

Narrative of Practical Experiments

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I. New Harmony and the Time Store Idea

This is a passage from *The Quarterly Letter: Devoted to Showing the Practical Applications and Progress of Equity, a Subject of Serious to All Classes, but Most Immediately To the Men and Women of Labor and Sorrow!* Vol 1, No. 1 (dated October, 1867).

(Text obtained from the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan.)

The *Quarterly Letter*, like the *Periodical Letter*, and *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, was one-off or extremely occasional periodical, entirely written, set, and printed by Warren. The typesetting and printing is notable: extremely elaborate and relatively free of errors; the aesthetic is clunky but somehow sweet. This, of which I obtained the text from the Labadie Collection at Michigan, is more or less the entirety of the *Quarterly Letter*, vol. 1 no 1, datelined “Clifftondale, Mass., October 1867.” Oddly, it tells Warren’s story of disillusionment with Owen and realization of his principles in a semi-fictitious way; he calls himself “Werner.”

This may be the best mature statement of Warren’s philosophy or at least Werner’s anarchism — with continuous attempts at practical demonstration — and it displays emerging awareness that the conflict between labor and capital was in some ways fundamental to the late nineteenth century and to the ideological configuration of the progressive movements of that era.

This piece narrates the beginning of the Time Store idea, and is certainly the clearest description of the operation. With *Practical Applications of the Elementary Positions of True Civilization* (to follow), it forms a continuous narrative of Warren’s practical implementations of his ideas.

Introductory

It has come to be admitted by the best students of human affairs, that something is wrong at the foundation. That the history of the past is mainly made up of the failures of mankind in their efforts to make themselves comfortable. That it devolves upon the present generation to solve the problem of successful society, or become the pivot upon which civilization shall take a sudden turn toward barbarism. Whoever undertakes this solution, assumes too grave a responsibility in putting forth any abstract theory, but we are safe in stating facts in detail, leaving each mind to theorize for itself. This course is preferred in this work: beginning with the practical and letting theory follow.

A complete history of the experiments in Equity during the last forty years would be too voluminous — to expensive to publish or to be read by those who most need it. But selected parts will be given showing how justice has been done to labor, in store keeping, in exchanging all kinds of products, and services, renting of houses, buying and selling land, &c.: what kind of money has been used and how it has worked; how the interests of all classes are made to co-operate by a principle without entangling partnerships or partial, conflicting and short lived combinations or organizations: and showing how competition is converted into being a regulator rather than a destroyer, how destitute and despairing people have been relieved by justice instead of charity: enabling thinkers to see how distress can be relieved and the existing and threatened conflicts between the luxurious and the starving may be neutralized or averted: all without seriously disturbing any class or person.

Labor for Labor: Its Origin and the Way it Worked

One whom we will call Werner, went to New Harmony, in Indiana in 1825, with the celebrated philanthropist Robert Owen, who assembled eight hundred people, mostly selected for their superior intelligence and moral excellence, with the view of solving the great problem by communism of property. Mr. Owen and one of his coadjutors (Mr. Maclure) had an abundance (millions) of money and all felt an enthusiastic devotion to the cause and unlimited confidence in Mr. Owen, but all ended in disappointment. Two years time and at least two hundred thousand dollars were spent in making and breaking up organizations, constitutions, laws and governments of every conceivable kind, for no result except to show what will not work, and that it is dangerous to risk much in untried theories, how ever plausible they may appear.

In one of Mr. Owen's lectures, he spoke of an idea that had been broached in England. It was a proposal to exchange all labors or services equally, hour for hour, with labor notes for a circulating medium. But the idea did not seem to make much impression and it passed away without any attempt at its development.

At the very commencement of our experiments in communism we were taken all aback by phenomena altogether unexpected.

We had assured ourselves of our unanimous devotedness to the cause and expected unanimity of thought and action: but instead of this we met diversity of opinions, expedients and counter-action entirely beyond any thing we had just left behind us in common society. And the more we desired and called for union, the more this diversity seemed to be developed: and instead of that harmonious co-operation we had expected, we found more antagonisms than we had been accustomed to in common life. If we had demanded or even expected infinite diversity, disunion and disintegration we should have found ourselves in harmony with the facts and with each other on one point at least. We differed, we contended and ran ourselves into confusion: our legislative proceedings were just like all others, excepting that we did not come to blows or pistols; because Mr. Owen had shown us that all our thoughts, feelings and actions were the inevitable effects of the causes that produce them; and that it would be just as rational to punish the fruit of a tree for being what it is, as to punish each other for being what we are: that our true issue is not with each other, but with causes.

Every few days we heard of the failure of some one of the many communities that had been started in different parts of this and other countries. Small groups of selected friends had moved out of the town upon the surrounding lands, each confident that they could succeed though all others failed; but a very few weeks or months found them returning to the town discouraged.

We had fairly worn each other out by incessant legislation about organizations, constitutions, laws and regulations all to no purpose, and we could no longer talk with each other on the subject that brought us there. Many intelligent and far-seeing members had left — others were preparing to go, and an oppressive despondency hung heavily upon all. Werner shared the general feeling and nothing saved him from despair but that our business is with causes: and the question now was, what could be the causes of all this confusion and disappointment? What was the matter, when all were so willing to sacrifice so much for success? He dwelt upon this question till he could come to no other conclusion than that communism was the cause. What then was to be done? Must we give up all hope of a successful society? Or must we attempt to construct society without communism? for all societies, from a nation to the smallest partnership, are more or less communistic.

We had carried communism farther than usual and hence our greater confusion. Common society, then, had all the time been right in its individual ownership of property and its individual

responsibilities and wrong in all its communistic entanglements. Even two children owning a jack knife together are liable to continual dissatisfaction and disturbance till somebody owns it individually. Had society, then, started wrong at the beginning? Had all its governments and other communistic institutions been formed on a wrong model? Was disintegration, then, not an enemy but a friend and a remedy? Was "individuality" to be the watch word of progress instead of "union"? Werner dwelt upon these thoughts day and night, for he could not dismiss them and was almost bewildered with the immense scope of the subject and the astounding conclusions that he could not avoid: but he had become so distrustful of his own judgment from his late disappointments, he resolved to dismiss these thoughts and leave these great problems to be solved and settled by the wise, the great and the powerful. But he could not dismiss them; they haunted him; they haunted him, day and night. They presented to him society beginning anew. He found himself asking how it should begin. It could not be formed, for we had just proved, for we had just proved that we could no more form a successful society than we could form the fruit upon the tree — it must be the natural growth of the interest that each one feels in it from the benefits of enjoyments derived from it. The greater these benefits. the stronger the bond of society. Where there is no interest felt, there is no bond of society, whatever its unions, its organizations, its constitutions, governments or laws may be.

If the enjoyments derived from society are its true bond, what do we want of any other? "We want governments and laws to regulate the movements of the members of society, to prevent encroachments upon each other, and to manage the common interests for common benefit. "

But the movements of society have never been regulated. Encroachments have never been prevented, but are increasing every day, and the common interests have never been managed to the satisfaction of the parties interested. It is precisely these problems that remain to be solved, which was our purpose in our late movement. It had been defeated by our attempt to govern each other, to regulate each other's movements for the common benefit, no two having the same view of the common benefit and no one retaining the same view from one week to another. Infinite diversity instead of unity is inevitable, especially in a progressive or transitory stage. Then why not leave each one to regulate his own movements within equitable limits, provided we can find out what equity is, and leave the rest to the universal instinct of self-preservation? But what constitutes equity is the greatest question of all. It is the unknown quantity that even algebra has failed to furnish. One thing is certain. If all our wants are supplied, that is all we want. Could we not supply each other's without entangling ourselves in communism and thereby involving ourselves in interminable conflicts and fruitless legislation? Could we not have a central point in each neighborhood where all wants might be made known, and where those wanting employment or who have anything to dispose of could also apply, and thus bring demand and supply together and adapt one to the other? Then, as to exchange — on what principle could it be equitably conducted? Here the idea of labor for labor presented itself: but hour for hour in all pursuits did not seem to promise the equilibrium required: because those those who perform the most disagreeable kinds of labor make the greatest sacrifices for the general good, and should they not be compensated in proportion to the sacrifices made? If not, then (opportunities being equally open to all) starved, ragged, insulted labor would be shunned even more than it is now, by ever one who can avoid it, and more respected and more agreeable pursuits would be over crowded and conflict between all will continue and the demand and supply be thrown out of balance.: but, as no pledges or compacts would be entered into, every one could make any

exceptions to the hour for hour rule that suited him. This would be one application of equitable freedom.

Estimating the price of every thing by the labor there is in it promised to abolish all speculations on land, on clothing, food, fuel, knowledge, on every thing — to convert time into capital, thereby abolishing the distinctions of rich and poor — to reduce the amount of necessary labor to two or three hours a day, when no one should wish to shun his share of employment. The motive of some to force others to bear their burden would not exist, and slavery of all kinds would naturally become extinct. Every consumer becomes interested thereby in assisting in reducing the costs of his own supplies, and in doing this for himself, he is doing it for all consumers. Destructive competition would be changed into an immediate regulator of prices and property, and property might ultimately become so abundant that like water in a river or spontaneous fruits all prices would be voluntarily abandoned, and the high and noble aims of communists be reached without communism, without organization, without constitutions or pledges, without any legislation in conflict with the natural and inalienable individualities of men and things.

Overwhelmed with astonishment and bewildered with the newness and immense magnitude of the subject, Werner began to doubt his own sanity, and to think that perhaps the late disappointments had deranged his thoughts. Day after day he retired into the woods outside of the town to ponder and to detect if possible some lurking error in his reasoning; but the closer he criticized, the more he was confirmed. He concluded to return to Cincinnati and place himself in some working position where he could bring these ideas to practical tests. If they failed under trial, he would give up all specific reforms and keep a common family store. For he would apply first apply these new idea in store keeping. If they did not succeed, the transition would be easy, into a store of the common kind; but if successful, then the store must be wound up to commence new villages where the new ideas could be applied to the affairs of social life.

Werner thought he would try the experiment of presenting these strange ideas to one of his associates. What! he exclaimed with a sarcastic smile, no organization? no constitution? no laws? no rulers? Where is the bond of society and social order?

There has never been any bond to general society, said Werner: bonds have existed more or less strong within narrow limits of sects, parties, clans, tribes, classes, combinations and corporations in proportion to the points of co-incidence between their members. But just in proportion to the strength of such bonds the different parties unavoidably became hostile to one another.

Society, even what there has been of it, has always been tumbling to pieces and tinkers and tinkers have always been employed in patching up some rent or leakage, but one has no sooner been stopped than two others have been opened; and now, it is generally seen that patching is hopeless. I [?] thought we had come here with this conviction and with a view to remodel the whole structure.

The bond of society is the interest felt in the advantages (or enjoyments) derived from or expected from it, or there is no bond. The greatest advantages derived from civilization — all that distinguishes it from primitive or savage life are derived from labor: but they have been enjoyed by those who perform the labor. The workers are the foundation, soul and substance of civilization, but they can scarcely be expected to feel much devotion to that which takes all from them and gives them little or nothing in return; and if a way is ever opened by which they can enjoy the benefits they are justly entitled to, no bond can keep them in their present condition. And when the foundation moves, the structure must move or fall.

The bond you speak of has been represented by a bundle of dry sticks and they are accepted as a symbol of union. But dry sticks never can be united; united sticks would be a log of wood. But the symbol is a good one to represent what some would have society to be: lifeless beings forced together by external bonds, retaining from age to age the same form, substance, and inertness. But human beings are not dead, dry sticks; they have a natural tendency to grow. A better symbol of what would now be called "society" would be the limbs of a tree all bent upwards, forced together at the top and bound round with iron hoops crushing all of them out of their legitimate shapes, stopping all their fruit-bearing power, chafing and bruising each other but still retaining life enough to grow larger if not beautiful, now bursting the bonds or else forcing their way into each other's vitals and becoming one united mass, a solid log, a barren, shapeless, hideous thing, an encumbrance to the ground.

Do justice to labor, and then we may see something of "the bond of society and social order": not so much on paper as in every aspect of social life.

Werner returned to Cincinnati and began to talk with his friends about his intended enterprise, but they recoiled at once from any new movements. They said that nobody would listen now to anything of the kind while the failures at New Harmony were so fresh in their minds. But, said Werner, this is nothing like any of those experiments. Where there is no organization, it is only individuals that can fail. But, said the objectors, where is your bond of society? and where the capital to come from without organization? Werner replied that he was going to act as any common store keeper now conducts his business, excepting that he was going to set and regulate his prices by an equitable principle instead of having no principle; and that the benefits the customers would derive from this would constitute the bond.

After spending three weeks in this manner, going over the same ground, bond and all, with different persons, Werner perceived that scarcely a single one had got the least idea of what he intended: but that as old words will not explain new things, new things must explain themselves.

Although he had no capital he would not consent to any joint stock operation; knowing that he should have as many masters as there were stockholders, that no two of them could agree for a month in such a new undertaking and that mutual criticism and the friction of continuous legislation would be sure to wear out all parties and defeat the movement sooner or later.

He went to a wholesale grocer of his acquaintance and said to him "I think I see the causes of our failures at New Harmony and I want to satisfy myself whether I am correct or not. If I am right, I shall sell a few goods rapidly. If I am deceived I shall keep a common store and let all reforms alone.

There is to be no company formed, no organization, not offices to contend about. I shall act on my own responsibility and if I fail no one will suffer. If I succeed the public will get a new lesson.

After a little explanatory conversation, the merchant said "I think I see something of your design and it may work well and perhaps revive the hopes of the reformers. You may come to my store and get whatever you want and pay when the goods are sold, and if you want what I have not got, I will pass my word where you can get them."

Werner took about three hundred dollars worth of groceries and a few staple dry goods and arranged them in his store; stuck up the bills of purchase so that all customers could see what every article cost; and a notice saying that seven per cent would be added to pay contingent expenses. But instead of mixing up the profit of the keeper along with the prices of the goods, the customers would pay the first costs and seven per cent; but for the labor of the keeper, they were to pay an equal amount of their own labor. A clock was in plain sight to measure the of

the tenders in delivering the goods, which was considered one half of the labor and purchasing &c. the other half. An index resembling the face of a clock was fixed just below it; and when the tender commenced to deliver goods, he was to set the index to correspond with the clock. The index would stand still while the clock would run on, and a comparison of the two would show how much time had been employed. the labor in some of the most common necessaries had been ascertained, and a list of them hung up where all could see the labor price at which any of these articles would be taken in and given out, the customer paying for the labor of the tender and one twentieth of the price of the article for contingent expenses. These prices were permanent. The keeper of the store would give an hour of his labor in buying and selling goods for a pound of butter because there was an hour's labor in it; thirty hours for a barrel of flour because there was about that amount of labor in it. An hour of his merchandising for an hour of the drayman, the shoe maker, the needle woman, the wash woman, &c.

All being ready for operation, Werner went to a friend to a friend and invited him o come and try the experiment of buying some thing; and he promised to come at a certain hour but he did not come. Werner then went to another and he promised to come at a time fixed on, but he never came! Werner then went to a third one who promised to come at a certain hour, but he never made his appearance. In desperation Werner went to a fourth, one who could not refuse, and begged him as a favor to come and go through the process of buying something and if he did not wish to keep his articles, he could return them and receive his money. This man came and bought articles to the amount of a dollar and fifty cents and gave Werner his note for fifteen minutes of his labor and saved fifty cents.

He did not want to return the articles, but going home with them met C.P. who had been to New Harmony with us, and he came immediately to the store, exclaiming "My God! What fools we were at New Harmony. Why didn't we see such a simple and self-evident thing as this?. Here, give me ten pounds of coffee, twenty of sugar" (&c.). He bought five dollars worth of the most common necessaries and saved a dollar and a half, or the wages of a day and a half of the hardest kind of labor. "Now," he said, "how shall I pay you for your twenty minutes?" Werner replied, "one great point is to show how we can emancipate our supplies as well as ourselves from the tyranny of common money. As I cannot make use of your labor, and as there will be many other cases of the same kind, I have set a labor price upon several articles such as tea, coffee, sugar, and spices, at which I am willing to receive them and run the risk of selling them again, not professing to have found out the exact amount of labor in them, for this is not of so much importance as it is to fix a price that shall remain the same when it is bought and when it is sold and which is satisfactory to the parties concerned. So, you may give me the price of a pound of coffee in money, I will weigh it out and put it among the labor articles and give you an hour of my labor for it. Deducting the twenty minutes already due me and the labor of weighing out the coffee I shall owe you about thirty five minutes, for which I will give you my note which you can use in future purchases. Or you can, at any time, take out the amount of coffee which it represents. This was entirely satisfactory and it was done.

C.P. went away and began to spread the news about the store. There was a department in the store for medicines, and the next articles sold were carbonate of soda and tartaric acid. They were bought by a lady who worked with her needle for about twenty five or thirty cents a day. The medicines, bought in the common way would have cost her sixty eight cents; they now cost her seventeen cents and five minutes of her needle work, giving her note for the work. She saved the wages of about two days' labor in this little transaction of about five minutes.

The business now began to grow, but during the whole of the first week, only ten dollars worth of goods were sold, the next week thirty, and very soon a crowd of customers thronged to the store and many were obliged to go away unserved because they could not get where the goods were delivered. All this was natural growth without any stimulus from the news papers, for Werner could not hope to make the subject understood through them when he failed with friends in familiar conversation.

Werner now began to buy at auction. There he bought three barrels of excellent rice for a cent and a quarter a pound while the common retail price was eight cents a pound. The lady who bought the medicines bought thirty pounds of this for forty five cents, and saved a dollar and ninety five cents in five minutes, for which she gave Werner her note for five minutes more of her needle work. In other words she had saved the proceeds of about eight days of her labor in this equitable exchange of five minutes. Werner got her to make some cloth bags for the store, which employed her two hours. he now gave her back two notes of five minutes each, and gave his notes for an hour and fifty minutes in merchandising.

A store keeper came and wanted to buy the whole of the rice, but Werner declined selling it. "What? You keep goods to sell and don't want to sell them? The more you sell, the more money you make, don't you?"

No sir. In the first place I don't take money for my labor, and if I did I should not get any more for the same time spent in selling large quantities than small ones. But these are not my reasons for refusing to sell. I want to distribute it as a public educator and for the benefit of those who will be likely to reciprocate the same principle. If you had all along been selling goods on the labor for labor principle, I would sell you a part on it. But if I deal at all with you, I should deal as you deal.

"Do you mean to say that you should gain no more profit to yourself in buying and selling a hundred barrels of flour than in buying and selling five pounds, if it took no more time?"

Yes sir; certainly; which ever required the greatest sacrifice of my time or comfort I should charge the most for.

"Well, that is a strange idea!"

No doubt, said Werner, but does it not appear reasonable to charge the most for what costs us the most time and trouble?

I cannot but say yes to that, said the other, but it is so very strange, so noew, I can hardly grasp the idea. Yes sir, said Werner, Justice is a great stranger, but I will invite you to examine this labor for labor idea and see what you think it will lead to.

Terms and Conditions of the Quarterly Letter

It should be understood that the undersigned is alone responsible for the contents of the Letter unless some other responsibility is given.

Price. On the equitable principle, three minutes labor a page or two hours per year. In the common way, one cent a page or fifty cents a year.

All communication should be addressed to Josiah Warren, Cliftdale (near Boston) Mass.

II. Narrative Practical Experiments, Contd.: Tuscarawas, Utopia and Modern Times

Here are passages from the 1872 booklet *Practical Applications of "True Civilization" to the Minute Details of Every Day Life, Being Part III of the "True Civilization" Series* (text obtained from the Houghton Library, Harvard). The description of Modern Times is both advertently and inadvertently comical: the spectacle of an amazingly strait-laced advocate of absolute freedom dealing with a bunch of eccentrics. The backwoods projector is lobbed suddenly into the ambit of New York City, and the 1830s reformer into the decadent phase of American reform.

“When Simple Truth with mighty breath
Shall, like a Whirlwind, scatter in its breeze,
The whole dark pile of human mockeries
Then shall the reign of [Right] commence on earth;
And, startling fresh as from a second birth,
Man, in the sunshine of the World’s new Spring,
Shall walk transparent, like some Holy Thing.”

Tuscarawas

The first village was attempted in Tuscarawas Co., Ohio, in 1835. Six families were on the ground – 24 persons in all. 23 of them had the ague or some other bileous complaint some portion of the first year! We became alarmed and dared not invite any friends to join us. We thought we would try one more year; but these complaints prevailed as before, and in addition to them, the influenza carried off twelve, mostly young, vigorous, healthy people within a circle of thirty families of the neighborhood, within two weeks. We now resolved to get away from the locality as soon as possible, and we did so, at the almost total sacrifice of buildings, furniture, and land, but with the view of concentrating again when our shattered finances had been recruited.

The time between 1837 and 1842 passed in repairing damages. In March 1842 another store (just like that in Cincinnati in 1827) was set in operation in New Harmony, the old seat of Mr. Owen’s communistic experiments. This store worked with an immense power in revolutionizing the retail trade in that region. It consumed about three years. But these cheapening stores, however successful, and however revolutionizing, are chiefly valuable only as means of getting public attention to the principles upon which the great revolution required must be based. It is of only momentary consequence to cheapen the prices of supplies to those who live upon wages. If they could live on a cent a day, a cent or day would be their wages, while destructive competition rages between them. Nothing short of homes of their own and new elements to work with can bring the required relief.

Utopia, Ohio

In 1844 I was in Cincinnati when an association according to Fourier was being formed. I gave a discourse to a small audience, consisting mostly of those interested in that movement. My chief points were that joint stock necessarily involves joint management, and that joint management in such new and complicated movements is impossible, that we cannot construct any verbal

organization that will not wear itself out by its own friction. And I said, "I know that a large portion of my hearers are engaged in an enterprise with the best possible motives and the highest hopes, but you cannot succeed; you will fail within three years. But when you come to fail, I beg you, for your own sakes, to remember what I have said tonight, and that there is a road to success."

In about two years and eight months I learned that they had broken up in the worst humor with each other, and in fact some had had a hand to hand scramble for some of the joint property.

In June 1847 I went up to their locality, thinking that they might be disposed to try "equity." I had not been landed from the steam boat thirty minutes when Mr. Daniel Prescott (a stranger to me) approached and said, "Well, we failed, just as you said we should — it worked just as you said it would. Now I am ready for your movement."

There were six families almost destitute, even of shelter. There was but little talking to do, no organization to get up, no constitution nor bylaws to make. The first step was to get land, but no one had the money to buy it. A proposition was made to the owner of a few acres, to lay them out into quarter acre lots and set a price upon each that would give him all he asked now for the land by the acre, adding all the costs of streets, alleys, surveying, and to pay for his own time and trouble in attending to it, and to bind himself and his heirs to keep that price, unaltered, for three years.

He consented, and the village was laid out at once and work commenced: though I doubt whether ten dollars in money could have been in the possession of the six families at that time. It was now about the middle of July 1847. On the first of December following, four of the six families had good houses and lots of their own, nearly or wholly paid for.

On moving into their new house in December (a brick house about thirty feet square and two stories high), Mrs. Prescott stood in her kitchen and casting a look of surprise round the room, exclaimed, "Well! they say this is *our* house, but how in the world we came by it I cannot imagine!"

Mr. Prescott was a carpenter and exchanged more or less work with others. No common money passed between them.

Another of these pioneers, Mr. Cubberley, shall tell his own story. He wrote it out to be printed in 1848. Here it is:

"Mr. Editor, Here is a statement of the simple facts that may be of some value to the readers of your paper.

"Last July, when Mr. Jernegan had this town laid out, I thought I would buy a lot and get it fenced in last fall, and be gathering materials through the winter, for building on it in the spring. But the house that I then occupied was too bad to winter in, and as I could not get any other near, I came to the conclusion that I must build one. Well, I began to look round to see where the means should come from. I found I had about thirty dollars in money, and about nine or ten dollars worth of shoe materials (rather a small sum to think about building a house with!), but on enquiry of those who had the brick, lumber &c., I found that I could exchange my labor for theirs: that is, to give my labor for theirs in bricks, lumber, hauling &c. Well, I set to work with what means I had. The result is, I have got a brick house, one story and a half high, sixteen by eighteen feet, and a small wooden addition that serves as a kitchen. And all the money I paid out was eleven dollars and eighty five cents.

"All this is the result of equitable commerce.

"A word to the Fourierists, who contemplate such great advantages in a phalanx, combination, united interests &c.

“I was in the Clermont Phalanx for nearly three years, and paid two hundred and seven dollars, and worked harder all the time, with not the best of eatables either. And at the end of that time I found myself rather badly situated: no money, no good clothes, no tools to commence work with, no anything.

“I borrowed twenty six dollars to commence my business with, and last July I paid all that, and had thirty dollars left. I now have a house and lot, and all I owe on it is two dollars and seventy nine cents in money, and about four days labor.

“I feel now that I am a whole individual — not a piece of a mass, or of somebody else, as I was in combination.”

Mr. Cubberley is still living in that house and can be consulted if necessary: but it has been thought important from the beginning not to make the place notorious, as it would cause great inconvenience to the residents, there being no public house for the entertainment of visitors, and for other reasons that will appear as we proceed.

The way these lots were sold and the prices fixed, we believe to be a most peaceful, most satisfactory and efficient mode of stopping speculation on land. It makes no quarrel with present ownership. It satisfies the owners, not only giving them a price for their land which satisfies them, but tends to immediately surround them with the best of neighbors and growing better all the time, bringing the city conveniences to them upon equitable terms, and opens the way at once for the homeless to get homes of their own without legislation or any other vexation: all resulting from the simple application of the cost principle to land tenures as they now are, and I cannot see any other reliable solution to this great question.

In about two years after the commencement of this village, I was going down to Cincinnati, and anticipating enquiries as to our progress, and unwilling to give my own version of things, I went to the residents themselves to get their own words to report to our friends. I took my book and pencil and went to the first I met. “Well, Mr. Poor, what shall I say to our friends in Cincinnati about our progress?”

Mr. Poor. “Why, I hardly know. I am surprised that people are so slow to see and take hold. I expected that a great many would have come before this time. If they want homes, small homes, this is the place to get them. Tell them that when I landed here two years ago, I sent my last dollar to Cincinnati for a barrel of flour and hadn’t enough left in my pocket to jingle, and now I have a comfortable house, with room enough, two acres of land, a yoke of oxen and a cow and a garden, and would not sell out for six hundred dollars.”

Mrs. Poor. “Tell them if they want homes to come here and get them — that is the way we did and came five hundred miles for it: and I would not now part with my home long enough to go on a visit to the East if they would pay my passage both ways.”

Mr. H.B. Lyon. “Tell them the principles have benefited me and my affairs, and although I have been acting on them about two years, I see new beauties and have stronger confidence in them every day.”

Mrs. V. “Well, I must say that I am discouraged. I cannot get any one to act with me on the principles. They will not give me employment and I give up.”

Mr. Daniel Prescott. “I say now, what I have always said, that it works well, as far as we have anything to work it with, and the farther we work it, the better it works.”

Mr. Geo. Prescott. “Why, it works well. We get on as well as we could expect with our means, and expect to do better as our means increase.”

Mr. Wm. Long. "We want more numbers. Our advantages will increase with our numbers. I think people should understand that they will require means enough to set themselves going. There is plenty to do, but each must bring means to commence with, and then, all will go on finely."

Mrs. C. "I have not seen the workings of the principles long enough to express an opinion, but Mr. C and myself have both been agreeably disappointed by the unexpected kindness and attention of the people here."

Mr. Francis. "I could talk half a day on the advantages of the principles. But I think talking almost useless. Action is what we want."

Little Amelia. "You may tell them it is just the place to come to learn music."

Mr. Cubberley. "You may tell them that I have all my life been wanting something, but didn't know what it was. Now I have found it."

Mrs. _____. "The principles embrace all that people will ever want, all they can ever enjoy. But I will not let you say this from me, because it might set down as effect of overwrought enthusiasm."

Mrs. Prescott. "You may say that I have always embrace all that is wanted. They are practicable too, just in proportion to numbers and means: with plenty of people and even a small amount of means in the hands of each, all would be worked handsomely out." (Observe, "in the hands of each," not in the hands of a committee of managers, or president and council.)

These persons mentioned were all adults who were on the ground at that time. The singular coincidence between them cannot be attributed to any pre-arranged understanding, for not one of them knew before hand that their opinion would be asked for.

Mr. W. "The reason why the village does not grow any faster is that the public know nothing of the subject. They judge it by what they know of common reforms which have so repeatedly failed. They have no idea that they have a whole new lesson to learn."

Mrs Poor. "Why, do you think we grow slowly? Isn't there twenty six buildings put up here, out of nothing, as you may say? When we landed here not two years ago, we had but five dollars in the world, and now my husband says he would not sell out for six hundred dollars for his gains over and above the support of the family; and all this the result of our own labor. We have not gained it off other people — they have had all that belongs to them. And besides, the boys have got trades without the loss of a day in apprenticeships, instead of enslaving themselves seven years of the best part of their lives for nothing. There is a door our boy made; he has made sashes too. I speak of our own case. I have a right to do that, but others have done as well as we have. Look at H. That boy is, even now, a smooth workman, and his first attempt was upon our own house."

In less than three years there was a good saw and grist mill running, owned (not by a company) but by an individual who had not a dollar when the village commenced, but who was favored by a gentleman who sympathized in the movement, and who had a steam engine and boiler to dispose of. And he had the assistance and cooperation of all the residents, because they were to have the lumber at the cost price; the more assistance they could render, the less the price would be. But if the price of the lumber was to have been set by common practice (the owner of the mill demanding all he could have extorted from the necessities of the settlers) then no such motive to cooperation would have existed. As it was, the cooperation was as perfect as cooperation could be, yet everyone was entirely free from all trammels of organizations, constitutions, pledges, and every thing of the kind.

The owner of the mill issued his labor notes, payable in lumber.

H.B. Lyon paid for his lot with his labor notes. The mill needed his labor and the owner of the land needed lumber. Mr. Lyon needed his labor and the owner of the land needed lumber, and Mr. Lyon redeemed them in tending the mill. With all my hopes, I had not dared to expect to see land bought with labor notes, so soon as this.

While the types are being set for these pages (October 1872) there comes an article written by Mr. Cubberley for publication. Alluding to the labor notes, he says, "These put us here into a reciprocating society. The result was, in two years, twelve families found themselves with homes, who never owned them before. Labor capital did it. I built a brick cottage one and a half stories high, and all the money I paid out was \$9.81. All the rest was effected by exchanging labor for labor. Money prices, with no principle to guide, have always deceived us."

When it is stated that this village was started twenty five years ago, very natural questions are often asked: How large is it now? Why have the public not heard more about it? Why are not a hundred such in full operation? &c. No short, complete answer can be given to these very reasonable questions. This particular village consisted of only about eighty quarter acre lots (if I remember rightly). All the surrounding lands were controlled by speculators who demanded such high prices that after about four years the largest portion of the first settlers moved all together to Minnesota, where land was abundant and cheap.

The contract with the land owner to keep the prices of the lots unchanged for three years had expired before all the lots were taken up, and it is labor and trouble thrown away to bestow them when the prices of lots can be raised just in proportion as they become desirable.

"Well," asks Mr. Jones, "did those who went to Minnesota still act on the principles where they went?"

The only report I have heard from them is an incident between Mr. Poor and a speculator who applied to him for his crop of potatoes. Mr. Poor declined to sell them. "Why not?" asked the speculator. I will give you thirty cents a bushel, while the highest price you can get from any one else is thirty cents."

Mr. Poor. "No I will sell them for speculation at any price. Twenty five cents a bushel will pay me for my labor and I shall supply my neighbors with them at that price."

As has been before stated the public have learned but very little of the subject, because the common, mercenary news papers could not do it any justice, and it has been kept out of them as much as possible.

The next resort was publishing in book form. But people will not buy books on a subject that they feel no interest in, and they cannot feel an interest in that which they know nothing about. The little progress that has been made has mostly been effected by giving away the works published to here and there one who could be induced to look at them. It is easy to see that no ordinary private resources could make very rapid or extensive progress in that way. There are other reasons for slow growth that will appear as we proceed.

Modern Times, New York

The third village was commenced on Long Island, NY in March, 1851, on the Long Island R.R. 40 miles from New York.

One man went on the ground alone and built a little shanty, ten or twelve feet square. There was not, at that time, even a cow path in sight, among the scrub oaks that were every where

breast high. In a few days two others joined him: they built the first house with funds supplied by a sympathizing friend.

The soil was so poor that it was generally considered worthless. Many attempts of capitalists to turn it to account had failed. But a few persons were very anxious to try the new principles and thought that the soil might answer for gardens, while mechanism might furnish the principal employments.

There was nothing on the land to make lumber of, and even the winter fuel (coal) had to be brought from the city. Even with these drawbacks, houses seemed to go up, as they did in the other village, without means, and those who never had homes of their own before suddenly had them.

We were going on very pleasantly without notoriety, but one of the most active pioneers published an article in the *Tribune* relative to the movement at Modern Times (as the village had been named). The effect was, a rush of people, ignorant of the principles upon which the enterprise was projected. Among these were some that were full of crotchets, each one seeming to think that the salvation of the world depended on his displaying his particular hobby. One regular impostor traveled over the Island announcing *himself* as the founder of the village, and he put forth such crude theories, especially with regard to marriage, that his audiences were disgusted, not only with him, but with what they supposed the village to be, and some very good neighbors who had kindly welcomed us to the neighborhood, shut their doors in the face one who was offering them hand bills to counteract the blasting influence of this lying impostor.

Another favorite crotchet of his was, that children ought to be brought up without clothing! And he inflicted some crazy experiments on his children in the coldest weather. A woman, too, got this notion, and kept her infant naked in the midst of winter. With all his genius and noble efforts, Lord Bacon has not entirely secured us against the delusions of mere fancies, instead of building our theories on experience.

A German, who was wholly or partly blind, paraded himself naked in the streets, with the theory that it would help his sight. He was stopped by an appeal to the overseer of the insane asylum.

He could see well enough to take a neighbor's coat from a fence where the owner of it had been at work. This gave the neighbors an idea that we were a nest of thieves as well as fanatics. To counteract this, hand bills were printed and circulated describing the person, and advising the neighbors who might miss any thing to come to that village and look for it in his premises. This placed the responsibility upon him, individually, where it belonged, and put an end to his pilfering.

One woman took a notion to parade the streets in men's clothing, having a bad form, the clothes a bad fit and of the worst possible color and texture, she cut such a hideous figure that women shut down their windows and men averted their heads as she passed. Yet it was very easy for the sensation news paper reporters to say that "the women of Modern Times wore mens' clothing and looked hideously enough!"

I can believe the woman dressed in this manner, for the purpose of breaking in upon the tyranny of fashions, and to vindicate the right to dress as she pleased. But there was no need of any vindication where her absolute sovereignty in all things (within her own sphere) was already admitted. It seemed not to have occurred to her that this same right of sovereignty in other people, should secure them against being unnecessarily disgusted and offended. But it is nothing new, especially with reformers, to "lose our manners in learning our philosophy."

It seemed not to have occurred to the woman in mens' clothes, that the influence of woman is one of the greatest civilizing powers we have, and we need to know when we are in their presence.

It had gone abroad that "the women of Modern Times wear mens' clothes," and those who were disgusted at the imputation had no means of defending themselves against it. This communistic reputation is the most formidable obstacle to peace and progress that the world has to overcome. All the inhabitants of a village, or a nation, all the members of a party, a sect, or a family, are involved by it in the acts of every or any member, sane or insane, on the horrid principle of the old Japanese law that condemned a whole family to death when any member of it had offended. There is no escape from this monstrosity, till the public generally can be taught something about the great, preservative fact that we are individuals, and that no one should be made responsible for the act or word of another, without his or her known consent.

There must freedom to differ before there can be peace or progress, and this freedom can come only by placing responsibility where it belongs.

The world needs new experiences, and it is suicidal to set ourselves against experiments, however absurd they may appear, and we can afford to tolerate them if we are not too closely mixed up with them. Some people can learn nothing from the experience of others; they must have measles, the whooping cough, and small pox for themselves, before they can be secured against them. All we can demand of them is that they do not endanger the health of others.

A young woman of the village had the diet mania to such a degree that she was said to live almost wholly on beans without salt. She tottered about a living skeleton for about a year and then sank down and died (if we can say there was enough of her left to die). Though her brother also had the diet theory dangerously, he had the candor to acknowledge, at her funeral, that he believed the poor girl died in consequence of theoretical speculations about diet.

The next report was "*those people* there, are killing themselves with fanatical theories about their food."

Another trial. A man came there with three young women to live with as wives in the same house, and they started a paper to vindicate themselves, full of sickly, silly, maudlin sentimentality that perfectly disgusted the surrounding neighborhood so that even the name of the place was something like an emetic. But, the settlers, faithful to the great sacred right of freedom to do silly things, and knowing that opportunity to get experience would work the best cure, they were suffered to go on entirely undisturbed, though the effects of their conduct were disturbing every other settler in the village.

They seemed to be totally ignorant of the fact that no four people, nor even any two people can govern one house or drive one horse at the same time, that nature demands and will have an individual deciding in every sphere, whether that government is a person, an idea or anything else. It must be an individual or all will be confusion. Three months trial taught them this inevitable lesson, but the effects were much more enduring.

These are a few of the trials to which such enterprises are always exposed, and that keep people of culture and sensibility from taking any part in them unless they are impelled by motives that are irresistible.

It is impossible and perhaps unnecessary to give an account of all the obstacles that beset the village. But I will give one more. There was a man (as I suppose we must call him) came there, planted himself in our midst, publicly slandered and abused the most active friends of the movement, apparently with a view to discourage them. He deliberately wrote the most unqualified

falsehoods and sent them to England, where the subject was beginning to get respectful attention from men of influence. He actually made a particular point of saying and doing those very things that he afterwards caused to be published as a disgrace to the place, and which had the effect to disgust friends abroad and turn their eyes away from us, just as the enemies of liberty did in the French Revolution: they mixed in with the crowd and urged on and committed such monstrous crimes, that the world recoiled in disgust and horror at the idea of revolutions and even of liberty itself.

Another case. A man, a preacher of some influence, came there to investigate and returned to Cincinnati and delivered a public discourse from the pulpit, which was afterwards published in the *Cincinnati Gazette* under the heading of "Bohemianism." Of twenty-six statements made, twenty-five were wholly or partly false and one was equivocal. The citizens felt outraged. A letter was sent to him and he promised to rectify his stupid statements, but he never did.

With such infernal elements as those to contend with, is it not a wonder that there is any village left at all? Yet, there is a very pretty one, and it is improving faster than any other in the neighborhood. Where many capitalists have lost all their investments in attempting to turn the soil to account, a few industrious individuals with nothing but their hands and their good sense have made themselves homes and business. Where there was not even a cow path at the beginning, there is now an avenue straight as a line, a hundred feet wide and nearly a mile long, and other avenues and streets crossing each other at right angles. There is a railroad station and a post office there, and an excellent road six miles long, running out into the country in one direction and extending to the South Bay in the other, and running right through the town. The name of the place is changed [to Brentwood] and the annoyance from that source is at an end.

One of the most common remarks of the citizens was that the village was the greatest school they ever knew.

But it is not only what they have got but what they have not got that constitute the gains of the residents. They have no quarrels about what is called "religion." No demands for jails. No grog shops. No houses of prostitution. No fighting about politics. No man there has dashed his wife's brains out with an axe, nor cut her throat, nor murdered her in any other way. No wife there has poisoned her husband. No starving child has been torn from his home there and sent to prison for "unlawfully" taking "a penny's worth of potatoes." No poor, suffering girl or woman has been persecuted to death there for that misfortune which is, of itself, too grievous to be borne. No man or woman has murdered another for rivalry, jealousy, or any other cause.

The gardens and strawberry beds are mostly without fences, yet no one belonging to the village is seen in them without the owner's consent. Few if any doors are locked at night, and the fear of robbers and fire disturbs no one's sleep.

"We have heard," says an enquirer, that the movement was a failure, and that the principles were abandoned by the inhabitants." (Second speaker:) "Yes, I have heard the same: I heard one of the most devoted friends of the movement propose to make a public announcement to that effect, to protect themselves against the annoyances of too much public notoriety." He was not afraid that the laws of nature would fail, whatever might be said of them.

Individuality is the great prevailing fact of all persons and things. This never fails. Any denial of this only illustrates it. *Self-sovereignty* is a form of expressing our natural promptings to have our own way. This, also, is illustrated by all that is said, for or against it: it is a universal propensity, a natural, primitive, divine law. *The cost principle* is intended to express the fact that it is the sacrifices or trouble incurred in the performance of a piece of service that should measure

its price. This is derived from our instinctive aversion to that which is painful: another natural law. *Adapting supplies to our demands or wants* is what we all aim at in every move we make, whether we succeed or not. No one ever abandons the desire to have what he wants. *Equitable money* is the only human contrivance in the five elementary principles of the movement. The four others are not the work of man, but natural phenomena: everywhere and at all times around and within us, whether recognised or not. Like the process of breathing, like the digestion of food or like the circulation of blood, they are constantly acting whether we will or no, either with or against our surroundings, and to talk of “abandoning” them, is like the attempt to run away from one’s legs: it is an effort to do as they want to, and it brings their right of self-sovereignty into more active operation.

No body talks of the principles of arithmetic having failed. If the results disappoint the operator, he attributes it to some mistake of his own, because he knows that arithmetical laws never fail. The blunder of our critic is in not knowing that our enterprise is not based in human inventions, but on natural laws that are as old as creation.

Q: Do the people in these villages use the equitable money now?

A: In the first stages, when they were building their houses, they used it extensively because they needed each others’ labor, but they cannot use it any farther than they can supply each others’ wants. Twenty families cannot do much in this way, till they commence domestic manufactures. But being obliged to draw most of their supplies of food, clothing, and fuel from abroad they must use the common money. And here is a reply to a very common remark, that “if every body was free to issue notes for their labor, there would be an inundation of them.” Exactly the opposite is the fact. We found that people generally preferred to use the notes of others rather than to issue their own, and instead of there being a flood of notes afloat, they disappear in proportion as the necessity for them ceases.

Q: You have intimated that the odious doctrine of “free love” was fastened upon the village in order to set the public against the movement. Your assertion of the right of self-sovereignty certainly gives free scope to free love, or any ism or crotchet, however ridiculous or dangerous.

A: Yes, certainly it gives perfect freedom for anyone to do any thing that he can do *at his own cost*.

Every one is now free to wear a crown of thorns upon his head all the time, but no one does it. Whoever tries what is vulgarly called “free love” (if I understand what the words mean), will find it more troublesome than a crown of thorns. And there is not much danger of its becoming contagious where the results of experiments are made known. But forbid it and keep people ignorant of the effects of it, and there is danger of trouble of inexpressible. Among about thirty persons in and near New York who tried the experiment, two men shot themselves, one hung himself, one died in the insane asylum, and another told me that he would sooner commit suicide than to live as he had (in that way) the last nine years, and although decidedly against the common marriage system, he went back under it, as the least of present evils.

In what I have said, I have not mentioned the worst effects of promiscuity. These are best made known by a visit to Dr. Jourdain’s gallery of anatomical specimens at number 397 Washington St., Boston.

For thirty three years spent in the midst of controversies and experiments on the subject, I remained in doubt as to what form that relationship would assume in the reign of equitable freedom. But about thirteen years ago, with the help of an English publication I did come to conclusions that have, ever since, remained undisturbed. One of these conclusions was, that

this great subject is involved in the labor question, that justice to all labor of men, women, and children will settle it, as probably nothing else can, and without justice to labor, there is no escape from a return to barbarism.

In studying individuality as the great principle of order, and of security of confusion, you will see that it sanctions the most essential features of the common marriage systems, which are, one man to one woman for definite, specified length of time, renewable by consent of both parties.

Q: Have you come to any conclusions as to the expediency of forming these villages?

A: Yes, I think it will be necessary to form them at any costs. If our efforts do not secure homes to the homeless, we work to no purpose, and these homes cannot be secured in the cities now built. But the hardships that pioneers encounter can be borne only by those of the hardest constitutions. These hardships are incident to new lands and new principles, and to those who cannot bear them, I would recommend introducing the new elements into villages already partly formed, wherever land can be had on the proposed terms, and not far from where the movers had been accustomed to live, making no public proclamations, but letting the practical operations commend the principles to surrounding minds by natural degrees, so that fruits shall come by growth, not by any attempt at formation.

Q: You speak of getting land on the proposed terms. I don't know as I quite understand your idea.

A: It is, to get the holders of land to bind themselves by legal contract to sell certain specified lots at certain specified prices for a certain term of years.

In laying out the first village, the term was three years, but this was not long enough. In our second (Modern Times) we had five years, but considering the obstacles, this was not long enough. At the expiration of this term, speculation grasps at the unsold lots, and then it is no longer worth while to do anything for further growth. While the principles are so little known, I would suggest ten years in which to fill up a settlement of, say, a thousand acres.

Points Suggested for Consideration in Laying Out Towns

1. While securing to every settler all the land that can be necessary to him or her (when labor is properly paid) to positively cut off the power to monopolize the soil.
2. Positive security against desolating fires.
3. Security against the spread of dangerous diseases.
4. To secure as far as possible, to every one, the choice, at all times, of their own immediate surroundings and companionship or neighbors.
5. To give every one, as nearly as possible, equal advantages of locality, in regard to public resorts and places of business.
6. The distances from dwellings to places of business to be short as practicable while preserving sufficient room to avoid mutual disturbance.
7. To give equal facilities for the use of the roads.

8. To be able to begin in a small way, yet complete in itself, so that growth will be only a repetition of what has already been done, and given satisfaction, and which can be continuously extended outwards, so that enlarging will not compel emigrations to remote regions, deprived of all the conveniences that habit has rendered necessary – perhaps to die of new peculiarities of climate, or hard work without help.
9. The world needs free play for experiments in life. Almost every thinker has some favorite ideas to try, but only one can be tried at one time by any body of people, and there is but little chance of getting the consent of all to any thing new or untried. If a new project can find half a dozen advocates, it is unusually fortunate. If a hundred experiments were going on at once, there might be fifty times the progress that there would be with only one. To attain this very desirable end, it should be practical for the few advocates of any new project to try it without involving any others in risks, expenses, or responsibilities or disturbances of any kind. And yet all might benefit by the results of such experiments, either positively, or negatively as warnings.

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Josiah Warren
Narrative of Practical Experiments
1872

Retrieved on October 7, 2011 from web.archive.org
Together, passages from *The Quarterly Letter* and *Practical Applications* [of True Civilization]
embody the final version of a project that Warren assayed many times: a record of his
experiments in equitable commerce and self-sovereign community.

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