abstract, out of all relation to the Past, whereas the whole world rests upon that Past, the individual man included. Hence they are too abstract, too metaphysical, and accomplish little. They are recruited in part from the working class, of which they have enlisted but a very small fraction representing, however, its most educated and solid elements. In its present form, Socialism can never become the com-

mon creed of the working class; it must condescend to return for a moment to the Chartist standpoint. But the true proletarian Socialism, having passed through Chartism, purified of its bourgeois elements, assuming the form which it has already reached in the minds of many Socialists and Chartist leaders (who are nearly all Socialists), must, within a short time, play a weighty part in the history of the development of the English people.

*Condition of the Working Class.*

(b) Then a twenty-nine-year-old manufacturer came on the scene as a reformer, a man of almost sublimely child-like simplicity of character and at the same time a born leader of men such as is rarely seen. Robert Owen had adopted the teachings of the materialist philosophers of the Enlightenment, that man's character is the product on the one hand of his hereditary constitution, and on the other, of his environment during his lifetime, and particularly during the period of his development. In the industrial revolution most of his class saw only confusion and chaos, enabling them to fish in troubled waters and get rich quickly. He saw in it the opportunity to put his favourite theory into practice, and thereby to bring order out of chaos. [Engels then describes Owen's success at New Lanark.]

In spite of it all, Owen was not content. The existence which he had contrived for his workers in his eyes fell far short of being worthy of human beings; 'the people were slaves at my mercy'; the relatively favourable conditions in which he had set them were still far removed from allowing them an all-round and rational development of character and mind, and much less a free life. 'And yet, the working part of this population of 2,500 persons was daily producing as much real wealth of society as, less than half a century before, it would have required the working part of a population of 600,000 to create. I asked myself: what became of the difference be-

tween the wealth consumed by 2,500 persons and that which would have been consumed by 600,000?' The answer was clear. It had been used to pay the owners of the concern five per cent interest on their invested capital in addition to a profit of more than £300,000 sterling. And what was true of New Lanark held good in still greater measure of all the factories in England. 'Without this new wealth created by machinery, the wars for the overthrow of Napoleon, and for maintaining the aristocratic principles of society, could not have been carried through. And yet this new power was the creation of the working class.' To them, therefore, also belonged the fruits. . . .

The Owenite Communism arose in this purely business way . . . And in his definite plan for the future the technical elaboration of details shows such practical knowledge that, once the Owenite method of social reform is accepted, from an expert's standpoint there is little to be said against the actual detailed arrangements.

His advance to communism was the turning-point in Owen's life. So long as he merely played the part of a philantropist he had reaped nothing but wealth, applause, honour and glory. He was the most popular man in Europe. Not only those of his own class, but statesmen and princes listened to him with approval. But when he came forward with his communist theories, the situation was entirely changed. There were three great obstacles which above all seemed to him to block the path of social reform: private property, religion and marriage in its present form. He knew what confronted him if he attacked them: complete outlawry from official society and the loss of his whole social position. But nothing could hold him back; he attacked them regardless of the consequences, and what he had foreseen came to pass. Banished from official society, banned by the press, impoverished by the failures of communist experiments in America in which he sacrificed his whole fortune, he turned directly to the

working class and worked among them for another thirty years. All social movements, all real advance made in England in the interests of the working class were associated with Owen's name. Thus in 1819, after five years' effort, he was successful in securing the first law limiting the labour of women and children in the factories. He presided at the first Congress at which the trade unions of all England united in a single great trades association. As transition measures to the complete communist organisation of society he introduced on the one hand the co-operative societies (both consumers and productive), which have since at least given practical proof that it is very well possible to dispense with both merchants and manufacturers; and on the other hand, the labour bazaars, institutions for the exchange of the products of labour by means of labour notes with the labour hours as unit. These institutions were necessarily bound to fail, but they completely anticipated the Proudhon exchange bank of a much later period, and only differed from it in that they did not represent the panacea for all social ills, but only the first steps toward a far more radical transformation of society.

*Anti-Dühring*, 294-7.

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ROBERT OWEN, rationalist, socialist, philanthropist, pioneer of trade unionism and co-operation, was famous for his early social experiments in the mills at New Lanark and later for his attempts to establish utopian communities in the United States of America. He was one of the most influential writers of the time of the industrial revolution and his ideas have continued in currency and influence to this day. Yet few today have read his works. He was in fact an extremely diffuse writer, which makes reading his complete works a formidable task.

This volume makes Robert Owen accessible to the contemporary reader. As A. L. Morton remarks in the Foreword, he is "one of the few who really gains more than he loses by being read in selections."

Presented here are Owen's "First Principles" on human nature and the influence of the environment on individual character; his views on economic theory and the industrial revolution; his views on education, the family and religion; his socialist aspirations and plans for setting up ideal co-operative communities; his ideas on trade unionism, the class struggle and "Revolution by Reason."

A. L. Morton adds an introductory essay on Owen's life, the development of his ideas and his contribution to socialist thought.

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