

## Frances Wright's Experiment with Negro Emancipation

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The early nineteenth century ushered in an era of reform, which touched many American institutions. With serious purpose, many an earnest soul set about to make the world a better place. Utopian schemes based upon ideals of common property and other plans with deep religious motives made their way into the newly developing west. Frances Wright destined to become a crusader for the emancipation of negro slaves and the rights of women, was a connecting link in the history of several western reform movements. She was born in Dundee, Scotland, on Sept. 6, 1795.<sup>1</sup> Members of her family, on the father's side, were extensive landowners and merchants. The mother's family had descended from the "lettered aristocracy of England."<sup>2</sup> There seems to have been a remarkable similarity in the views of Frances Wright and her father, James Wright, which was somewhat unusual, since he died when Frances was two years old. James Wright was much interested in the governmental reforms of his day. He was deeply affected by the French Revolution, and had translations of French political and philosophical pamphlets made, and distributed in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> So ardent did he become in the espousal of the ideas of Thomas Paine, that he became an object of governmental espionage for a time.<sup>4</sup> About this time, he changed the motto on the family crest from "For the king, sometimes" to "Our country is dear, Liberty is dearer." To such a motto the daughter, Frances, could give whole-hearted support.<sup>5</sup>

After the death of the parents, the three orphaned Wright children were reared by relatives in England. The brother died at an early age and the sisters, Camilla and Frances, were close companions till Camilla died. In the home of the English relatives, Frances, naturally studious, found congenial surroundings with a fine library and good

<sup>1</sup> Frances Wright D'Arusmont, *Biography, Notes and Political Letters* (Dundee, Scotland, 1844), 3. The first part of this material is really an autobiography of Frances Wright, who, in 1831, married William Phiquepal D'Arusmont, whom she met when he was teaching in the community school at New Harmony, Indiana.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

teachers. The loneliness of an orphan's life was in a measure, compensated by her opportunity for wide reading and study. She relates in her autobiography, that she learned early in life that "Truth had still to be found and that men were afraid of truth."<sup>6</sup>

Watching the work of English peasants and their ejection from the estates of the wealthy, Frances Wright developed an intense sympathy for the lowly and down-trodden. She early reached a conclusion that her life's work must be devoted to the cause of the poor and helpless.<sup>7</sup>

Her study of the Greek philosophers brought to her a great enthusiasm for the teachings of Epicurus, "a devotion which lasted throughout her life."<sup>8</sup> In the defense of the teachings of her master, she wrote her first work, *Epicurus*.<sup>9</sup> Her investigation of Greek philosophy had turned her alert mind to the road of free inquiry, a route she was destined to follow the remainder of her life.

Her study of history had awakened in her a great interest for America. To many a person of high idealism, the reactionary era following the Napoleonic wars, brought much pessimism. To Frances Wright, the American ideal of government seemed the hope of the world—"There existed a country consecrated to freedom and in which man might awake to the full knowledge and exercise of his powers."<sup>10</sup> In 1818, Frances, accompanied by her sister Camilla, made her first trip to the United States. To an uncle, who insisted that the thought of their trip to America was startling and painful and who proposed that they visit Italy instead, Frances replied: "The sight of Italy, dear Uncle, prostrated under the yoke of Austria, would break my heart."<sup>11</sup>

During her stay in New York City, one personal triumph came to the young visitor in the production of her play "Altorf," by a New York company of English actors. The theme of the play was the struggle of the forest cantons of Switzerland against the power of Austria. The play was produced as of unknown authorship. One newspaper account said of it: "The author is unknown. He has trusted his work

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> William Randall Waterman, *Frances Wright* (New York, 1924), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Later, *Epicurus* was extended and published under the name, *A Few Days in Athens*, Waterman, *op. cit.*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> D'Arusmont, *op. cit.*, 11.

to its own merits and to the unprejudiced liberality of an American audience. He has trusted a tale of freedom to the feelings of the only nation where the cause of freedom dare be asserted."<sup>12</sup> What an interesting situation for one who was soon to be a woman's rights leader, to have her work mistaken for a man's!

After some visiting in New York, the two sisters toured the northern and eastern states. The enthusiasm of Frances for everything American led her to believe that in almost all things Americans were superior. With the unfailing courtesy of Americans, their understanding of and devotion to their government, she was greatly impressed. One is inclined to believe that she saw with the prejudiced eye of a young dreamer and idealist.

For one American institution she had, however, no enthusiasm. She expressed no desire to include the southern states in her travels, "for the sight of slavery is revolting everywhere, but to inhale the impure breath of its pestilence, in the free winds of America, is odious beyond all that imagination can conceive."<sup>13</sup> Of this first visit, she wrote eight years later: "Delighted with the sound of political liberty, the absence of bayonets and constrained taxation, I spoke and published as I felt, in praise of American institutions, and called, and, I believe, first generally awakened the attention of the European public to their study and appreciation."<sup>14</sup>

Upon her return to England, Frances Wright published, in 1821, a volume entitled *Views on Society and Manners in America*. With the publication of this book, she became well known in England and on the continent. Her book was translated into several languages and was widely read by liberals and reformers. While she shrank from formal society, she found herself agreeably surrounded by a number of people interested in political and social reform. Jeremy Bentham read her book and sought her friendship. At his Queen's Square home, Frances often met with him and his circle, which included James Mill, economist, Francis Plore, astute politician, George Grote, author of *The History of Greece*, and the jurist, John Austin.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 37. Quoted from the *New York Columbian*, Feb. 18, 1819.

<sup>13</sup> Frances Wright D'Arusmont, *Views on Society and Manners in America* (London, 1821), 517.

<sup>14</sup> Frances Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures* (London, c. 1829), 157.

<sup>15</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 61.

But however much she may have enjoyed her association with English reformers, it was the acquaintance with the Marquis de Lafayette, which her book brought about, that was to be of profound importance to her, for "at sixty-three, the passion for political liberty burned as strongly in the bosom of the old veteran as in those glorious days when, side by side, with Washington, he had fought for the independence of the United States."<sup>16</sup> He read all the books that he could get, describing American life. In this way, he learned of Frances Wright and in a short time, invited her to France. In September of 1821, she went to Paris and arranged to meet Lafayette. A short time after this meeting, she was invited to visit at his home in LaGrange. This was the beginning of a friendship of no ordinary character. In her autobiography she says that she had his most intimate private and political confidence.<sup>17</sup> So ardent did Frances Wright become in her enthusiasm for Lafayette that she urged him to adopt her and Camilla as his children. His family frowned on these developments and a crisis arose, but later reconciliations were effected and the friendship continued. The General's affection and high regard for Frances Wright is shown in a letter from him to an unknown friend. After discussing some matters pertaining to the business affairs of the two sisters and quoting from a letter recently received from Fanny, he says: "Of other matters my dear daughter says very little, but that she loves her adopted father, which you all well know, and whether I do love her is not much a question with you."<sup>18</sup> In her associations with Lafayette, she was close to liberal reforms working under cover in France and on one occasion she took charge of French exiles in England.<sup>19</sup> In April of 1827, she was back in France for a six month's visit at La Grange where she worked on writing a life of the General.<sup>20</sup>

In 1824, when Lafayette accepted the invitation of the American people to revisit the United States, Frances and Camilla decided to come to America. Their sailing followed the General's a few days, and they were visitors at many

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> D'Arusmont, *Biography, Notes and Letters*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Lafayette to an unknown friend, Paris, April 11, 1826. Original letter is in S. W. Jackson Collection. A copy was used by the author. The references *daughter* and *adopted* father evidently are not meant to be literally interpreted.

<sup>19</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

of the balls and public functions given in his honor. As Lafayette made plans to go to Virginia to visit his friends, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, he wrote in advance to Jefferson about the Wright sisters. Lafayette told Jefferson of the great pleasure that Frances experienced in knowing that he (Jefferson) had enjoyed reading her book, *A Few Days in Athens*. Then the General added that he wished to present "these two adopted daughters of mine to Mrs. Randolph and to you. . . . [They] have passed the last three years in most intimate connection with my children and myself and have readily yielded to our joint entreaties to make a second visit to the United States."<sup>21</sup> In replying to this letter, Jefferson wrote: "You mention the return of Miss Wright to America, accompanied by her sister, but do not say what her stay is to be, nor what her course. Should it lead to a visit of our University . . . herself and companion will nowhere find a welcome more hearty than that with Mrs. Randolph, and all the inhabitants of Monticello."<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately Frances Wright left no record of her visits to the homes of Jefferson and Madison, but from the reports of Lafayette's secretary, Levasseur, we know that many hours of interesting discussion of political and economic affairs took place.<sup>23</sup> It was at this time that Frances Wright had her first direct experience with negro slavery. She saw it carried on by men of liberal views, who were apologetic for the institution. In such surroundings, it was easy for the young reformer to catch the inspiration of a bold idea, an experiment to show the world a plan for the gradual emancipation of negro slaves.

During the spring of 1825, Frances and Camilla visited two communities in the West that were founded by the Rappite Society. The example furnished by this band of Germans and their success in establishing a working community life, based upon principles of common ownership of property, seems to have given great impetus to Frances Wright's dream. In 1803, a band of German dissenters from the Lutheran Church, under the leadership of George Rapp,

<sup>21</sup> Lafayette to Jefferson, Oct. 1, 1824, Gilbert Chinard, ed., *Letters of Lafayette to Jefferson* (Baltimore, 1929), 422-423.

<sup>22</sup> Jefferson to Lafayette, Oct. 9, 1824, H. A. Washington, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1861), 379.

<sup>23</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 88.

had migrated to Butler County in western Pennsylvania and set up their first colony which was named *Harmonie*. Here, they built extensive mills and developed fine farms and vineyards. But the era of steam navigation had come and their site away from the river, was disadvantageous, so a new location was sought. A tract of 30,000 acres was purchased in Indiana Territory, in the lower Wabash Valley, and, in 1814, the colony began the move to the Wabash. The new home was also named *Harmonie*.<sup>25</sup> Soon the fertile valley of the Wabash flourished under the diligent toil of the Rappites and one may imagine that Frances Wright was indeed thrilled at the picture of industry and thrift which the community presented when she was there in 1825.

William Cobbett, who visited *Harmonie* before the end of the Rappite period wrote of it in his Journal entry of July 1, 1890:

Our road now lay across a field of Indian corn, of, at the very least, a mile in width and bordering the town on the side we entered; I wanted nothing more than to behold this immense field of most beautiful corn to be at once convinced of all I had heard of the industry of this society of Germans . . . We went out to see their harvest which had just begun. There were 150 men and women all reaping in the same field of wheat. A beautiful sight. The crop is very fine. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Richard Flower, a visitor from the nearby English community at Albion, Illinois, reported in 1819, that he had spent the week at *Harmonie*, "that wonder of the West, [where] every man has his station appointed him according to his wishes . . . It is from this hive of industry that Albion and its vicinity have drawn its supplies and its contiguity to such neighbors, has been of great advantage."<sup>27</sup>

But in spite of their material progress, the Rappites decided to move back East, where more stable money conditions prevailed, and Rapp's advertisement to sell *Harmonie*

<sup>24</sup> J. Schenck, *The Rappites* (Evansville, Indiana, 1890), 3.

<sup>25</sup> John Samuel Duss, *George Rapp and His Associates* (Indianapolis, 1914). This address was delivered at the Centennial Celebration held at New Harmony, Indiana, on June 6, 1914. In 1903, Mr. Duss, resigned as one of the trustees of the Rappite Society and Mrs. Duss was chosen to the vacancy. The Society was dissolved in 1906. *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> William Cobbett, "A Year's Residence in the United States," *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, edited by Harlow Lindley (Indiana Historical Commission, 1916), 514-519. Cobbett mentioned that steam engines were being used in the manufacturing carried on, and stated that the Rappites labored in common and possessed property in common except houses, gardens, cows and poultry which each family fed for itself.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Flower, "Flower's Letters from Lexington and the Illinois, 1819", *Early Western Travels*, edited by R. G. Thwaites (Cleveland, 1904), X, 98-99. A relative of Richard Flower, Ges Flower, was later associated with Frances Wright at Nashoba, Tennessee.

appeared in Eastern papers. The buyer of the property of the community came not from the east, however, but from Scotland. Robert Owen, already an international figure in factory reform, had decided, as had Frances Wright earlier, that only in a new country like the United States, could one be free to work out social reforms without interference. Robert Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, stated in later years that when the prospect of buying Harmonie had been presented to his father, he said: "Here is a vilage already built . . . a country where thought is free."<sup>28</sup>

When Frances Wright came to Harmonie the first time, she found it in the transition period. The Rappites were leaving and the advance guard of the Owen Colony was coming into the town, which was now renamed by Robert Owen, *New Harmony*.<sup>29</sup> Miss Wright saw the agricultural and industrial success of the first group and caught the social reform spirit of the Owenites. Out of this combination, she began to evolve her plan, which had been developing since her visit to Virginia, the inspiration of which had so stirred her zeal to aid the slave. It is easy to believe that the influence of Robert Owen's thinking would produce a profound effect on Frances Wright. His theory that man was entirely the product of his environment would strengthen her feeling that the negro, given a chance, would soon equal the white man. She expressed her belief as to the effects of environment on the negro:

Had not the Europeans of a less humane age degraded the African below the human standard and laid the benumbing hand of oppression upon his intellect, it is doubtful whether the least enlightened of us should ever have seen anything in a sable skin, but a whim of nature, or attributed the ignorance and slavishness of the African tribes on their own soil, to any other causes than those which variously operate on the human race, in all the differing climates and countries of the globe.<sup>30</sup>

Both Robert Owen and Fanny Wright were endowed with the crusading spirit which asked few particulars as to the practical means but saw only the lofty aims and ideals for bettering the lot of humanity. Robert Dale Owen, also a true disciple of his father's philosophy, was a congenial spirit to Frances Wright from the first. He wrote that she

<sup>28</sup> Robert Dale Owen, *Threading My Way* (London, 1874), 210.

<sup>29</sup> George B. Lockwood, *The New Harmony Movement* (New York, 1905), 58.

<sup>30</sup> D'Arusmont, *Views on Society*, 74.

"was a thorough republican; indeed, an advocate of universal suffrage without regard to color or sex." He also stated that her "abilities as an author and lecturer were of high order."<sup>31</sup>

Frances Wright had convinced herself that negro slavery was out of harmony with American ideals and she attempted to explain that it had been imposed upon a people, for the most part, very unwilling to have it introduced and established. Her arguments were: (1) The Negro was carried in forcibly to the colonists' feelings and despite the resistance of colonists and solemn protestations of their assemblies. (2) Colonial Virginia enumerated the slave trade as a wrong suffered at the hands of the British government. (3) The foreign slave trade was abolished by the United States in 1808. (4) The slave trade was later considered as piracy and punishable by the laws of the United States. (5) Slavery had been abolished in all American States where the number of slaves was not sufficient to render an act of enfranchisement menacing to the major interests of public order, industry and general welfare of the country. (6) The North failed on its part to appreciate the dangers to the Negro, of sudden emancipation.<sup>32</sup>

Miss Wright connected her distrust of orthodox religion as practiced by the Established Church with her statement that slavery had been most acceptable in those colonies where the English church prevailed by law.<sup>33</sup> The idea of the colonization movement for negroes, seems to have appealed to her from the time of her first visit to America:

Some at present have devised the scheme of appropriating to this purpose [colonization of negroes], the money arising from the sale of public lands. From various circumstances I am led to think that this measure is neither visionary nor impracticable, especially as it finds supporters among the slaveholders of the South.<sup>34</sup>

With this background of study, she felt convinced that the American people had only in part and unwillingly accepted slavery, and once they were shown a feasible way to get rid of the evil, gradually, they would accept the plan gladly. Of the Abolitionists, she said that she found them to have

<sup>31</sup> Dobert Dale Owen. "My Experience of Community Life," *Atlantic Monthly* (Sept., 1873), XXXII, 347.

<sup>32</sup> D'Arusmont, *Biography*, 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> Frances Wright, *Views on Society*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

"much zeal and little knowledge,"<sup>35</sup> and she had little sympathy for them and their methods.

By the summer of 1825, her plan had taken definite form. Lafayette before his return to France, had gone over the plan with her, and had submitted it to his friends, Jefferson, Madison and John Marshall.<sup>36</sup> During this period, Frances Wright wrote to Thomas Jefferson asking his support and active help in the direction of her plan. In his reply, he said:

I do not permit myself to take part in any new enterprises, even for bettering the condition of man, not even in the great one which is the subject of your letter and which has been through life, that of my greatest anxieties. . . . The abolition of the evil is not impossible, it might never, therefore, be despaired of. Every plan should be adopted, every experiment tried, which may do something toward the the ultimate object.

With the caution of one grown old and not too sanguine of perfection, he added:

Your proposition has its aspects of promise also and should it not answer fully to calculations in figures, it may yet in its developments, and lead to happy results. You are young, dear Madam, and have the powers of mind which may do much in exciting others in this arduous work. I am confident they will be so exerted and I pray Heaven for their success and that you may be rewarded with the blessings which such efforts merit.<sup>37</sup>

In her discussions with slave owners, many of whom admitted in theory that slavery was bad, and even morally wrong, Miss Wright had become convinced that the only obstacle to emancipation was the pecuniary interest which the planters derived from slavery. She believed that the slave might become a free man without loss to the owner, and be a gain to society, in that his freedom would add another man to the population.<sup>38</sup> Her plan was based upon these general principles: (1) The purchase of an estate in a southern state, to furnish an opportunity for negro labor. (2) The purchase of some slaves, a few to start, more to be added later. These slaves and lands to be paid for by herself. (3) Each slave was to be charged with his purchase

<sup>35</sup> D'Arusmont, *Biography*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 96.

<sup>37</sup> Jefferson to Frances Wright, Aug. 7, 1825, William B. Parker and Jonas Viles, editors, *Letters and Addresses of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York, 1905), 285-86.

<sup>38</sup> Amos Gilbert, *Memoir of Frances Wright* (Cincinnati, 1855), 25. Mr. Gilbert was later associated with Frances Wright in newspaper work in New York.

price in the bill of sale. In addition he was to be charged with his board and clothing costs. A fair rate of interest on the investment was to be charged also. To his credit, would be his labor. Any over work or extra care in management were to be carefully recorded and credit given. Labor was to be paid the usual prices, articles furnished to be rated at cost prices. (4) When any slave's credit account balanced his cost price, he was to go free. (5) When his freedom was gained, the slave was to be colonized in some place outside the United States. This was a concession to the wishes of southern planters who did not believe that free negroes would be desirable or successful in southern communities.<sup>39</sup> added:

The plan included setting up a school for industrial education of the slaves, along the lines followed on some large plantations where skilled slaves were taught carpentry, shoemaking, black-smithing, sewing, weaving, etc. It has been said that "She [Frances Wright] anticipated the work of Hampton Roads [Hampton Institute] by nearly half a century, of Tuskegee by nearly a century. . . ."<sup>40</sup>

It was estimated that it would take a good worker five years to earn his purchase price, with interest. In order that families might not be broken up, labor was to be valued by the family, instead of by the head, keeping the children with the parents until they reached a certain age.<sup>41</sup>

In the fall of 1825, Miss Wright set out to locate the site for her experiment. She turned to the State of Tennessee. She had already met General Andrew Jackson and probably knew that he was interested in the idea of gradual emancipation. General Lafayette's secretary, Levasseur, furnishes an account of their visit to the Hermitage, to which he adds:

Everybody told us that the slaves of General Jackson were treated with utmost kindness and several persons assured us that they should not be astonished if, in a short time, their master. . . were to give to Tennessee, an example of gradual emancipation, which would be easier to perform in that state, because there are only 79,000 slaves out of a total population of 423,000, and because public feeling is more favorable there than elsewhere to the abolition of slavery.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Anna B. A. Brown, "A Dream of Emancipation," *New England Magazine* (June, 1904), n.s. XXX, 494.

<sup>41</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 98.

<sup>42</sup> A. Levasseur, *Lafayette in America* (New York, 1829), II, 172.

George Flower from the English settlement at Albion, Illinois, accompanied Miss Wright to Tennessee. He had taken an active part in the slavery struggles in Illinois and had financed the migration of a number of negroes to Haiti.<sup>43</sup> Flower knew Lafayette and seems to have conferred with him regarding the Wright experiment, since he reported that "Mr. Flower assured me, when we parted, that Fanny should not be suffered to go beyond the fixed sum."<sup>44</sup> A few weeks later, Lafayette wrote to a mutual friend of Frances Wright and himself that the fixed sum for the venture of Miss Wright was \$10,000.<sup>45</sup>

Flower and Miss Wright reached Memphis on October 8, 1825. In a short time, they had arranged for the purchase of lands along the Wolf River, some thirteen miles from Memphis. In all, about two thousand acres were purchased.

To her property, Miss Wright gave the old Chickasaw Indian name for wolf, *Nashoba*.<sup>46</sup> George Flower returned to Illinois to make arrangements for bringing his family and Camilla Wright to Nashoba in the spring. Frances remained in Tennessee superintending the building of cabins and the management of a few slaves purchased to start the experiment. To what limits her enthusiasm carried her may be seen in this account:

It was not to be anticipated that one born in the lap of wealthy aristocracy, who probably had never kneaded bread, churned butter or perchance put a stitch in a garment should without the pressure of necessity, voluntarily turn woodman, or that an enlightened, refined female should forego the pleasures of intelligent intercourse, and confine herself to the society of uncultivated, undeveloped minds. But she did it, and might be seen with her swarthy companions, piling brush, rolling logs, etc., from dawn to dusky eve. As a specimen of her application to business, she left in the morning twilight in search of their cows, and returned in the evening twilight, having traversed the forest a whole day without a mouthful of food. Several times she went alone on horseback from Tennessee to New Harmony, Indiana, through a wilderness country with several rivers of swimming depth. Once she fell in with two men who had a black man in custody. After some altercation she took the Negro on behind her and repaired to the office of a Magistrate to ascertain if he were legally held.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Lafayette to an unknown friend, March 16, 1826, *loc. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> Lafayette to Julie Garnet, June 19, 1826. Original letter in S. W. Jackson collection.

<sup>46</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Gilbert, *op. cit.*, 27-28.

In February 1826, the experiment began in earnest. George Flower and family with Camilla Wright arrived by flatboat. A little later two other men joined the enterprise, James Richardson, a Scotchman whom Miss Wright had met at Memphis, and Richeson Whitby, who had recently been with Robert Owen's community at New Harmony.<sup>48</sup> Months of hard work followed and Miss Wright wrote to a friend: "We have raised buildings for immediate use, cleared and fenced around them. . . fenced an apple orchard of five acres, planted potatoes in a vegetable garden, opened fifteen acres for corn, and planted two acres of old ground in cotton."<sup>49</sup>

As a result of the heavy labor and the malarial climate, the founder became seriously ill and for a time her life seemed threatened. During the summer of 1826, with her experiment barely started, she left for New Harmony to rest and recover from the effects of her illness. Here she found Robert Owen's community in full flower. She was profoundly influenced by her visit and upon her return to Nashoba, decided to incorporate some of his ideas into her experiment. No doubt she felt the need of help in the management of the plantation, since her illness had shown the danger of depending upon herself alone for leadership. In December, 1826, she created a board of trustees for Nashoba and conveyed to them all of her lands and property in Tennessee. The ten trustees named were General Lafayette, William Maclure, Robert Owen, Caldwellader Colden, Richeson Whitby, Robert Jennings, Robert Dale Owen, George Flower, Camilla Wright, and James Richardson. Of these trustees five were, or had been, associated with the venture at New Harmony.<sup>50</sup>

The deed, as conveyed to the trustees, provided that the lands were to be held in perpetual trust for the negro race. A school for negro children was always to form a principal part of the plan, and further all negroes emancipated by the trustees, were, upon quitting the institution, to be placed out of the limits of the United States.<sup>51</sup>

Other provisions followed which distinctly modified the

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<sup>48</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> The five included besides Robert Owen, his son and Maclure, Jennings and Whitby.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

plan from its original scheme for a simple experiment in self-emancipation. In an article written two years later for the *New Harmony Gazette*, Miss Wright explained her purposes, in the revised plan, which John H. Noyes has called a sort of Brook Farm plus a negro basis. In this revised plan, whites as well as free negroes could be members of the coöperative society. Rigid rules of selection were laid down to prevent unfit members from coming to join. This was, no doubt, added because of the founder's observation that some who were lazy and indifferent had flocked to the New Harmony community.

Provisions of the revised plan for the Nashoba institution included: (1) No member is to be admitted until he or she has served a novitiate of six months, and only then by a unanimous vote of the resident proprietors. (2) The admission of a husband does not involve admitting the wife, or *vice versa*, nor the admission of a parent include children over the age of fourteen years. Each individual is to be received on his or her merits. (3) The marriage law existing without the pale of the Institution, is of no force in the Institution. No woman can forget her individual rights or no man assert over her any rights or power beyond what he may exercise over her free and voluntary affections. (4) Any member not able to work, may pay an equivalent amount of money, the highest amount not to exceed two hundred dollars a year. (5) Any property held by members is to be deeded over to the trustees. (6) Moral requisites necessary—an amiable and willing disposition, kindly affections, simple tastes, a high tone of moral feeling. (7) Religion is to occupy no place in the creed of the Institution, and the “rule of moral practice there proposed has simply in view human happiness, considering as virtuous whatever tends to promote that happiness and as vicious, whatever tends to counteract it.” (8) Children of outsiders may be educated in the schools at a cost of \$100 per year. (9) Young people are urged to learn a trade before applying for membership and to bring such tools and equipment as they may have, with them.<sup>52</sup>

Under this new plan, the promoter was not content merely to emancipate slaves, but contemplated curing the

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<sup>52</sup> Excerpts from articles written by Frances Wright and published in the *New Harmony Gazette*, Jan. and Feb., 1828.

ills of mankind. It reflects the evolution and flowering of an intense zeal to make over the world.

Robert Dale Owen wrote: "In the spring of 1827, New Harmony had ceased to be a community and I agreed to accompany Miss Wright to Nashoba, hoping there to find more cultivated and congenial associates than those among whom for eighteen months, I had been living."<sup>53</sup> He reported that he found the outlook unpromising, the land poor, slaves working indolently, Miss Wright's health bad and Whitby, the farm manager, in despair of being able to manage the slaves if Miss Wright and her sister should leave.<sup>54</sup>

In May, 1827, it was decided that Frances Wright's health could improve only with a change of climate, so she, accompanied by Robert Dale Owen, set out for France *via* New Orleans. *En route*, she was seriously ill, but gradually recovered her health during the long sea voyage.<sup>55</sup> They visited with Lafayette at LaGrange. In a letter from Lafayette to Concitoyen, he reported: "We have with us Miss Wright, who was near death in Western Tennessee, and has partly recovered towards health and strength as a result of having spent a few months in Europe."<sup>56</sup>

But her rest and happy visit were disturbed by reports of chaotic conditions at Nashoba. Neither Camilla Wright, Whitby, or Richardson, the resident trustee, seemed to be able to manage the place satisfactorily. Richardson, who appears to have dominated the other two trustees, made some very unwise moves. One was the publication of records of the Nashoba Society, which showed a decided laxness in moral tone and gave evidence that free love was accepted there. This report, published in Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, brought a round of protest from the friends of Francis and Camilla.<sup>57</sup> James Madison, writing to Lafayette in 1828, said of Miss Wright:

With her rare talents and still rarer disinterestedness, she has, I fear, created insuperable obstacles to her good fruits, of which they

<sup>53</sup> Robert Dale Owen, "Frances Wright, General Lafayette and Mary W. Shelley," *Atlantic Monthly* (Oct., 1873), XXXII, 449.

<sup>54</sup> Anna B. A. Brown, "A Dream of Emancipation," *loc. cit.*, 496, states that the land of Nashoba was "wonderfully rich."

<sup>55</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 112.

<sup>56</sup> Lafayette to Concitoyen, Aug. 16, 1827. Original letter in S. W. Jackson collection.

<sup>57</sup> Fred London, *Benjamin Lundy, Abolitionist*, 189-197. A comment is made regarding Nashoba and Lundy's interest in it, but he added that, "at a later date, we displayed less enthusiasm for that body's rather startling views on marriage and some kindred subjects," *ibid.*, 192.

might be productive, by her disregard, or rather defiance, of the most established opinion and vivid feelings. Besides her views on amalgamating the white and black population, so universally obnoxious, she gives an eclat to her notions on the subject of religion and marriage, the effect of which your knowledge of this country, can readily estimate.<sup>58</sup>

In a report of the trustees of Nashoba published in the *New Harmony Gazette*, in 1828, it was evident that grave problems had arisen. This report stated: "The trustees have encountered many difficulties." The trustees complained that they had found it difficult to find men and women mentally and morally fitted for the good work. They had admitted some good people who had no capital, and the society assumed a mixed form. The trustees admitted some to labor and others as boarders, who did not labor, and they erred by so doing, making inequality. They either had to require physical labor from all, or else form a society composed of small capitalists, or a simple coöperative society. The trustees had decided to admit in the future, only those with a certain sum yearly for their support. For the present they would give up their idea of a coöperative society. Each member would pay into the organization one hundred dollars yearly for board and each pay his own individual expenses in addition. They urged further that each member should build for himself a brick house, with broad piazza, constructed according to a regular plan to cost about five hundred dollars per house. They concluded the report with a statement that the trustees would be responsible for the slaves, now on the place, and enable them to emancipate themselves as they were then doing, by their own labor.<sup>59</sup>

After her visit in France, Frances Wright returned to England. There she prevailed upon her friend, Mrs. Frances Trollope, to accompany her to America. She seems to have convinced Mrs. Trollope that Nashoba would be a delightful place to visit and wanted her to join their society there.<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Trollope left an interesting account of her association with Frances Wright on this trip:

This lady, since become so celebrated as the advocate of opinions, which make millions shudder and some half-score admire, was, at the time of my leaving England with her, dedicated to a pursuit widely different from her subsequent occupation. Instead of becoming a pub-

<sup>58</sup> *Writings of James Madison*, edited by Gaillard Hunt (New York, 1910), IX, 311.

<sup>59</sup> Excerpts from a report of the Nashoba trustees, published in the *New Harmony Gazette*, Nov., 1828.

<sup>60</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 123.

lic orator in every town in America, she was about, as she said, to seclude herself for life, in the deepest forests of the Western world, that her fortune, her time, and her talents might be exclusively devoted to aid the cause of suffering Africans. Her first object was to show that nature had made no difference between whites and blacks, excepting in complexion, and this she meant to prove by giving an education perfectly equal to a class of black and white children. I expected, for my children and myself, both pleasure and information from visiting her establishment and watching the success of her experiment.<sup>61</sup>

When the party reached Nashville, they were forced to remain there for awhile, due to rains and bad roads. Mrs. Trollope reported in regard to the trip from Nashville that the

road was a mass of stumps. The forest became thicker and more dreary-looking every mile we advanced, but our ever-grinning negro declared it was a right good road and that we should be sure to get to Nashoba and so we did . . . and one glance sufficed to convince me that every idea I had formed of the place was as far as possible from the truth. Desolation was the only feeling, the only word that presented itself, but it was not spoken. I think that Miss Wright was aware of the painful impression which her forest home produced on me and I doubt not that the conviction reached us both at the same moment, that we had erred in thinking that a few months passed together at this spot could be productive of pleasure to either of us. But to do her justice, I believe that her mind was so exclusively occupied by the object she had then in view, that all things else were worthless, or indifferent to her. I never heard or read of any enthusiasm approaching hers except in a few instances, in ages past, of religious fanaticism.<sup>62</sup>

Mrs. Trollope's work gives a picture of Nashoba as she saw it. A hollow square of cleared land was surrounded by a rail fence. Six log houses were placed at intervals around the square. She reported further that,

Each building consisted of two large rooms furnished in the most simple manner, nor had they as yet collected around them any of those minor comforts which ordinary minds class as the necessities of life.<sup>63</sup>

She counted

between thirty and forty slaves including children. No school had been established. Books and other materials for the great experiment had been collected, and one or two professors engaged, but nothing as yet was organized.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Frances Terolope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London, 1832), I, 17-18.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

It did not take long for Mrs. Trollope to decide that the climate would be harmful to herself and children, and they soon departed from Nashoba.

Even the high enthusiasm of the founder began to wane, and, within the year, Frances Wright again left Nashoba under the management of an inefficient overseer. The decline was rapid and Miss Wright, by this time, engaged in editorial work on the *New Harmony Gazette*, and, with starting her career as a lecturer, decided to abandon the project. She carried out her promise of emancipation and colonization made to slaves at Nashoba and personally directed their removal. She chartered the brig, *John Quincy Adams*, of Boston, and with her charges sailed from New Orleans for Haitai in January, 1830. She placed the negroes under the personal care of President Boyer of Haiti, and left them with his assurance that he would aid them in every way possible.<sup>65</sup> Her original scheme had become too much involved with eccentric ideas. "Her experiment in self emancipation was one of the very few efforts made to solve the problem of American slavery, and it deserved a better fate."<sup>66</sup> When telling of the concluding phases of the Nashoba story, she remarked for the first time that she had bowed her spirit in humility before the omnipotence of collective humanity: "Man Species is alone capable of effecting what I, weak existence of an hour! have thought myself equal to attempt."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Waterman, *op. cit.*, 131.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>67</sup> D'Arusmont, *Biography*, 31.