

Third Essay

TO THE SUPERINTENDENTS OF MANUFACTORIES, AND TO THOSE INDIVIDUALS GENERALLY, WHO, BY GIVING EMPLOYMENT TO AN AGGREGATED POPULATION, MAY EASILY ADOPT THE MEANS TO FORM THE SENTIMENTS AND MANNERS OF SUCH A POPULATION

The Principles of the Former Essays applied to a Particular
Situation

"Truth must ultimately prevail over error."

The "Progress of Improvement"

That which has been hitherto done for the community at New Lanark, as described in the Second Essay, has chiefly consisted in *withdrawing some of those circumstances which tended to generate, continue, or increase early bad habits; that is to say, undoing that which society had from ignorance permitted to be done.*

To effect this, however, was a far more difficult task than to train up a child from infancy in the way he should go; for that is the most easy process for the formation of character; while to unlearn and to change long acquired habits is a proceeding directly opposed to the most tenacious feelings of human nature.

Nevertheless, the proper application steadily pursued did effect beneficial changes on these old habits, even beyond the most sanguine expectations of the party by whom the task was undertaken. The principles were derived from the study of human nature itself, and they could not fail of success.

Still, however, very little, comparatively speaking, had been done for them. They had not been taught the most valuable domestic and social habits: such as the most economical method of preparing food; how to arrange their dwellings with neatness, and to keep them always clean and in order; but, what was of infinitely more importance, they had not been instructed how to train their children to form them into valuable members of the community, or to know that principles existed, which, when properly applied to practice from infancy, would ensure from man to man, without chance of failure, a just, open, sincere, and benevolent conduct.

The Playground

To effect this change the "New Institution" was built, centrally located and housing the School, the Lecture Room and the Church and surrounded by an enclosed area, a supervised infant playground.

As the happiness of man chiefly, if not altogether, depends on his own sentiments and habits, as well as those of the individuals around him; and as any sentiments and habits may be given to all infants, it becomes of primary importance that those alone should be given to them which can contribute to their happiness. Each child, therefore, on his entrance into playground, is to be told in language which he can understand, that "he is never to injure his play-fellows; but that, on the contrary, he is to contribute all in his power to make them happy." This simple precept, when comprehended in all its bearings, and the habits which will arise from its early adoption into practice, *if no counteracting principle be forced upon the young mind*, will effectually supersede all the errors which have hitherto kept the world in ignorance and misery. So simple a precept, too, will be easily taught, and as easily acquired; for the chief employment of the superintendents will be to prevent any deviation from it in practice. The older children, when they shall have experienced the endless advantages from acting on this principle, will, by their example, soon enforce the practice of it on the young strangers; and the happiness which the little groups will enjoy from rational conduct, will ensure its speedy and general and willing adoption. The habit also which they will acquire at this early period of life by continually acting on the principle, will fix it firmly; it will become easy and familiar to them, or, as it is often termed, natural.

Thus by merely attending to the evidence of our senses respecting human nature and disregarding the wild, inconsistent, and absurd theories in which man has been hitherto trained in all parts of the earth, we shall accomplish with ease and certainty the supposed Herculean labour of forming a rational character in man, and that, too, chiefly before the child commences the ordinary course of education.

The benefits are dear:

The child will be removed, so far as it is at present practicable, from the erroneous treatment of the yet untrained and untaught parents.

The parents will be relieved from the loss of time and from the care and anxiety which are now occasioned by attendance on their children from the period when they can go alone to that at which they enter the school.

The child will be placed in a situation of safety, where, with its future school-fellows and companions, it will acquire the best habits and principles, while at meal times and at night it will return to the caresses of its parents; and the affections of each are likely to be increased by the separation.

The area is also to be a place of meeting for the children from five to ten years of age, previous to and after school-hours, and to serve for a drill ground, the object of which will be hereafter explained; and a shade will be formed, under which in stormy weather the children may retire for shelter.

These are the important purposes to which a playground attached to a school may be applied.

Relaxation and the Sabbath

Those who have derived a knowledge of human nature from observation, know, that man in every situation requires relaxation from his constant and regular occupations, whatever they be: and that if he shall not be provided with or permitted to enjoy innocent and uninjurious amusements, he must and will partake of those which he can obtain, to give him temporary relief from his exertions, although the means of gaining that relief should be most pernicious. For man, irrationally instructed, is ever influenced far more by immediate feelings than by remote considerations.

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.

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 of these has been the cause of the other; the latter the certain and natural consequences of the former. 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 to 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 the air and exercise to which nature invites them, and which their health demands.

The errors of the times of superstition and bigotry still hold some sway, and compel those who wish to preserve a regard to their respectability in society, to an overstrained demeanour; and this demeanour sometimes degenerates into hypocrisy, and is often the cause of great inconsistency. It is destructive of every open, honest, generous, and manly feeling. It disgusts many, and drives them to the opposite extreme. It is sometimes the cause of insanity. It is founded on ignorance, and defeats its own object.

In order to counteract the detrimental effect of the Scottish Sabbath, it was deemed necessary to provide the villagers with week-time relaxation. In summer they could enjoy walking and tending their garden plots, but in winter they worked at the same job for 10% hours a day, six days a week and "experience has shown that the average health and spirits of the community are several degrees lower in winter than in summer." A venue for "innocent amusements and rational recreation" was thus needed.

Man's Character is Formed for Him, not by 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 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 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 and more evident *that the character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him; 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 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; it will be found to be a deduction drawn from such a multiplicity of facts, as to afford the most complete demonstration.

Ignorance and misdirected guidance have hitherto prevented man from pursuing human happiness to its full potential.

Happily for man this reign of ignorance rapidly approaches to dissolution; its terrors are already on the wing, and soon they will be compelled to take their flight, never more to return. For now the knowledge of the existing errors is not only possessed by the learned and reflecting, but it is spreading far and wide throughout society; and ere long it will be fully comprehended even by the most ignorant.

New Lanark provides a "fair test of public experiment."

It remains to be proved, whether the character of man shall continue to be formed under the guidance of the most inconsistent notions, the errors of which for centuries past have been manifest to every reflecting rational mind; or whether it shall be moulded under the direction of uniformly consistent principles, derived from the unvarying facts of the creation; principles, the truth of which no sane man will now attempt to deny.

It is then by the full and complete disclosure of these principles, that the destruction of ignorance and misery is to be effected, and the reign of reason, intelligence, and happiness is to be firmly established.

The New Institution Explained
The School and the Lecture Room

The principle instilled in the child from the age of two, "that he must endeavour to keep his companions happy", continues as the basis of his school education from the age of five. Beyond this the children are taught basic arithmetic and to read and write with comprehension. In addition the girls learn to sew, cook and keep house. The rational basis of this instruction is emphasised:

Can man, when possessing the full vigour of his faculties, form a rational judgement on any subject, until he has first collected all the facts respecting it which are known? Has not this been, and will not this ever remain, the only path by which human knowledge can be obtained? Then children ought to be instructed on the same principles. They should first be taught the knowledge of facts, commencing with those which are most familiar to the young mind, and gradually proceeding to the most useful and necessary to be known by the respective individuals in the rank of life in which they are likely to be placed; and in all cases the children should have as clear an explanation of each fact as their minds can comprehend, rendering those explanations more detailed as the child acquires strength and capacity of intellect.

It is in the interest of both health and happiness that the children are taught relevantly and according to their potential. Given that change can only be effected gradually since parents will continue to instil error in their children, evening lectures are proposed. These "familiar discourses" will be given three times a week during the winter and will alternate with dancing. They will cover the training of children and the planning of personal finances and they will be designed to effect the general education of the people. Owen advocates national application across society.

In short, these lectures may be made to convey, in an amusing and agreeable manner, highly valuable and substantial information to those who are now the most ignorant in the community; and by similar means, which at a trifling expense may be put into action over the whole kingdom, the most important benefits may be given to the labouring classes, and through them, to the whole mass of society.

For it should be considered *that the far greater part of the population belong to or have risen from the labouring classes; and by them the happiness and comfort of all ranks, not excluding the highest, are very essentially influenced:* because even much more of the character of children in all families is formed by the servants, than is ever supposed by those

unaccustomed to trace with attention the human mind from *earliest infancy*. It is indeed impossible that children in any situation can be correctly trained, until those who surround them from infancy shall be previously well-instructed; and the value of good servants may be duly appreciated by those who have experienced the difference between the very good and very bad.

The Church

The Church and its doctrines are of vital significance to the New Institution:

They involve considerations of the highest interest and importance; inasmuch as a knowledge of truth on the subject of religion would permanently establish the happiness of man; for it is the inconsistencies alone, proceeding from the want of this knowledge, which have created, and still create, a great proportion of the miseries which exist in the world.

Sectarianism merely perpetuates irrationality. "Each of those systems contain some truth with more error: hence it is that no one of them has gained, or is likely to gain, universality." ***Irrational systems based on a doctrine of eternal punishment and reward amount to "gross absurdities"***.

The doctrines which have been and now are taught throughout the world, must necessarily create and perpetuate, and they do create and perpetuate, a total want of mental charity among men. They also generate superstitions, bigotry, hypocrisy, hatred, revenge, wars, and all their evil consequences.

Yes, my deluded fellow men, believe me, for your future happiness, that the facts around us, when you shall observe them aright, will make it evident, even to demonstration, that any such doctrines must be erroneous, because THE WILL OF MAN HAS NO POWER WHATSOEVER OVER HIS OPINIONS; HE MUST, AND EVER DID, AND EVER WILL BELIEVE WHAT HAS BEEN, IS OR MAY BE IMPRESSED ON HIS MIND BY HIS PREDECESSORS AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SURROUND HIM. It becomes therefore the essence of irrationality to suppose that any human being, from the creation to this day, could deserve praise or blame, reward or punishment, for the prepossessions of early education.

Religion has thus ever been a source of human misery, but the cure will cause offence.

Shall then misery most complicated and extensive be experienced, from the prince to the peasant, in all nations throughout the world, and shall

its causes and prevention be known, and yet withheld? The knowledge of this cause, however, cannot be communicated to mankind without offending against the deep-rooted prejudices of all.

The removal of sectarian prejudice will be a "high event, of unequalled magnitude in the history of humanity . . . The principle, then, on which the doctrines taught in the New Institution are proposed to be founded, is, that they shall be in unison with universally revealed facts, which cannot but be true." Man is motivated from birth by a self-interested desire for happiness; he possesses natural, God-given inclinations and mental faculties, which direct and develop his actions and ideas; he is influenced by his surroundings and by the instruction of his elders and these in turn determine the extent of his misery or happiness. If the knowledge he gains is based on rational truth, he will enjoy happiness. He relies perforce on reason and teaching. Irrational instruction merely confuses the power of reason and causes "inconsistencies, . . . evil and misery."

"Man's ignorance of human nature" ***has been the root cause of*** "fundamental errors" ***on which present society is founded. Even*** "accidents, disease and death" ***are exacerbated by*** "man's ignorance of himself." ***Correct this, and the inevitable outcome will be a*** "vital religion, pure and undefiled, and the only one which, without any counteracting evil, can give peace and happiness to man."

Drill Exercises for the Social Good

Having alluded to the chief uses of the playground, and exercise rooms, with the School, Lecture Room, and Church, it remains, to complete the account of the New Institution, that the object of the drill exercises, mentioned when stating the purposes of the playground, should be explained; and to this we now proceed.

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

The playground superintendent at New Lanark will instruct all boys in drill and the use of fire-arms, which instruction will in itself produce active attentiveness and physical health and vigour. It will be impressed upon them, however, that this is only deemed essential on account of "the partial insanity of some of their fellow-creatures", who have themselves been mistaught by their elders. If such practice were introduced throughout the British Isles, a superior, permanent force could soon be created in place of the local military, thus preventing the loss of labour hours.

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.

Provision for Old Age

All New Lanark workers already contribute to a minimal sickness and superannuation fund.

It is surely desirable that, after they have spent nearly half a century in unremitting industry, they should, if possible, enjoy a comfortable independence.

To effect this object, it is intended that in the most pleasant situation near the present village, neat and convenient dwellings should be erected, with gardens attached; that they should be surrounded and sheltered by plantations, through which public walks should be formed; and the whole arranged to give the occupiers the most substantial comforts.

By monthly, voluntary contributions for a set number of years the workers would have the opportunity to purchase these homes themselves:

This part of the arrangement would always present a prospect of rest, comfort, and happiness to those employed; in consequence, their daily occupations would be performed with more spirit and cheerfulness, and their labour would appear comparatively light and easy. Those still engaged in active operations would, of course, frequently visit their former companions and friends, who, after having spent their years of toil, were in the actual enjoyment of this simple retreat; and from this intercourse each party would naturally derive pleasure. The reflections of each would be most gratifying. The old would rejoice that they had been trained in habits of industry, temperance, and foresight, to enable them to receive and enjoy in their declining years every reasonable comfort which the present state of society will admit; the young and middle-aged, that they were pursuing the same course, and that they had not

been trained to waste their money, time, and health in idleness and intemperance. These and many similar reflections could not fail often to arise in their minds; and those who could look forward with confident hopes to such certain comfort and independence would, in part, enjoy by anticipation these advantages.

The Audience

Owen concludes the essay by considering to whom his proposals might best be addressed. He dismisses men of commerce, lawyers, politicians, military 'heroes', those of high fashion and society and religious leaders - all would display prejudices.

But (these principles) 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 connection which exists between individual and general, between private and public good!

When (these principles) shall have dissipated in some degree, as they speedily will dissipate, the thick darkness in which the human mind has been and is still enveloped, the endless beneficial consequences which must follow the general introduction of them into practice may then be explained in greater detail, and urged upon minds to which they will then appear less questionable.

In the meantime we shall proceed to state, in a Fourth Essay, of what improvements the present state of the British population is susceptible in practice.