

## Some Books at Hand

*By the Editor*

## THE NEW HARMONY MOVEMENT\*

IN reading *The New Harmony Movement* one marvels that so much rich material has lain so long, practically unworked. Mr. Lockwood is to be congratulated that he has so large a field almost wholly to himself; and, on the other hand, the interested reader is to be congratulated that the man who took up the subject had the patience and ability to do it thoroughly and well. He has not grudged giving years to the task. Originally, we believe, he essayed the work as a college thesis, which was subsequently published in *The Republican*, of Peru, Ind., and in that form it was by far the fullest treatise on the New Harmony experiment that had hitherto appeared. Further research in the voluminous material available resulted, some years later, in *The New Harmony Communities*, a handsome, profusely-illustrated volume published by the author; and the Appleton book, bearing the date 1905, though in cheaper form, represents still further additions and revisions.

Many are familiar, in a general way, with the story of Robert Owen, the Welsh philanthropist, who invested his fortune in a great social experiment in the wilderness of Indiana more than three-quarters of a century ago. The soaring social and educational aims of that experiment, the impracticable dreams, the signal failures, and the unique life and remarkable personages connected with the little town of New Harmony on the Wabash, all have passed into the limbo of vague and dimly known things; but, as often happens, the things thus imperfectly remembered are not at all the more important facts of the occasion—the facts that should be remembered. Robert Owen was not a mere impracticable theorist who squandered his energies for want of ballast. He was one to have been loved and one to be loved now. His errors of judgment (and some of them, no doubt, were remarkable) were as nothing compared with the spirit that moved the man from first to last, prompting him to sacrifice himself and

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his world's goods on the altar of a noble idea. In the carefully-studied facts presented by Mr. Lockwood we nowhere find evidence that Owen sought self-aggrandizement or expected gain. Contrariwise there is continuous evidence that he was controlled by a desire that may be called an abiding passion to aid and uplift his fellow-men. This benevolence was broad and universal, extending to all men regardless of color or creed, and concerning itself alike with the helpless child facing its future and the helpless adult who was a victim to social conditions. In the face of loss, of the faithlessness of associates, of disappointments of many kinds; in spite of indifference, opposition and ingratitude, even from those he sought most to benefit, he persisted in carrying out ideas that, always, were deep rooted in and sustained by the craving to aid humanity. He was a true lover of his fellows. In a world where the struggle for self even to the point of superfluity and grasping gain is the recognized normal thing it ill-behooves those who have any strain of nobility to remember with a cynical or a superior smile only the failures of a man like Robert Owen. Yet it seems to be one of the ironies of fate that he who rebukes men by departing from the beaten track will be remembered by his failures when his successes are forgotten. Owen's successes were of no mean character and scope. Before he came to America he had, by the exercise of a paternal philanthropy, and as a cotton-mill operator, so transformed for the better the town of New Lanark, Scotland, that "representatives of royalty, philanthropists, educators from all parts of Europe journeyed thither to study the processes Mr. Owen had put in operation for the betterment of the working people in his mills." He had found there the drunkenness, shiftlessness and dishonesty that were inseparable from the conditions that prevailed among the working classes of that day—conditions of ignorance and its accompanying vice as dense as obtained among the black slaves of America. By meliorating those conditions he so far lifted the community out of its vices that a traveler who visited the place wrote: "There is not, I apprehend, to be found in any part of the world a manufacturing community in which so much order, good government, tranquillity and rational happiness prevails." He sought the confidence and co-operation of his employes; he established for their children schools far superior to most then

existing in the United Kingdom; he promoted comfort in the homes, and set up a store where goods could be secured at cost, thus relieving his people of the exorbitant middleman's profits. In short; he did so much for them that his partners in the mills refused to keep pace with him, even though the better class of employes resulting from his methods made the business more lucrative than ever. Twice he dissolved the partnership, each time forming a new one, and proceeded with his philanthropic work. With tongue and pen, as well as with money he fought the fight of the working man and particularly of the working child, who then from tenderest years was doomed to factory servitude. Unfortunately for his cause he felt impelled to intrude upon the public his religious, or, rather, anti-religious views—a crime beside which all mere philanthropic effort counted as nothing, and it succeeded in forcing him out of the Lanark mills, and undermined his influence in all circles. After this he stood for Parliament in Lanark borough. The working men whose good he had promoted for nineteen years and who then had the opportunity to send their best friend to court, saw fit to defeat him in favor of one who "more loudly swore his fealty to the common people." Had it been otherwise Owen would never have established his colony at New Harmony. As it was, on the heels of this defeat came the proposition to purchase in America, at a comparatively low figure, the great estate of the Rappists, where he might put his social ideas into effect under what seemed ideal conditions. His acceptance of the proposition and his ensuing experiment, together with that of his associate, William Maclure, is one of the pathetic chapters of history, and is a most interesting study of certain aspects presented by man, individually and collectively. The mingled wisdom and folly of the New Harmony movement; the noble aspirations turned awry as if in jest by the hidden hand of a power that willed otherwise; the strange spectacle of what may be called a *salon* of the world's elect gathered here in the heart of the pioneer west, and the influences that have radiated and spread from this first wave set in motion by Robert Owen are, as we have already implied, well and fully dealt with in Mr. Lockwood's book, and the social student will be well repaid by a careful study of it.