

About Harmony Hall

Story of Famous Hampshire Experiment

Robert Owens' Schemes at East Tytherley

Special to the "Hampshire Advertiser"

HAMPSHIRE has been the home of many out-of-the-ordinary experiments, not the least interesting of which was Robert Owen's attempt to establish a community at Queenwood Park, East Tytherley. Incidentally, the building was entirely demolished about 1903, after having been partially destroyed by fire.

One must realise something of Robert Owen's background to understand his idealism, and the forces which went to make him the apostle of "Owenism," the embryo of the new Socialism.

Born in 1771, and the son of a saddler in Montgomeryshire, he was a precocious child who, at 7, was usher in the village school. An omnivorous reader, before he was ten he was convinced that there was "something fundamentally wrong in all religions." This distrust of organised religion became, in later life, one of the great stumbling-blocks in winning public sympathy to his schemes. Successively shop assistant, and promoter of practical experiments in cotton spinning, he ultimately became manager and then partner and owner of successful mills.

Those were the days when pauper children, terribly overworked, were sent to the mills: when horrible conditions of housing and labour induced a very low standard of morality. Robert Owen had always held that men were the creatures of circumstances and environment, and therefore that they should be moulded into goodness rather than punished.

hideous a pollution." The tale was much the same as at New Harmony—too many members for the accommodation and (since they were largely recruited from industrial towns) too few for skilled work. The original idea was to bring to Queenwood skilled artisans working in various light manufactures, such as watchmaking, whose industry might bring an income into the community. But the capital was insufficient to do this.

"C.M."

So great was Owen's hopes that he had the initials "C.M." (commencement of the millenium) inscribed over the main door of the central building, which he called Harmony Hall. Country folk called some of the huge buildings "Babyion" and "Jericho."

Aldam, the director of agricultural operations, wrote of those early days "spent in united industry, our evenings in mutual improvement . . . a generous strife pervades us as to who shall most promote the general happiness, and be most obliging and useful . . ." There were classes in mathematics, dancing, drawing, grammar, agriculture, music, geography and elocution.

On Sundays the inhabitants met to hear the Gospel of peace and universal fraternity expounded, and the parody of a religious service aroused local as well as ecclesiastical ire. The neighbouring clergy even got up petitions and wrote tracts about the place.

FOR 7s. A WEEK

Exclusive of rent, the actual cost of maintenance for each adult was 7s. 1d. per week, from 4s. 3d. to 4s. 7d. of which was for food. Sevenpence was allowed for clothing, and 1s. for pocket money. The farms were starved, and the simple food was largely vegetarian.

Even at the low wages obtaining in Hampshire (some 8s. a week) the expense of employing hired labourers was greater than the charge of supporting its own members, but without further accommodation this could not be remedied, the organisers comment. This curious reasoning overlooked the fact that the labourer supported a family on 8s., and that the gain of 11d. went a very little way towards the £15,000 that the buildings alone cost.

Seven or eight hundred pounds were spent on the making of roads and promenades alone, and even the kitchen and basement rooms were wainscoted with mahogany, relates Podmore.

A visitor to Harmony Hall comments upon the healthy appearance and good manners of the inmates, but is much disappointed at the extravagant appointment of the house, suggesting that a village of cottages with gardens would have been more appropriate. A fine avenue of yews was one of the features of the grounds, and was said to be unequalled in England.

THE SCHOOL

In 1844 the schools contained 94 children, 64 of whom paid fees (£25 a year). Their unusual curriculum included anatomy and physiology, chemistry, land surveying, painting in oils, and French and German.

If, at the end, not one stone remained to show what Queenwood had once been, the experiment was not entirely fruitless. Owen, for all the unpractical idealism that characterised his later life, had aroused the public conscience. There is no space here to dwell upon his connection with trade unionism and the co-operative movement, but he had undoubtedly laid foundations on which others were to build.

FOUNDER OF INFANT SCHOOLS

With the backing of many who read his pamphlets, he set to work to improve conditions, beginning with houses and machinery. Owen claimed to be the founder of infant schools, and he established successful schools for the children working in the mills. In his policy—that children should be addressed kindly and never beaten, that dancing, music, drilling etc., should play a large part in their training—he was years ahead of his time.

His experiment was visited by all sorts of people, from the Archbishop of Canterbury and Malthus to the Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia, who wanted to establish a Russian "New Lanark" under Owen.

In his efforts to limit the hours and raise the age of child labour, to introduce inspection and some schooling, Owen was less successful. If in his later life he had been content to wait for the slow results of educational advance, instead of trying to change men by changing their circumstances, there might have been a different story to tell.

AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

He spent £40,000 on an experiment at "New Harmony," a community and village of co-operation in Illinois and Indiana, America, in charge of his son William. From the first it was doomed to failure, for he was here dealing with an untrained mass of needy adventurers, practically unselected. Although attempts to reorganise, both on an individualist system, and in a number of occupational societies was made, the communal experiment was wound up.

ABOUT HARMONY HALL

"The complete conversion of the Owenite movement into an ethical society did not come until after its last great venture in community-making had ended in disaster," says Cole, in his "Life of Robert Owen." "Harmony Hall, or Queenwood, near East Tytherley, was acquired by the Owenites in 1839, and operations were at once begun for converting it into a model Village of Co-operation, based chiefly on agricultural production." It was some 533 acres in extent.

Owen refused the offer of the governorship of the community at the outset. When however, chiefly through lack of capital and inexperienced workers, difficulties set in, he raised fresh capital and became Governor in 1841.

He made Queenwood a showplace, with palatial buildings and the finest equipment. Even though the farms already held were not paying he leased new ones, and altogether the Owenite sympathisers put some £40,000 into the venture. There was an admirably equipped school, not only for the children of residents, but of Owenites throughout the country.

Even his own supporters began to waver, and financially the enterprise went from bad to worse. Three years later, the Congress of the Rational Society elected a new chairman, and passed resolutions relating to the management of the community. Owen, who refused to have his authority curtailed, immediately resigned. He was then 73.

A year later, in spite of severe retrenchments, Queenwood ceased to be a co-operative community, although the school which succeeded it was conducted for many years on semi-Owenite principles. The organ of the movement, the "New Moral World," was sold.

BISHOPS DISTRUSTFUL

Bishops, apparently frightened by Owen's revolutionary views on ethics, were more than distrustful of "this Epicurian syc" as Queenwood was unjustly described. "Hampshire was summoned to cleanse its soil of 'so

HAMPSHIRE ADULT SCHOOLS

Spring Conference

The quarterly Council meeting of the Hampshire Union of Adult Schools was held at the Foundry-lane Adult School Hall, Southampton. There was a good attendance. Officers present were: Mr. F. Mosley (president), Mrs. K. Burgess, Miss M. D. Clibborn and Mr. S. M. G. Mitchell (vice-presidents), Miss E. M. Foster (hon. secretary) and Mr. W. Isaac (hon. treasurer). Delegates were from: Foundry-lane Mixed, Freemantle Women, Ordnance-road Women and Portswood United Adult Schools.

By Citizen

Mr. F. Mosley was in the chair. The treasurer reported on the financial position and promised a definite scheme for raising money for the maintenance of Union and National resources. The proposition was approved.

NEW PLACES FOR EXHIBITION

The arts and crafts exhibition secretary announced that it was almost impossible to run a successful exhibition on former lines, and particulars of a new scheme would be circulated.

It was decided to arrange a week-end lecture school and also a non-residential school.

The Young People's Committee report, given by Miss E. M. Foster, showed that the young people were beginning to take responsibilities. Miss Foster was appointed young people's correspondent.

National Council reports were given by the delegates, Mrs. K. Burgess and Mr. S. M. G. Mitchell. Both spoke of the valuable Adult School work being done in various parts of the country, especially by the young people. Many junior adult schools were meeting with success, but there was a growing concern over the decline in general membership. Both delegates were warmly thanked by the president.

Local school reports showed enthusiasm and good work. Social groups and clubs were progressing.

It was decided to hold the next Council meeting at Portswood Adult School on Monday, June 15th.

Members of Foundry-lane Adult School provided tea. Thanks were accorded them.

IDEALISM OF YOUTH

Mrs. E. M. Foster, hon. secretary of the Hampshire A.S. Union, spoke at the meeting of Kentish-road Women on "The Idealism of Youth." Miss Foster has served on the National A.S. Union Young People's Committee, and her knowledge of young people's work throughout the country enabled her to give an interesting lecture on this difficult subject.

Mrs. K. Burgess, Mrs. B. Dymott, Mrs. J. Luke and Miss A. Biddlecombe (who presided) entered into the discussion. "Love, Courtship and Marriage" is the subject of Mrs. J. Luke next week.

THE SERVICE OF LAW

At Foundry-lane A.S. on Sunday morning Mr. R. R. J. Williams gave an

address on "The Service of Law."

Mr. Williams said most people looked upon law as something to be avoided, but really law ran right through every person's life from registration at birth to death.

He spoke on the origin of laws, and the gradual growth of an idea from custom to habit, from habit until it eventually became law. He defined law as a collection of rules and regulations to control the actions between man and man, and to enable men to live together as a society in peace and comfort.

Criminal law was now administered more as a curative system than as a punishment of the criminal. A good law should represent the general desire of the people. Law is a living science continually changing; it cannot be static, being bound up with ever-changing social and economic forces. Good laws helped man towards perfection, and were for the benefit of the community.

Mr. R. R. J. Williams is also next week's speaker.

PRESIDENT AT PORTSWOOD

Mr. F. Mosley, president of the Hampshire Union, paid an official visit to Portswood United A.S. and spoke to the group on "Martin Luther." Mr. W. Isaac was in the chair.

Martin Luther, said the speaker, lived just over 400 years ago, and in times almost identical in many ways to the present age.

He vividly recounted how Luther went to work amongst the people, and laid bare the superstition and ignorance of the times. He challenged the fundamental principles of his day, and came out successful.

He was a man of indomitable courage and perseverance, and because he had faith that his cause was right, he was unafraid. The speaker was warmly thanked, and a discussion followed.

Mr. R. W. Chapman is the speaker next week.

WEDDING AT FREEMANTLE

Last Sunday morning, at Freemantle Church, Miss Florence Brooking was married to Mr. Albert Haycock, and many Adult School members and friends of the bride and bridegroom witnessed the ceremony. The bride looked very charming in a grey costume, and was given away by her father.

Miss Brooking was one of the senior members of Foundry-lane A.S. and has been a keen worker in many committees associated with it. She was pianiste for several years, and amongst her numerous presents was an eiderdown from the members of her school. All the members of the local schools will join in wishing Mr. and Mrs. Haycock happiness.

PORTSWOOD ACCIDENT

The latest news concerning Mrs. M. King, of Portswood, is that progress is very slow, and it is feared that the main bone of her arm is crushed.

DYNAMO CLUB'S NEW CHAIRMAN

An "At Home" was held by Southampton Dynamo Club to welcome the chairman for the ensuing year, Mrs. C. Hope. She thanked the club for the honour of chairmanship, and expressed her desire to serve the best interests of the club.

Mrs. Tomlinson entertained the members with several monologues and songs, and Madame Kelly played the pianoforte accompaniments. Mrs. J. M. Monro recited.