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Social Experiment

Josiah Warren

1831

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I have never inserted a Communication in this paper, which I believe will be perused with more interest by many of its readers, than the following. As the facts came under our friend's observation, not mine, I shall add no opinion or deductions of my own, for each reader can make these for himself. I content myself with saying; that our friends may implicitly depend on the accuracy of Josiah Warren's information; for he is a strictly attentive observer and an honest man. I need not tell him, that his letters will always be welcome.

R. D. O.

Spring Hill, Dec. 19, 1830.

My Dear Friend,

In accordance with our understanding when we parted, I sit down to give you, for the information of our friends at a distance, some of the practical results of our proceedings at this place; but I would have it distinctly premised, that this is not done with a view to obtrude men upon the notice of the public, but perceiving that "the character is formed *for* us and not *by* ourselves" all aspirations after public applause, and all dread of censure are annihilated and

leave us with no motive to attract or avoid the notice of others, but the promotion of their happiness or our own : and if in the course of this correspondence I speak often of myself, I offer my apology in the fact that we have a distinct understanding that whatever we do, is done entirely in the individual character, each taking on himself all the responsibility of his own actions. There is no combination whatever among us; the personal liberty of each is considered sacred, and I shall therefore not use the term we, nor speak of others except in cases where the free choice of each individual concerned has been consulted.

The school at this place originated in the following circumstances.

About five years since Mrs. Charity Rotch, of the society of Friends, bequeathed at her decease the interest of twenty two thousand dollars to be appropriated to the establishment of a school for the benefit of poor children.

In Jan. 1828, Hezekiah Camp of New York, William G. Macy of Nantucket, James Bayliss of New York and Edward Dunn of Philadelphia, some of whom had experienced the failure of three communities to which they had belonged, on the dissolution of the Kendal Community, not discouraged by failures which they received were caused by the want of knowledge, applied to and contracted with the Trustees of said fund to take under their care 25 children; to feed and clothe them, to teach them the common rudiments of education, and to give to the females a knowledge of housewifery generally, and to the boys a knowledge of practical agriculture. They were to spend three hours per day in school in warm weather, and four in the cold season; they might be required to work eight hours per day, the proceeds of which the company were to receive, together with the school fund amounting to one thousand dollars per year.

The company began their operations with a capital of \$1000, with which they stocked the farm, purchased farming utensils, furniture, bedding &c.

I have been particular in stating these details, because it is a common impression that these arrangements require a large capital; and while this impression remains, the independence of the mass will depend on capitalists whose interest (as most of them view it) is to keep the mass in servitude.

At the expiration of the first year, on balancing accounts the company perceived that these children who were between 10 and 16 years of age, aided by these four adults, had supported themselves within 200 dollars, leaving a surplus of 800 dollars of the fund so generously intended for their benefit. Let it be observed that this was done by agriculture alone, a business which is by far more depressed than trades or manufactures; this shows that when legislators in this republic begin to learn the rights of citizens and secure to each the possession of the soil, that even children destitute of almost every thing else may render themselves independent by their labor; but while the soil of the country is chiefly monopolised and controlled by those who make no use of it, poor children destitute of friends and of influence will continue to be the victims of this legal barbarism.

It was in the fifth month of the second year that I visited this establishment, and beheld a demonstration of the influence of surrounding circumstances upon the characters of children, which, although I had reflected and observed much upon the subject, both surprised and delighted me. I saw children who a little more than a year before were destitute orphans and who, had they been differently circumstanced might have been forced from every endearing object and shut up in a house of Correction, a Bridewell, a house of Refuge or some other monument of human ignorance, now living as happy as they could well be; directed by intelligent friends who acted as benevolent guides, rather than as mercenary masters, and who consulted the present and future happiness of these children equally with their own.

I saw young females who, had they been in the cities, would have been compelled to waste away the bloom of life in unremitt-

ting toil at their needles for 12 1-2 cents per day or perhaps to be the miserable dependents on the “societies for the encouragement of domestics” and to drag out a monotonous life of enervating servitude in the kitchens of the rich for a scanty pittance just sufficient to keep up the working power,—I saw them here comparatively independent and daily acquiring an education which would place them beyond the vain ambition of expensive show, which would enable them to supply their own wants and conduct their own affairs, and consequently place them beyond the humiliation and distress endured by Poor but respectable females in our cities. As a proof of this, it has been a matter of complaint in the neighborhood, that “since this school commenced no girls could be obtained to do kitchen work.”

There I saw nothing of the studied effeminacy, the vacillating whims or the tyrannical spirit of the oppressor, nor the cowering look, the hesitating speech, or the trembling deportment of the oppressed; but here were only “equals among equal” each exhibiting a fine, cheerful, unclouded countenance, which at once bespoke habitual health and peace of mind. Their deportment towards each other was kind and affable, but not slavishly servile: modest, but not timid; ready, but not obtrusive, and altogether delightfully pleasing.

Although about 17, months ago they were (with few exceptions) destitute of artificial learning, I now saw them go through their exercises in reading, writing, arithmetic and grammar with accuracy and ease; their language in common conversation was more critically correct than that of adults in general, and their common remarks bespoke the habitual exercise of their reason. The utmost confidence and good, feeling between pupils and teachers was strikingly evident, although the latter assured me that they had labored as intensely to annihilate the feeling of fear in their pupils as the teachers of the old school generally do to excite it. The boys had acquired a practical knowledge of agriculture generally, and the girls of housewifery and domestic economy,

The labor of females and children being rewarded on this principle *places them upon a footing of independence equal to that of men* (where their power to produce is equal.)

Each individual carries his own labor notes as his money, signed by himself, which are pledges for certain amounts of his labor when called for; these he issues when occasions require. Thus every one becomes his own Banker, promises only his own labor, a capital always more at his own control than any other can be: and as *there are no laws to recognise these debts of labor, we at once step aside from all laws for the collection of debts, as well as from that monstrous compound of fraud and cupidity, Banking.*

Want of room compels me to conclude for the present, but you may expect more in future.

J. W.

and each went to his ploughing, planting, or reaping, and to her cooking, spinning, &c. with a cheerful promptness and efficient energy which demonstrated what may be done when the heart and the hand work together. These results (to my mind) speak sufficiently for the great truths developed by Robert Owen, and for the intelligence, perseverance and benevolence of the individuals who have, in honest adherence to those truths, thus devoted themselves to this experiment for human good. If the description above appear to some exaggerated, I may add that though these are impressions received upon first acquaintance they have all been confirmed by four months subsequent connexion and daily and hourly intercourse with the parties.

The equal exchange of labor is gradually taking root and extending itself among the friends of reform in the neighborhood; it has been reduced to practice in several of its ramifications which, in compliance with the request of our good friend Frances Wright in No. 52d of the Free Enquirer, I will now give you. Although the details which I am about to furnish may appear simple, and perhaps insignificant to some, they will not be unimportant to those who perceive that the whole work of reform must consist of simple, practical details, and that it is for want of these that it has been so long delayed and so often defeated.

It had been perceived that the new arrangements would require us to turn our attention to business with which we had never been acquainted, and an enquiry into the nature of apprenticeship resulted in the conviction that the common practice of serving seven years to learn a simple art or trade is a relic of ancient barbarism, and is a part of the same system of slavery to which belongs the present practice of monopolising land. Perceiving that 'all knowledge results from the experience of the senses' we have a direct road to all knowledge by "bringing the senses to bear directly upon the objects we desire to learn: this has in many cases reduced the customary apprenticeships to a few weeks or days. I know that this position will be controverted by established custom and es-

tablished interests; and as I know of nothing but facts which can sufficiently counteract the sophistry of words, I will give such facts as have already occurred, and leave all else to the future.

Upon the principle of labor for labor there is no motive to withhold knowledge from others, but it is honestly given by the possessor, to any who desire it, he being paid for the *time employed in conveying it*; and under these circumstances several adults here have, within three months, learned to make good shoes who before had never thought of it.

A boy between 11 and 12 years of age was placed in the shoe-shop and his first effort was to make a pair of shoes which have now been in constant wear about six weeks, but no defect has yet appeared. Another boy about 14 years of age also began the same business with the same success; they are now both constantly employed in that business, and the shoes of all the company are supplied from these sources by those who have served no other apprenticeship than such as above described. If any other proof be wanting that the customary apprenticeships of seven years is unnecessary in this business (where the interest of the instructor will permit him to be honest) abundance may be furnished.

I attach much importance to the fact that the customary apprenticeships are unnecessary, because the poor will see, that, when this custom is done away, it removes one of the greatest obstacles to the supply of their wants; and, because when those cease to support the rich, the idle and the useless, these latter will also be obliged to supply their own wants; and reform would present a discouraging prospect for them if they could not at once turn their attention to useful pursuits without going through seven years' apprenticeships; indeed this would be impossible, and the desire of self preservation would, and I believe does, compel them to oppose reform from personal fear. I do not speak without exceptions; we see some bright examples like meteors in the gloom of night, but all around is such appalling darkness that when they shine they dazzle; and immolate themselves in the effort. Let these then, know,

that, if necessary, they can turn their attention to the supply of their own wants and can accomplish it. More proofs will be given in future.

Instruction in Music has been given to the pupils upon the Equal Exchange principle, and, the labor of the teacher being divided among them, they will pay him about three hours labor each per quarter. This instruction from the same teacher, in the common way would cost them ten dollars each, which being quite unable to pay they would have been deprived of this highly desirable accomplishment.

Boarding is, under present circumstances, estimated at 20 hours per week, but is subject to some variation, according to the arrangements for cooking, the number accommodated, the kind of provisions in each boarding house, &c.

If we hire a saddle horse, we pay the owner an hour for every two hours we use him, his labor being estimated at half that of a man.

Wood upon this principle costs us 4 hours per cord for cutting, adding the labor of the man and team in hauling, this price remaining always the same. Upon this principle, we cannot feel the fraudulent fluctuations to which this article is subject, upon common principles.

Every article which is purchased with money is, upon this principle, sold again at prime cost, adding only the labor according to the time employed in buying and selling it. *This strikes at the root of all speculation.*

We have a ball every two weeks, and the music being paid for upon this principle, costs the company collectively about 3 hours labor; but upon the common principles it would cost three dollars, which would amount to a general prohibition of this healthy, graceful and social amusement. The average amount of labor bestowed by adults on any article constitutes its price whether produced by them or by children.