

Speech to Ferrer Colony

J. William Lloyd

In reading this paper to you, members of the Ferrer Colony, I wish to say that I claim neither inspiration nor infallibility. I do not pretend to be an expert in anything. I am simply a friend and a comrade who has a few suggestions to make out of his own thought and experience. It is your part to criticize and reject the useless.

In coming to a colony you are aiming at a more ideal social life. Were it not so there would be no object in your forming a colony, for the advantages of complex civilization are better obtained in a city and the joys of a country life, per se, would be better obtained in a hermitage. But the first thing you all need to realize is that social life is more difficult in a colony of comrades than in a village of strangers, still more so than in a city. It requires more tact, more sympathy, more patience and good-will. The chief trouble in almost every colony of radicals is the dogmatic cocksureness, the critic-ability and combativeness-plus of the members. Almost every member in such a chosen community has a vivid ideal of what life should be in such a place, all mapped and drawn to a scale in his mind, with every body's behaviour and belief specified, and he confidently expects to see this at once put in operation on his arrival. But alas, his ideal coincides with that of no one else exactly, for each and every one of his neighbors has a different ideal, also demanding general faith and practice. The result is a clash of intense natures, a Donnybrook Fair of the saints, so to speak, each zealous enthusiast using his plan-of-salvation as a shillaleh to pound his neighbor with. What you must all remember, when you come to a place like this, is that you are all intense individualists and therefore fated to differ, that Harmony is vastly more important than your particular "ism", and that whatever system, plan or method of life finally prevails in the colony will not be exactly what you have imagined, or exactly what anybody else has imagined, but a new and composite thing which the circumstances of the colony and the characters concerned have evolved and which under the friction of all these has proved most fitted to survive. Nothing else than this can be done.

The thing most needed in any colony is a lot of colonists who can live and work harmoniously together and you will find it the hardest thing of all to secure. In fact if your colony endures it will have to go thru a period of fermentation which will work off and out the unassimiable human units, leaving an effective working majority of those who are comrades in fact as well as in name. If you would assure this harmony you must all set your hearts upon it as your most vital social ideal, they keystone of your social arch without which it will surely fall.

But if Harmony is the keystone of your arch, Liberty and Sympathy are the foundation stones from which it springs. And these must be equal or it totters. A liberty which would do simply what it pleases is a Sampson which finally pulls down everything and on itself; and a sympathy which does not first grant freedom is worthless indeed. As you are mostly all libertarians I will not go into the theory of liberty, about which many of you know, no doubt, more than myself, but the necessary relation of sympathy to liberty is something which I have found too many libertarians unconscious of or indifferent to. It is all very well to affirm "I will do as I please and take the consequences", if you are willing to take the consequences, but not if you are willing that one of the consequences shall be a successful colony group.

The first step in that liberty which is sympathetic and makes for harmony, as I see it, is that you are willing and glad that other people should be different from yourself in looks, dress, habits, beliefs and ideals, that variation is not only certain but within uninvasive and reasonable limits is exceedingly useful and the thing to be desired to make life interesting and picturesque.

I will quote from some writings of mine on this subject made years ago:

"There are two ways to get liberty. One is for the isolated individual to flee to the savage wilderness, and there, away from his fellows and untrammelled by them, attain such animal liberty as Nature permits. But this, be it noted, is only liberty from man's fulfillment.

"The second way is for men to unite and by patiently, faithfully, lovingly cooperating, create for each other, and all, that real liberty which is power over Nature and fullness of self-expression -- which is knowledge, which is mastery, which is character; which in the material realm is service, art, leisure and healthful joy.

"Liberty is power.

"And the greatest attainable human liberty will be when men stop struggling for power over each other and all unite for power over Nature?

"To drop men isolated -- sink or swim -- on little bits of land, is not to give them liberty, leisure, power, home or Nature. All the raw materials are there, but just out of reach. The necessity for constant drudgery of toil from dawn to bed makes all inaccessible?

"But the moment man helps his fellow, power arrives and liberty flowers and art bears fruit. Life on small pieces of land, in individual homes, is ideal, if all one's neighbors are one's helpers and one's liberators, and if to liberate, love and assist is mutual job. Then combined brain and brawn can progressively lessen the hours of labor, while increasing the product, and power, leisure -- real liberty -- progressively arrive."

Another quotation is this: "And I would suggest for land-holding groups that they hold land as a corporate body, but in individual allotments, with an understanding that on the withdrawal of any member the title should revert to the group. Otherwise when a member leaves he might sell his holding to some outsider of absolutely uncongenial traits and so break up the quality of the group."

When a group is formed of people who all know each other and live close together, one great danger is that they will so constantly enter each other's homes and keep up such an intrusive intimacy that privacy will be impossible, and those who love retirement, meditation, quiet literary pursuits, and so on, will find the situation intolerable and at any cost must leave. And such people are usually of the very finest sort, the best material for harmonious cooperation. To lose them would be a grave loss. Yet there are always in every neighborhood, some who have no respect for their own society, but shun it as a vacuum, and rush continually to those about them for refuge from themselves. These become perilous bores unless carefully guarded against. It should be one

of your unwritten if not written laws that a member may be as reserved as he likes, a hermit, a very Robinson Crusoe if he pleases, with no reproof from any one. But the mere theory will not be enough, for it is the peculiarity of the bore that he is obtuse and conceited and always imagines that he is the accepted one and his society thrice welcome. You must have some sign or signal, flag, color, emblem, what you will, that can be displayed on the door-post or gate-post and which will be understood as warning all away. And as soon as possible all your homes should be united by telephone so that any really necessary communication can be made without entering the home itself. I would emphasize this pint, if you wish to have real liberty.

Many of you, I understand, are communists. Communism is one of the most beautiful of ideals, but in liberty it is only possible between loving friends. The only communism a libertarian can stand for is freedom communism and communism is only free when it is free to refuse. Therefore it must be based on individualism, on individual possession of property, for communism is sharing and if I possess nothing I can share nothing, and if I possess nothing I can refuse nothing. If your communism is forced it destroys your liberty, for liberty is power the means of power is property. Therefore your communism and individualism must be reconciled and both expressed in your colony life. Your communism must be your expression of your sense of solidarity and good will toward each other. Communism cannot be demanded as a right where there is to be liberty -- it can only be a gift.

As many of your are city men, unused to country life and its methods, you should employ one or more of your members, if capable, if not then some outsider, to teach and show such of you as may need it the mysteries of gardening, fruit-growing, poultry-raising, also to maintain a model garden where you may learn by example. This may make all the difference between great losses and easy success.

Most men who are fitted for country life, who would make good gardeners and good home-makers are not good businessmen in the modern sense -- they are not fitted for the struggles of the market, to buy and sell. You should then choose some trusted member with a talent for this and employ him as your business-agent, to buy for you economically and sell at a profit the things you produce.

The American pioneers did a good deal of practical communism under the name of "bees". When a new man arrived in the community, all came together in a "bee" and rushed up a little home to shelter him, or cleared his land, or plowed it, or whatever might be necessary. You too might do much with the "bee".

I would advise, too, that you mutually insured each other. What I mean is that in case of sickness you each contribute a few cents a week, whatever the agreed upon sum might be, to the support of the sick member. Or if fire destroys one of your little homes, that you each give \$5, or whatever you may pledge yourselves for, toward the erection of a new dwelling. These things will bind you all together, make you all feel more secure and your comradeship real.

I take it for granted that most of you would prefer to escape the city altogether and form you abiding place here. To do this you should band your energies upon mutual employment. See if you cannot make your colony a little world in itself, self-supporting, self-sufficient. And by such cooperation and division of labor you can greatly increase your combined efficiency and comfort.

Thus why should not one of your members do all the baking and perhaps much of the cooking for the whole colony? Why not have a common dining-room where those who chose could get meals without doing their own cooking? Why not have a colony carpenter, a colony barber, a colony cobbler, etc. You should be able to employ a colony tailor and colony seamstress. Of course

no one of these trades or employments might furnish a complete living, but combined with the garden it might make possible a residence permanent in the country, otherwise out of reach.

Many ways besides agriculture might be devised to sell colony products profitably to the outside world also. An arts-and-crafts shop for example. Or one woman instead of gardening might get some tents and furnish them and in summer take boarders from the city, doing their light housekeeping and cooking their meals. These are only hints and pointers.

Self-support and economic freedom should be your goal.

We all want liberty and we should want it. But we must take the universe as it is, for neither you nor I have made it, nor can change its laws. The wise man faces life as it is, and from that basis uses it to serve his purpose. And life as it is is an unstable balance of opposites; opposites that partly conflict, that is, and partly support each other, but are always there and insistent on being included. You can never successfully exclude all of any one and successfully include all of its opposite. It is a waste of time and strength to fight this natural law. In real life you can only have liberty in conjunction with a certain amount of authority and you practical problem, in each new set of circumstances that arises, will be to so reconcile the two that both may serve your benefit. We would fain abolish government because of its abuses, but in some form government insists on proportionate representation. Josiah Warren saw this and affirmed that in practical action the group must be an individual -- which means that somebody's brain must dominate the rest. Tucker saw it and based society on free-contract -- but contract is valueless unless there is some power to enforce it on those who treat it as a scrap of paper. Kropotkin saw this and would regulate society by custom, but custom is government -- too often the rule of the dead hand -- and maybe a very arbitrary and obstructive form of government indeed. The same is true of the boycott. Abolish artificial government and we go back to the primitive struggle and rule of might as right. In some form, and necessarily, the arbitrary and the coercive always emerges. Any way you fix it or leave it alone, when it comes to cooperation or business, you will find yourselves helpless unless you have organization, accepted order and executive power. Apparently the experience of mankind has evolved nothing so far better for the working reconciliation of liberty and authority than the democratic vote with majority decision; the minority agreeing beforehand to acquiesce.

If you can secure the necessary degree of government thru internal discipline, self-government -- self-restraint, loyalty and mutual agreement -- well and good. If not it will have to be accomplished by some degree of external government.

For in your business you will not be able to function without some method of obtaining and enforcing decisions and in your school you will not have success unless you have an order and discipline -- some method, with whatever checks and safeguards, of investing your teachers with sufficient authority to establish a working system out of a chaos of raw materials. Unless you evolve from or implant in your pupils a passionate love of social service and individual efficiency the liberty with which you endow them may be a personal and social curse and your education a failure.

The only true education is that which creates character. For character is the supreme essential of society. This is a truism, a platitude, if you will, but it is a fact we are all too prone to forget or underestimate. There is a certain plan of good intention and comprehending wisdom which some people attain which makes them always and everywhere good neighbors and good citizens. Get enough of such and you are safe. Without such a majority, nothing of theory or brilliant

accomplishment can save you. Formulas, philosophies, laws or liberations are all wind and waste, deceptions and disappointments unless the men behind them are men of character.

And if you have the character you will do pretty well no matter what the form or shibboleth.

It is not what men profess, it is what they will and what they do.

There is in almost every human being an instinctive love of beauty tho he may be largely unconscious of it or contentious enough to deny it, or unable, by himself, to express it. But if not in his environment he will grow disgusted, pessimistic, heartsick. Order is one of these elements of beauty. Order is everywhere in Nature. All animals lead orderly lives. All "savages", as we call them, have orderly societies and customs of life. Without order social life becomes intolerable and explodes to rearrange on new lines. Whatever its theories of liberty and spontaneity a society must evolve and maintain its own order or it falls into chaos.

The esthetic is extremely practical. We often regard work as alone practical, but we all work to attain the means of pleasure, and nothing affords us more pleasure than beauty. And the more orderly the work the more efficient. Work beautifully done, to achieve beautiful results, is always the most satisfactory.

But after the work is done, and we are tired and would rest, then disorder and ugliness discourage, dishearten, sicken. If the home to which we go after the day's work is done is not orderly and restfully beautiful the next day's work will be less efficient. Pioneers continually forget or ignore this and, in their concentration on the immediately practical, flout the beautiful until, in dull disgust with the hideousness of their own doings, they sell out and move on. Not until an element arrives which considers order and esthetics does an element which will stick arrive. It would pay any colony, then, that cares to succeed, to see it to that every building, however small or cheap, was made attractive to the eye, and that every bit of ground was laid out or cultivated in such a manner that the relation of it to all others in sight was pleasing, harmonious. For a hundred different people to settle, helter skelter on a tract of land, all in sight of each other, and proceed without plan, experience or regard to others, to run up every possible type of structure and tear up the earth generally, is very much in total effect on the nerves, as if a hundred would-be musicians seized a hundred instruments of any and every kind and proceeded, each for himself, to scrape, bang and blow, in the confident expectation of creating a symphony.

One of the most practical things any colony could do would be to elect a Committee of Esthetics to give advice to all on matters pertaining to beauty of form, color, line and relation. Make your colony beautiful and your colonists will love it as a home and be happy in it and with each other. Pay no attention to such things and observe the amazing percentage of homesickness, grumbling, quarreling, chronic kicking -- the many and frequent secessions and the satire and contempt the whole movement will evoke.

It is simply a scientific fact that any tent, shack or hutch, however cheap or simple, can be made picturesque, and any bit of ground can be made not only productive but a pleasing part of the total landscape.

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