

American Communal Societies Quarterly

Volume 8 | Number 4

Pages 183-223

October 2014

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Three Months with the Shakers—II

Editor's note: The following is the second and final installment of a reprint of a fourteen-part article first published in *Bizarre: For Fireside and Wayside* (Philadelphia) from October 5, 1853, through April 1, 1854. See the headnote to the first installment in the previous issue of *ACSQ* for more detail.

January 21, 1854

I am aware that I have not succeeded in making out of my materials a narrative of very special interest. Whether this be the fault of the subject or the writer, it is not for me to say. At all events, I will now offer some miscellaneous remarks on certain good and evil traits in the practical workings of Shakerism.

On the abstract truth or falsity of the most prominent of Shaker dogmas, celibacy, no words need be wasted. To argue, that marriage, intrinsically and universally, is a sin, is very much like maintaining, in a cloudless noonday, that the sun does not shine. There is, however, a mode of looking at this dogma, which may possibly account, in some measure, for its existence. May it not be numbered among those *protests*, which seem occasionally gotten up by Nature or Providence against some enormous wrong prevailing in the world? Corrupt as our civilisation confessedly is, nowhere does that corruption manifest itself more glaringly or work more fatally, than in the relations of the two sexes, whether under the nominal sanction of Law or against its statutes. Are not thousands of beings annually ushered into life, whose parentage and moulding conditions are such, as doom them almost inevitably to an after career, which must be a curse alike to themselves and the world? Would it not have been better, according to our most careful judgment, that such beings “had never been born?” This is but one among a myriad illustrations, that might be given, of the evils resulting from the relations of the sexes in our existing state of society. At the very least they serve to show, that these relations may not properly be contracted under the guidance of mere passion or impulse,

however natural or powerful these may be, but that reason, conscience and a calm survey of all present circumstances and probable consequences should have full exercise. And that they show vastly more than this might easily be demonstrated, were the present the place for such a discussion.

Now under the system of Providence all the elements strive evermore to conserve an equilibrium when existing, or restore it when disturbed. Thus, in times of extraordinary depravity appear the most eminent examples of virtuous character. Passing by the era of Jesus and his apostles, we may cite, in illustration of this law, the Antonines among the Roman Emperors, and Fenelon and Madame Guyon in the days of Louis le Grand. Fanatic loyalty and fanatic radicalism, boundless license and the most stringent asceticism were cotemporary in the days of Charles I. and the awful purity of Milton stood contrasted with the shameless infamies of the reign of the “Merry Monarch.” The Oriental Thugism, whose Worship is *murder*, is but a blind declaration of *human instinct*, that death is better than life in a country universally and radically corrupt; ground incessantly by famine and the whole circle of both physical and moral evils, and the perpetual victim of tyranny under every form.

And in like manner Shakerism, according to my reading, is an instinctive proclamation, that the relations of the sexes have become so vitiated, and so prolific of evils in all kinds, that the sole efficient remedy is to abrogate these relations altogether. The “right eye” has grown so offensive, that *melioration* is hopeless; it must be “plucked out” and cast away.

Where the subject of a kind, that could properly be discussed in full, I have little doubt, that I could adduce ample and satisfactory reasons for this view. As it is, I must submit this exposition to the reader without enlarging.

That the Shakers, however, are far from uniformly successful in their contest with the fundamental law of nature, is proved by numerous incidents in their history.

It is by no means an uncommon event for a young woman or man to dissolve connexion with the community, for the sake of contracting matrimony, and sometimes these matrimonial candidates *leave the same community at the same time, and meet at the same place elsewhere, for the same purpose*. How they are ever able, while still within Shaker limits, to find place and time for the preliminaries of becoming inoculated with the *virus* of Cupid and of perpetrating courtship, I cannot, from all my experience, conceive.

For in the whole community there is not a single individual, male or female, who is not the object of a vigilant and never-sleeping supervision. In the seasons of worship and in all the details of daily life the sexes are kept apart by a host of immemorial rules and usages. No woman is allowed to enter the apartment, where a man is, or even to address him, unless she be accompanied by at least one other woman. This regulation extends even to the *hospital*. I was once confined there, for a week, with a large boil on my wrist; and the elderly, and not excessively prepossessing nurse, who poulticed my arm twice a day, was always scrupulously careful to bring with her a “sister,” not much more attractive than herself! And yet, despite this omnipresent and incessant vigilance, cases do ever and anon occur, as above mentioned, of “brethren” and “sisters” quitting Shakerdom for a *joint* pilgrimage to the shrine of Hymen—a fact, which inevitably presupposes a measure of intercommunion, which it is beyond my power to explain. I had heard before, that “Love laughs at locksmiths,” but that he should laugh at *Shaker watchfulness* I should have reckoned beyond his power—especially as I am here reminded of one of the most objectionable features of Shaker discipline, which had escaped my memory. Virtually, every member of the community is a *spy upon every other*. The elders and elderesses *encourage* every individual to relate whatever they see and hear and know in relation to every other; and the consequence is, that every one is eager to pay court to the “powers that be” by the greatest possible amount of communications concerning those, with whom they are in daily and hourly fellowship. Of course, every criticism on Shaker beliefs and practices; every query, however respectful or honest, touching their verity or propriety; and even every joke on whatever subject, are hurried to the rulers, before the sun sets upon them, tinted with the coloring furnished by the dulness, the ignorance, or the semi-malice of the narrator’s own mind.

It is a wretched, demoralising usage in every way. It offers a premium on meanness, treachery, and gossipry, as I more than once bluntly told our leading elder, to the great damage of my own popularity with his excellency. But while debasing the tattler himself, it has the effect to diffuse universal distrust among the members, each of all others. No one can safely utter what he thinks, if his thought be anywise adverse to things as they are. No one can even question or debate upon the right or wrong of things established, lest he be misrepresented, as a malcontent or heretic. Consequently all are either reduced to utter dumbness on all, save the most trivial topics, or they must, perhaps at the expense of veracity, speak in

laudation of Shakerism from “turret to foundation stone.”

Partly as a result of this state of things, there prevails a universal torpor of mind and deadness of sensibility, together with an ignorance alike of books and of the world as it is, which can nowhere else be found. And from this intellectual and emotional state has been wrought out a peculiar type of countenance, which instantly strikes even the casual observer. It is a type compounded of stupidity and gloom. There were individuals among them, in whose faces the dominant lines were channelled somewhat deeper than usual, who exercised upon me a sort of veritable spell. They saddened and horrified me, and yet almost compelled me to gaze at their repulsive visages—the more repulsive still from being encircled by their hideously cut hair.

Another result, which I thought might be traced in part to this *spy system*, was the habit of eternal *self-puffing*—or of eulogising Shakerism in all its moods and tenses. This was apparent chiefly at our domestic religious assemblages. It was the practice of the head elder to prevail, if possible, on the members to speak at these meetings. For a long time I used to note with wonder, that these speakers, instead of, as in religious gatherings generally, exhorting the hearers to “cease to do evil and learn to do well,” spent their breath in magnifying the “privilege and blessing,” of belonging to a Shaker community, &c., &c. Sin, as pertaining to “believers” was an idea, which never seemed to occur to them, and the need of striving for moral improvement appeared to be no article of their creed. It was not much otherwise with the elders themselves. They did, indeed, sometimes touch on infractions of law—not, however, of the divine, universal law, but of some petty conventional rule of Shaker discipline.

In fact the main current of what might be called Shaker teaching tended directly and strongly to create self-conceit—an idea, that their body was the very “salt of the earth,” and in fact the only salt the earth possessed. For, be it noted, that, all this while, the *world without* was spoken of as unqualifiedly one vast sink of corruption—a place wherein to abide was all but inevitable destruction. That no small measure of this species of declamation was adopted for the purpose of currying favor with the elders, I am now satisfied.

But how little of moral or religious instruction or discipline could come from this source is evident enough. In fact, unless one brought with him to the community a mind instructed in moral and spiritual lore, I see not how it could ever be gained there. The only actual, regular tuition of any sort

ever bestowed on me in the community was in sundry branches of manual labor and in the steps and figures of the Shaker dances. Nor did I ever, know of any other tuition imparted to any, with the exception, of course, of the rudimentary branches of secular education to young children in their appropriate schools.

The simple truth seems to be, that Shakerism has little or no faith in principles or ideas, as modifying, controlling and directing conduct, but relies almost exclusively on external restraints. Thus, all the details of the entire system tend to this single point, to render it almost impossible to do wrong, in the Shaker sense of wrong. For example, all must labor at some manual employment; must *labor in company*; and must labor twelve or fourteen hours per day. Then, after eating in company, they must meet at a religious service or a conversation assembly, and this every night in the seven. Then they must go to their chambers, which are always occupied by several persons, and are soon glad, from sheer fatigue, to go to bed, and even there they must have a companion. Thus they are incessantly occupied, and that, too, in company with others, who are ever ready to speed to the elder with any word, act or look of yours, out of which a tale can be framed worth relating. Still further. If you would visit a neighboring city, you must ask leave of the elder, state what you are going for, how long you would be absent, &c., &c., and then abide his decision. If, in fact, you would go outside the community walls, you must go through the same process with the elder. If you would send a letter abroad, you must first show it to the elder and get permission; and if you receive a letter, you must do the same. And then, too, *confession* is insisted upon, as of pre-eminent, mysterious efficacy and importance. Besides the general confession required of each at initiation, there is one day in each year, on which all are subject to the same exercise, and the prevailing impression would seem to be, that by this service all sins are blotted out.

From this detail it will be seen on what Shakerism relies for the life-guidance of its votaries. By the strictest seclusion from the world it shuts out the world's ordinary temptations; breaking the habit of the drunkard by keeping liquor from him; the gambler's habit by his distance from gambling haunts and associates; and so on through the catalogue of those vices, which work the greatest visible havoc in society. At the same time, by incessant laborious employment under the most watchful supervision, it prevents the *breaking* out of such irregularities as are still possible in this retirement. In a word, this system operates upon a man precisely as would

his close confinement in a penitentiary or any other solitude It may preclude wrong *action*, but it does not necessarily touch the *inclination* to act. Unless this inclination be either *extinguished*, or there be formed in a man principles of a kind and strength competent to its control, there is not only a danger, but well nigh a certainty, that the individual would fall at once into his former vices on his first exposure to temptation. And it is in forming in its votaries these principles of guidance and control, that Shakerism struck me, as deplorably deficient. Indeed I once heard a Shaker, past sixty years old, say frankly, that he believed the “brethren” generally, if stationed out in the world, would fall into the very vices now condemned most loudly among them.

The Shakers talk a great deal about love, but upon this term they put a meaning of their own. It is not the love between man and woman, or parental love, or the love of children for parents, or of brothers and sisters for each other. It is what they name “impartial” love, and their doctrine is, that we should cherish the same measure of it towards each and all alike. A parent is wrong in loving his own child better than any and every other child, and the same rule applies to all other ties of kindred. Thus when families enter the community, the children, if old enough, are placed in some distant family for the express purpose of erasing all partial affection on both sides. A curious idea to be sure!

But, in truth, the whole fact of Shakerism is an exceedingly curious one. Here are some thousands of people, of all ages, living a laborious life, in the absence of all amusements, and cut off from most of those ties and pursuits, on which the rest of the race chiefly depend for enjoyment. How can they endure such a life, and what is it that renders such life at all tolerable?

I will attempt, in my next and final paper, to give some sort of answer to this question, as well as to present some of the bright features of Shakerism. This latter should, in simple fairness, be done, as hitherto my picture has been painted in rather sombre hues.

February 4, 1854

The governmental system of the Shakers, like so many other features of their organization, is a very curious anomaly. At New Lebanon, New York, where is located the largest of their Societies, and which is considered the

head-quarters of the “Believers,” reside for most of the time two persons, called “Ministers,” and recognised as the two Chiefs of the Shaker hierarchy. What is the precise mode of their appointment to their office, I know not; but their mandates are authoritative without appeal (unless I greatly mistake), through all the several communities in the United States. During my brief Shakerhood, there came from New Lebanon a command, that, with the 31st of the following December, *pork* should be banished from all Shaker tables and larders, and living swine exiled from the domains of the “Believers.” Not only was there no hesitation about obeying this rescript, but there was not even so much as the slightest challenge or discussion of its propriety.

Other mandates of like character had preceded my entering their association. Thus all Shakers under thirty years old, were forbidden to use *tobacco* in any shape, whatever their antecedent habits might have been. To those past thirty, the weed was allowed, as a merciful concession (I presume), to mortal frailty.

By the same authority, all the ordinary stimulating liquors had been prohibited several years before, and recently the same interdict had been extended to *cider*. Their scrupulosity, however, was not so stringent as to forbid their *profiting* by the juice of the apple, for they still continued to make cider from their annual superflux of apples, I and to vend it to “those in the outer darkness.” I know not on what ground they justified this presentation to the lips of others of a beverage, whose use by themselves they regarded as sinful. Very likely they deemed the case of the “world’s people,” *so* desperate, that it mattered little what they either did or forbore doing. And for a kindred reason, perhaps, they sold to the “outsiders” the *swine*, whose flesh was henceforward to be an “abomination,” in their own eyes.

By these “Ministers” were appointed the two “Elders” and two “Elderesses,” who presided over each several Shaker “Family.” These Families, as I before remarked, ranged from fifty to a hundred souls each. Of these four family Chiefs, one of either sex, entitled the “*head* Elder and Elderess,” held the main authority, the second Elder and Elderess being little other than their counsellors and messengers. Over their particular Families these two “heads” exercised apparently the same irresponsible and unquestionable authority, as did the two “Ministers” over the communities at large. *Greater* authority, indeed, for the entire goings on of the Family, down to its minutest items, were regulated by their simple *ipse dixit*. You might

often see one transferred from a species of employment rather agreeable to him, to one quite the reverse, by a simple order accompanied with no word of explanation. And you would see that order obeyed, and the change effected without resistance or hesitation, and without reasons asked. At my entrance, a certain little man held the office of *doctor* among them, his medical practice consisting in the administration of various herbs, grown on the domain, in the shape either of decoctions or essences. The post was generally considered a rather dignified one, and was therefore specially acceptable to its present occupant, who, like very much under-sized men generally, was largely endowed with self-esteem and approbateness. But somehow he had, at various times, given considerable offence by the arrogant exercise of his functions. According to the wonted fashion he was *privately* complained of to the Elder, and one day he was required by the latter to surrender his essence-phials and herb-bundles, and needle and “goose” in hand, to resume the *crossed-legged* attitude proper to his original vocation. That the mannikin was sorely galled in his tenderest point, must have been the fact, as every body knew. But he complied with the requisition without remonstrance, and without even exhibiting a glum phiz on the occasion.

On the other hand, his successor and substitute was, by no means, particularly gratified with his new official investiture. For he was an old man, far on towards the “used up” predicament, pinched with rheumatism, and greatly preferring his present vocation, which was to sit by the fire and whittle pegs for fastening loops in broomhandles, to the manifold “botherations” of the herb-dispensing life in conjunction with his existing duties. He, however, obeyed, also without remonstrance, only relieving his mind by a few groanings among his intimates.

The Shakers have not got beyond the proverbial American fondness for titles. The word “deacon,” which is employed by them in its original sense of “functionary,” or “official,” without reference to the kind of function or office, was applied very largely and variously. Thus the person, who supervised and kept in order the yard, was entitled the “yard-deacon;” the gentleman, who looked after and fed the hogs, the “hog-deacon,” &c., &c. And strange as it may sound, notwithstanding their far advance in spiritual things, it seemed to me, that these *dignities* were as highly prized by the “Believers,” both those who held and those who held them not as yet, as militia colonelcys and captaincys are valued by the “world’s people!”

On the whole, then, we witness among the Shakers the anomaly of

a completely autocratic system of government unhesitatingly exercised, and as unhesitatingly submitted to, in the heart of a land of democratic ideas, habits and institutions. Nicholas is not more absolute in Russia, than is the Elder among the members of his special “Family,” so long as they continue members. True, he has not the power of life and death, nor may he inflict incarceration or stripes, and, moreover, all may quit Shakerdom at their own pleasure. But here I am reminded of another among the countless anomalies of human nature, which is worthy remark. On those, who have remained long enough in a Shaker community to become pretty thoroughly leavened with its spirit, that spirit appears to fasten a very strong hold. Numerous instances have occurred of such persons getting discontented and leaving; but, in almost every *such* case the *migrating* individual feels completely “out of his element” while abroad in the world, and even seems to be tormented by a sense of *guilt*, as if, in severing his old ties, he had perpetrated a sin. At all events, this class of persons is very apt to return at no distant date, and beg to be re-admitted—a boon, which with some accompanying conditions is (I believe) for the most part granted. Not long before my initiation one of these “*apostatizing* Shakers” (as the name goes), was re-admitted after an absence of *twenty years*, during which he had again and again supplicated for this favor. He is, even now, a malcontent and an eternal grumbler, and it was doubtless this organic disposition, which occasioned his original departure. But, being out in the wide world, he found provocatives of his innate discontent to be *more* instead of *less* numerous, than in his peaceful Shaker seclusion, and he was glad to get back, even though it cost him a twenty years’ struggle!

The whole number of Shakers in this country is but small, not probably transcending 8,000 at the highest, and, most likely, falling considerably below this. Nothing, at the first glance, would seem more unaccountable than this, when we consider, on the one hand, the extreme poverty existing among certain classes with its accompaniments of hunger and cold, and a thousand miseries beside: and, on the other, the overflowing abundance of all the material comforts of life prevailing in every Shaker community without exception. This paucity of numbers may be owing in part to a total ignorance concerning Shakerism among those, whose material state might be so vastly benefitted by joining its communities.

But another thing is true touching these suffering ones, however strange it may seem. By some inexplicable species of attachment they are fast bound to the very localities of their squalor and wretchedness!

Else why don't they quit them? Why do they still continue to *overcrowd* the worse than dog-kennels of our cities, instead of migrating to the country? It is idle to say they *could not* do this. Did they but show a *desire* or even a *willingness* to do it, the means would even gladly be provided by the communities, where they are often a burden and a nursery of felons. I am not, of course, speaking of the honest, virtuous poor, but of that class who are ever complaining of their woes, and yet persist in cleaving to the places and circumstances, which breed them.

February 11, 1854

As I have before hinted, the growth of this body is exceedingly slow. Indeed, I am not sure, that it does more than escape absolute decline in its numbers. Its annual deaths are probably less than the average in the world at large, as might naturally be anticipated respecting persons leading a life so simple, regular, uneventful and unexciting. Still death causes *some* diminution, and this is increased by those, more or fewer, who for various reasons annually leave the Communities.

How it may be in the long run, as respects those who supply these losses, I cannot, from my brief experience, judge. But, so far as I saw, the new comers were chiefly such, as had got pretty well "used up" at home; persons, who not knowing, for the moment, what to do with themselves elsewhere, came here on the principle of "any port in a storm." Exceptions, it is true, there were to this rule, but they were not very numerous.

Among those, who were most thoroughly leavened with the Shaker spirit, and who had adhered to this life beyond the proverbial *critical* period, the close of the *initial* year, I noticed that a very considerable number consisted of relatives, near or remote, of the first converts to the new Faith in this country. These original converts, as in all kindred instances, were animated by a fervent zeal and a strong, tenacious faith. This was all but inevitable, since there was no well-compacted, opulent community existing *then*, as *now*, to hold out inducements which might compensate for breaking up ancient ties, religious, social and domestic, and adopting a novel, untried life, obnoxious, in many of its principles and usages, to the dominant opinions and feelings of the world. This super-average faith and zeal of the early Shakers would naturally act with no small force on all connected with them, however distantly, by ties of blood; and as the

American origin of the sect dates back little beyond seventy years, we can readily see why so many of the same kin are found among them at the present time.

One source of present additions is found in those fanatical crises, which are ever and anon occurring in this country and in England, and which seem to be a periodical epidemic peculiar, or well nigh so, to the Anglosaxon blood. Thus Millerism, on its explosion, threw a considerable mass of its fragments into the domain of Shakerism. Several of the most earnest believers and most zealous proselyters in the particular “Family,” to which I belonged, had been among the most enthusiastic disciples of “Father Miller.” Nor did they find the masses of argument and Scriptural interpretation, which had been wielded so self-convincingly in behalf of a *material* “second advent” and “world-conflagration,” to be at all inapplicable, and useless in the service of their newly adopted Faith. They had but to substitute “*spiritual*” for “*material*,” and all their accumulated weapons were precisely adapted to the new warfare, in which they had enlisted. The world *was*, at the present moment, in the very process of being “burned up” by the *spiritual* fire of Shakerism; that is, its *old* opinions, feelings and ways of life were being done away, and the “Lord was descending” in the *new* modes of thought, feeling and action, which Shakerism was superinducing upon mankind!

The great objection to this self-complacent view of things was, that of a race of 800,000,000 beings, the Shakers constituted but *seven or eight thousand*, and that this small number, if not absolutely *lessened*, had certainly increased the veriest trifle, if at all, for a lengthened period! And this, too, notwithstanding that, two years before, a new Revelation, entitled the “Sacred Roll,” had been written down by a selected one of their number, from the *oral dictation of an angel visible, and audible*, and its authenticity confirmed by countless preternatural “signs and wonders,” addressed to the vision and hearing of numerous members of the several Shaker Communities all through the country.

But I will dwell no longer on this aspect of things. It is easy talking of the fanaticism and foolish credulity of this or that body of men, but not so easy showing, that we are ourselves free from the same or kindred traits under *some other outward guise*. The undeniable truth is, that man is a fanatical, credulous, superstitious being in his very core, and partly on temperament, and partly on education and environing circumstances it depends into what external moulds these ingrained tendencies shall run.

Voltaire was no whit less fanatical and credulous and superstitious in his *unbelief*, than Simeon Stylites and Pierre, of Amiens, in their *faith*. “Judge not, that ye be not judged.

I said the Shakers had characteristics, which might advantageously be copied by the world at large. They present to that world a spectacle of order, sobriety and untiring, successful industry, which were not easily matched, and certainly not transcended, were you to circumnavigate our globe in the search. Every species of intoxicating beverage has long been banished from use among them; and in the Shakers you have an entire sect, among whom total abstinence is a *religious* principle and usage, not less than a matter of social expediency. And when, on looking abroad through our best-regulated and most moral communities, we witness the swarming myriads of licensed “dens of death,” and note the awful ravages thereby inflicted on every class and age of either sex, we *ought* not at least to withhold our cordial approbation of a sect, which long since “laid the axe at the root of the Upas tree,” and therefore exhibits the spectacle of some thousands of men, women and children, in whose life-currents mingles no single drop of the still! “Honor to whom honor is due.”

The Shakers, too, are remarkable for the prevalence of universal, unbroken *order*. This, indeed, might be infallibly inferred from what I have stated above. Much as has been written and spoken, of late years, of the multiplex evils flowing immediately and remotely from alcohol, we are very far, even yet, from having plummeted the depths of that abyss, or measured and traced the innumerable streams greater or smaller, that issue therefrom. Of all the disorders that afflict the civilised world, whether in the shape of wars between nations or of internal and domestic quarrels, few, I suspect, would remain, were alcohol once banished universally. Day after day, month after month, year after year, you behold these Shaker Communities presenting the spectacle of *undisturbed concord* alike within their own bounds, and in their relations to the world beyond; each individual of their number moving in the sphere assigned him, and performing the duties allotted to his charge, without clash or collision in word or deed with any other! Surely this is a spectacle worth contemplating, and an example which might with profit be universally copied.

As I have before said, the Shakers are pre-eminent for their industrious habits. All, without exception, men, women and children, are incessantly occupied in *some way* during their waking hours. All, too, are required, whatever may have been their vocation before entering Shakerdom, to

labor at some *manual* employment. The natural result of these usages, coupled with the strict economy universally enforced, is a rapid growth in wealth. There being among the Shakers no *idlers*, “*fruges consumere nati*,” but all being *workers*, and their various toils being so directed by the despotic authority of the Elders, as all to bear on a single point, *accumulation* is a *virtual necessity*. And I question whether there be in existence a single community of “Believers,” which has had time to get “fairly under way,” that is not distinguished by its possession of all life’s material comforts in abundance.

I have often thought it a great pity, that some arrangement could not be adopted, whereby a host of the half-starving denizens of our cities might be plucked out of the filth and nakedness and misery, with the almost inevitably accompanying vices and crimes of their present condition, to the warm plenty and orderly industry, and pervasive comfort and peace of Shakerdom. Such an event would certainly delight the “Believers,” for the smallest augmentation of their numbers is to them a matter of great and general interest. That to these denizens themselves it would be an exceedingly desirable boon, it needs no words to show. For though the Shaker is not the highest conceivable form of existence, it is immeasurably better than the *garretism* and *cellarism* of our city lanes.

Pity, too, that the multitudes of boys and girls, who are growing up in neglect, and environed by numberless temptations of allsorts in our city streets, could not be transplanted to the quiet, regular, industrious homes of Shakerism. To themselves it would be at least *temporal salvation*, while to society at large it would be the removal of a burden, which is, every year, pressing more heavily on both its *moral* and *material* resources.

In this era, when novel discoveries and inventions, of whatever description, have almost ceased to awaken surprise, and when enterprises, that once would have been counted the suggestions of lunacy, are undertaken with calm deliberation and unsuspecting faith, I do not despair of beholding some movement carried into effect, whereby Shakerism may confer an immense benefit on general society by transforming the *outcasts* and *parias* of the latter into useful and reputable men and women, while, at the same time, reaping large benefits to itself by augmenting its numbers and resources, and therefore its visible strength and respectability. There are shrewd men among those Shaker leaders, and it were really worth the while for *our own wise ones*, the conservators of our social order and promoters of our common weal, to propound a conference with those

leaders, touching this very subject. We appeal to the philanthropic, and those wielding influence with the public, to consider and act in this behalf!

February 18, 1854

The idea has often occurred to me, that, under the lead and impulsion of a supervising Providence, the Shakers were, unconsciously to themselves, solving various problems for the weal of Society at large; and perhaps laying foundations, accumulating materials and fashioning and proving implements, whereby an advanced condition of universal Humanity was eventually to be wrought out. For to any reflective person surveying that band of thousands of energetic, never-pausing, patient workers, the question “*cui bono*”—“to what end is all this”—can hardly fail to occur again and again. No holidays and no amusements absorbing time and money; no costly habits whether relating to the dress, to the table, to the architectural or any other arrangements pertaining to their system of life, vary the one monotonous aspect of things, which everywhere addresses the eye. But, instead of those, a strict, though not pinching economy pervades every department, embracing even the minutest details of each, and insuring that no single penny is expended without a full, unmistakable equivalent therefor. Thus much for the negative side of the case.

On the positive side, you behold the entire Community, men, women and children, laboring steadily from January 1st to December 31st, more than the average number of hours per day elsewhere, with all the furtherance of the best labor-saving mechanism, and under that skilful guidance of a single unquestioned will, which precludes all clashing or distraction of effort and all waste of time in visionary experiments, and compels universal coöperation towards one profitable end. The invariable result, as I have elsewhere said, is steady accumulation—accumulation, too, as rapid as ever can consist with a sound and safe condition of things. The Shaker Body, then, as a whole, must possess an amount of wealth, that may be pronounced vast. That wealth, moreover, must every year increase in a geometrical, rather than an arithmetical ratio. For, as every separate “Family” must make considerable annual accumulations above its necessary annual expenditures by the actual labors of each passing year, their large vested funds must be left to grow with

interest upon interest. How fast a pile must grow by the large yearly accretions from these two several sources, and how large it must inevitably become at no distant day, it requires no very expert arithmetician to calculate.

Most, I presume, remember that the British Parliament, not very long since, passed an Act prohibiting thenceforward all repetition of the Thelusson Will. This gentleman, it will be recollected, so disposed, in his last Testament, of the bulk of his fortune, that it should accumulate for rather a lengthened term of years and then come into possession of an individual, who should, at that date, be the legal heir. The sum accumulated was, I think, some thirty millions either of dollars or pounds sterling. At all events, it was something enormous, and the Conscript Fathers judged it perilous to the safety of the State, that a sum so prodigious should be at the unquestionable disposal of a single private citizen. For, though money is emphatically *power everywhere*, it is such even more emphatically still among the penury-ground, and want-pinched myriads crowded within the too narrow bounds of the European countries. This peril, for the time to come, they endeavored to stave off by parliamentary enactment. It is not then a question altogether without meaning, or interest, or perhaps even public importance, what is to be the eventual result of the above described condition of things among the Shakers. Already they must possess invested millions—I can imagine *no other probability*, if even *possibility*, than this. These millions are annually swelling by compound interest. And this is all apart from the fact, that seven or eight thousand persons are steadily engaged year after year in largely productive employments, living the while on a system of careful and skilfully ordered frugality, and thus year after year adding large savings to their already invested and interest-drawing funds. With such regular, natural increase as this, the increase of a *single private fortune*, vested in English three or four per cents, wears a comparatively insignificant aspect.

These thoughts used sometimes to pass through my mind while enacting my wearisome part in the bee-like industry of Shakerdom. At such times I was wont to question some of the brethren—especially one honest, not over brilliant brother, who had long worn the “broad brim”—as to what was the meaning or object of our toiling so incessantly and laboriously, living so economically, spending so sparsely, saving so carefully, and thus laying up each year so largely? What was the *use* of all this, and what was to be done with the vast sums thus accumulated?

His answer was, “we are working and laying up for those who are to

come after us.”

“But,” I rejoined, “what are those who come after us to do themselves? They’ll be no Shakers, nor will they be tolerated here, unless they work and economise and save and lay up, just as we are now doing; and thus imitating us in *these* respects, they will also imitate us in adding yearly to the pile already accumulated. So, that instead of *needing* the fruits of our present labors, they will themselves produce a surplus far above their wants. Besides, according to your rule, those who preceded *us*, must have labored and accumulated for those, who were to come after *them*, that is for *us*. But how do *their* toils benefit *us*, or what sort of connexion have we with them? They labored and accumulated—we labor and accumulate—those following us will also labor and accumulate—what sense, then, in saying, we are laboring for those who are to *come after us*?”

My honest, stolid brother could not follow in my track, though it was certainly plain and straight enough. His sur-rejoinder was, “We work for them, that’s to come after us,—that’s what Elder Isaachar said.” Beyond this he could not go, and I presume he made me this precise answer a full dozen times.

As I have already said, I cannot help thinking, that forty years hence, and perhaps even much sooner than this, the problem will not only be one of interest, but one which will press urgently for a wise and safe solution, what shall be done with the immense property, which by that date will be in possession of a single corporate body, organized and governed, too as this is? We know something of the wonders that may be achieved by *associated effort*—by numbers greater or smaller *combining their individual means and forces* and thus *moving and acting with unity of aim and direction*. We witness the results in our railroads, our telegraphic lines, our steam navigation, our factories, &c., which, within a few years, have changed the face of the world far more, than ancient methods were able to do in centuries. As yet, however, we have but a faint glimpse of the ultimate achievements of association, for we have not advanced beyond its very alphabet. Archimedes would have recognised in it the longed for “lever, wherewith to *move the world*.”

We see what simple combination could accomplish, even without productive industry, by the immense accumulations of the mediaeval monastic and other ecclesiastical establishments, the Orders of Knights Templars, Hospitallers, &c., &c. At the breaking up of Papal supremacy, it was found that in some countries *one-third* of the whole land was under ecclesiastical ownership. There would seem to be in wealth a sort of

mysterious quality, whereby it increases in bulk on the one sole condition of being kept a unit and not dispersed among various owners. “To him, that hath *much*, shall be given *more*—from him, that hath *little*, even that little shall be taken away,” is a proverbial recognition of this quality. The large fortunes occasionally accumulated by *individuals*, are barred of this natural increase for any long duration by the frequent change of owners, through the laws of inheritance and in various ways besides.

But the Shakers are a Corporation of a peculiar character. The present holders of Shaker funds have not, like the present proprietors of other corporate property, the right of dissolving their contract and dividing the funds among themselves. These funds are pledged to certain specific uses forever, and the usufruct thereof is all that, in any case, enures to the benefit of the beholders for the time being. But from the whole modes of thought and practical usages of the Shakers, it is plain that scarce any supposed exigency would induce them to draw on these vested funds for any present needs. What their present industry could not supply they would go without. None, therefore, of the ordinary causes which prevent the indefinite growth of a sum once accumulated have any application to them. Considering, then, the many principles of increase, which are united in their case, it is evident that, except for *unforeseen preventing circumstances*, the Shaker wealth must, in a few generations at least, swell to an amount, which will make it a problem of universal and even governmental concern. What direction matters may take in relation to it, it were idle to attempt fortelling. We know, that wealth may be so applied as to work immeasurable good; and we know, that many of the terrible evils, which now scourge society, are the direct result of poverty, and might be alleviated, if not completely extirpated, by the judicious application of wealth. The mere naming of these circumstances intimates what use *may*, at some future day, come to be made of those Shaker hoards, which can never, under any ordinary conditions, be of benefit to themselves. Such use, I, of course, am supposing would be made, if at all, with their consent and coöperation.

From the existing generation of Shakers, so far as I am able to judge, no measure of this sort is to be hoped. As a matter alike of principle, of feeling, and of pride, they are exclusive to the very core. I apprehend they care little what becomes of human kind beyond the walls of the Shaker-fold. But none may predict what the coming years shall witness. The spirit of change which is passing over and remodelling the world, is an element too subtle to be shut out by any barriers however high and

broad. Institutions political, religious and social, which had seemed as immovable and changeless as granite mountains, are, in our day, seen to be like very wax in its moulding grasp. And that, which has shattered into fragments and rebuilt from the foundations monarchies, whose cornerstones were laid under the twilight haze of the middle ages; which has essentially modified the condition internal and external of the “infallible Church;” and which is stirring into life-renewing agitation the elements of that Chinese Society, which had already become stagnant, when Romulus was an infant; *that* spirit may surely be trusted to accomplish greater things, than to infuse *universal* humane sympathies into some coming generation of Shaker exclusionists.

The wild bees labor assiduously and accumulate in hollow trees large stores of honey beyond what their needs apparently require. Perhaps they are themselves unaware of why they do thus. But when the famishing pioneer is saved from starvation by these chance-found stores, or the heralds of civilization to these savage wilds find in them a help and a pleasant alleviation to the hardships of their missionary work, then we witness, may be, the *reason* why the bees so labored and accumulated. Possibly this example may shadow forth the providential significance of Shaker life.

Meanwhile the Shakers have undeniably solved sundry problems of immeasurable moment to society universally. They have demonstrated the *possibility* of a social state, wherein intemperance, robbery, theft, licentiousness, with the manifold other crimes and vices, that deface and torment our ordinary society, may be wholly unknown; wherein, too, the multiplex, ineffable miseries and sufferings inflicted by *poverty*, shall be equally unknown; a social state, wherein abundance of all life’s necessities and comforts, thriving industry, good morals, peace and harmony shall be the universal law and the permanent, daily fact. That Shakerism accomplishes all these results both negative and positive, I know and do hereby testify.

And *how* is all this affected? There is no mystery about the matter. It is effected by a *certain combination of individuals, subjecting themselves to certain rules*. This is the whole of it. Be it remembered, too, that these individuals, many or few of them, are in no wise extraordinary for their capacities or gifts of any kind. They are simply seven or eight thousands of precisely such men, women and children as might be gathered in from a large assemblage of ordinary people by one unacquainted with a single person among them. Not only are they not the *elite* of society at large, but they have among them

no *specimens of the elite*. For I believe it to be the fact, that not one person of thorough classical education, nor one person of *extraordinary talents* in any kind, is to be found in their ranks. All are ordinary working people, and what they accomplish is not through luck, speculations or felicitous inspirations of genius, but by ordinary, every-day methods and means. With this single exception, however, they have adopted and abide by a *specific organization*, including certain practical rules and usages. Organization—association—combination—is then the one potent principle, whereby they avoid the horrid *evils* of our Society and achieve the many great *goods*, which our Society lacks.

Let the world ponder this. For years the much abused Socialists have been declaring, that most existing evils are the results of vicious social conditions, and that by *altered conditions* these evils might be removed and supplanted by their opposites. For this they have been pronounced “disorganisers,” “enemies of order,” “infidels,” “blasphemers,” &c., &c., precisely as were Jesus and his disciples of old, and as all great reformers have been ever since. And yet, unknown seemingly to these loud-brattling, envenomed vilifiers, the Shakers, in their very neighborhood, have been daily, for half a century, demonstrating by their own example the literal, inexpugnable truth of what the Socialists have declared. These proposed socialistic schemes, may, perhaps, have had in them objectionable items. Let these, then, be cast aside, for they are not essential parts of their formative principle. Shakerism, too, may involve principles, which, like their *celibacy*, may to most persons be objectionable. But I do not believe celibacy to be an indispensable requisite for the achieving of the great good of the system.

To sum up, it has been practically demonstrated, that in organization may be found a cure of our existing social evils, and a creative cause of a social state such as Philanthropy has long dreamed of, and toiled for, and prayed for, all in vain. Here is the great central, radical, eternal fact. With our *existing social conditions*, I doubt if a much improved state of the world is ever to be hoped for. Certainly railroads, telegraphs, and steam navigation, can never effect it, and with all our inventions and discoveries, we find the mass of poverty, misery, vice, and crime, growing incessantly larger. Machinery benefits not the laborer and not even the majority of capitalists. It helps to produce more *things*, but the *producing worker* is worse off than ever. And our very institutions of charity, it would sometimes seem, create hardly less evils than they relieve. All these facts prove true

the socialistic thesis, that in our false social organization lies the great spring of existing evils. Let the *remedy* of these evils be sought, then, in a *true* organization—one, which eliminating the objectionable features of Shakerism, shall retain and improve its right and beneficent principles and usages.

March 11, 1854

It is so long since I commenced this narrative, that I cannot recollect whether or not I have spoken of one item as I intended. No matter, however, whether I have or have not, since a brief reiteration will do no harm. This item is the *position of Woman in Shakerdom*.

Now I know of not a single class in the community, whose estimate and treatment of womankind are marked throughout by such invariable good sense and correct feeling, as those of the Shakers. To every Shaker man a Shaker woman, whatever be her age or her characteristics personal or mental, is precisely what a mother or a sister is to any man of pure sentiment and high-toned character. What higher commendation could possibly be awarded to the estimate and treatment above mentioned?

Observe, too, the admirable sagacity of these so-stigmatised fanatics! They by no means hold to female idleness. They do not consider respect for woman as implying, that men should toil like slaves in order that their mothers and sisters should lead an idle, useless, luxurious life, wherein all their organic fine sympathies and noble qualities die out, and selfish indulgence becomes the supreme law. No. They believe that Woman was created for industry equally with Man, and that in a life of moderate, genial labor her nature finds its truest, healthiest development, and she, therefore, is most likely to become what she was intended to be. By consequence to every female from childhood to old age some regular employment is allotted, matching their years, strength and capacity. And in the adaptation of such employment you will especially discern the kindly spirit pervading the Shaker administration as regards woman.

A single example will suffice to indicate this spirit. Thus in ordinary weather the women enact the role of cow-milkers. It is not a hard task, and is, moreover one, to which woman is naturally better suited than man. But in rainy, snowy, very cold, or tempestuous weather, it becomes a severe and disagreeable task. At all such times, therefore, it is ordained, that men take

the place of women, and the ordination is universally obeyed with great promptitude and entire cheerfulness. And thus it is everywhere and on all occasions.

To sum up, there is no single particular, wherein man enjoys any advantage or assumes any superiority over woman, but both theoretically and practically is accorded to the two sexes a complete equality of rights and prerogatives. That there must be some sound philosophy in a system, of which this is one of the leading principles, will not, I think, be denied by any save the narrow-minded and hard-hearted.

My chief purpose, however, in the present chapter, is to point out what I believe to be some of those principles in the Shaker discipline, from which flow the desirable results enumerated in previous chapters. As I have already stated, I do not consider the *religious idiosyncrasies* of Shakerism, as the *generating causes* of the Shaker wealth and universally prevalent good morals. On the contrary, I regard these results as flowing from principles, which *might* be combined in social organizations entirely free from Shaker specialties.

Let me attempt, then, to designate these principles, at least to some extent.

In the first place, the *Shaker kitchen* is far less expensive than most others, while its supplies are superior both in *quantity* and *quality* to those of most others. The Shaker table might be pronounced perfect by all save epicures and gourmands of the first water. The *cause* of this less expensiveness is plain.

Thus a Shaker family comprises, say, one hundred persons, men, women and children. For these one hundred a single kitchen, with a couple of fire-apparatuses, suffices, and here all the cooking, baking, &c. &c. are performed. For work done on this large scale labor-saving and fuel-saving machinery becomes possible and proper. So, too, in a single room with one or two heating apparatuses, all the washing, ironing, &c., for these one hundred are performed, and fuel-saving and labor-saving mechanism is again employed. And the two fires in each of these two rooms, after subserving their primary ends, may by mechanism be made to diffuse heat enough nearly, if not entirely, to warm the whole buildings wherein they are situated. Besides, in consequence of the labor-saving mechanism, half a dozen persons, at the outside, suffice to execute the cooking, washing, ironing, &c., for the whole one hundred.

Now suppose these hundred persons were distributed in separate

families living after the ordinary manner. With five in each family they will make twenty families. At the most moderate computation these families will require one fire each, or twenty fires in all, and fuel-saving and labor-saving mechanism is impracticable. To perform the cooking, washing, ironing, &c. for each family, one woman must devote her principal labor and time. The difference, then, between the one Shaker family and the twenty other families is, that the former with *four fires* and *six women* performs the labor, which in the latter demands *twenty fires* and *twenty women*. The balance, therefore, in favor of the former is, that it saves the cost of *sixteen fires* and the time and labor of *fourteen women*, which may be given to *productive employments*.

But I am not bound to select twenty families, all maintaining but one fire each. I may suppose some to be farmers, some merchants, some mechanics in thriving conditions, and some belonging to one or another of the many professional classes. In such case, the number of fires must be considerably multiplied, as also the number of persons employed in doing the work above specified. In such case, then, a large addition must be made to the *amount saved* by the single Shaker family. I here do but suggest mere hints, leaving the reader, if he so please, to go into a thousand various details of economy, wherein the Shaker has the advantage of ordinary families through the *system* adopted by the former.

Note, for example, the difference of mode wherein the two provide the family supplies, *e. g.* food, groceries, clothing, fuel, &c. &c. Ordinary families purchase all these things mostly in small quantities, and of the retailer, and therefore pay a large advance on the original, wholesale price. This advance is, of course, so much as will afford to the retailer a support, and not infrequently wealth, for himself and family, as else he would not continue his business. In some cases the article passes through even three or four successive hands from the wholesaler to the consumer, and then the *advance* must be sufficient to furnish a subsistence to three or four several retailers.

Now the Shaker family purchases of the wholesaler, and in quantities sufficiently large at one time for several months' consumption. It thus saves all, that other families pay to the retailer, besides getting some reduction, on the wholesale price itself on account of the quantity taken. In the *making up* of garments, shoes, &c., it saves whatever *profits* would go to the tailor, cordwainer, dress-maker, &c., since each Shaker family has within itself members of these several vocations.

Now if you add together the manifold items of saving made in these respects by the Shaker family, the amount within no long period will be found very considerable. And this amount, be it remembered, becomes at once *productive capital*, and under numerous different appliances goes to swell the unitary resources. So that the advantage of the Shaker family over others is constantly increasing in a *double ratio*—the former first *saving* what the latter *consumes*, and secondly making this *saving* a *source of increase*. Were this the *sole difference* between the two, it were nothing strange the one should grow *rich* while the other continued *poor*. This, however, is but one of a large class of kindred matters.

For example, the Shakers by their organization are able to get considerable productive labor out of children not yet beyond their school-attending years. Thus, the school occupies *six hours* of the twenty-four. Allow eight hours for sleep, and *ten hours* remain to be *somehow* disposed of. The three meals together absorb *just forty-five minutes*, and the diurnal worship, or its substitute, say, an hour and a half more—the two, in all, two and a quarter hours, leaving seven and three quarter hours *still vacant*. Now Shakerism tolerates no *vacuum* in time. It knows not *idleness*, and as little does it know what is commonly called amusement, recreation or pleasure. During these seven diurnal hours the children are as regularly employed in productive industry as the adults. In the kitchen, or the wash-room, in the garden, on the farm, or in the workshops with their various branches of labor, some work is found adapted to the age and capabilities of each, and in reference to the total products of the family, the labor of the children, so far as it goes, is precisely as profitable as that of the adults.

This advantage the Shaker family owes to its organization with the large diversity of employments involved therein. With ordinary families, the children, instead of being *helpers*, are *hindrances*—that is, as a general rule. For, by their organization, it is impossible to provide for children productive employments suited to them. The *why* and the *how* of this are too well understood to require discussion. The *pecuniary* difference between the *single* family and the *twenty* families, arising from the former employing, and the latter not employing, the children in *lucrative* industry—a difference both positive and negative—is much larger than one would at first suppose, and in a few years would swell to a *very great* total.

The Shaker family has usually—I believe invariably—a large farm; one comprising as many acres as three or four of the ordinary farms. It may readily be seen how this circumstance affords opportunity for

numerous economies as well as positive advantages. Thus one or two barns will subserve all purposes of storage, instead of the eight or ten which four several farmers would require—not to mention that these one or two might be so much better constructed and appointed, as to yield other benefits. So the *single* farm would require little, if any, more fencing than the *four*—another item of large saving.

Again, the four several farmers, for carrying their produce to market, would need four teams and four drivers, while the Shaker family could perform their own market-carrying with a single team and its driver. Moreover, this same Shaker teamster with his team would also serve to carry to market the various products of the different work-shops, which are always associated with their farms. If you consider the various savings arising from these several particulars, and consider, too, the amount of these savings as transmuted at once into productive capital, you perceive the single farm to be getting ahead of the four with constantly accelerating speed. And, by a little reflection, you may recall numerous other items, wherein exists the same difference in favor of the Shaker unity.

On the *positive* side may be perceived advantages not fewer, perhaps, in number or less in importance. A large farm *may* be cultivated to vastly greater advantage, than a small one. In the case of the Shakers, which alone I am now considering, it will be remembered, that, from the various particulars of their organization, they always have *abundant capital*. This enables them to manure their land up to the very highest pitch, which sound husbandry prescribes. Very rarely is the *single farmer* possessed of sufficient means to do this. The latter, too, must cultivate whatever crops sell best and quickest, whether his land be best suited to them or not. The Shakers may adapt crops to soils, whether the returns are to be immediate or not, for they do not *need* instant returns. In short, not being a practical farmer, I am able only to say in general what is authenticated by those well instructed, that a large tract cultivated, as a *unit*, by those having abundant *capital* coupled with skill, may in a thousand ways be made more profitable, than the same tract divided into several farms and tilled by several different owners possessing, as is *then* usually the fact, but moderate or even scanty means. Thus, for one thing, the former may introduce labor-saving machinery largely, while the latter are, for the most part, not justified by their profits in so doing.

The Shaker family has, moreover, this advantage, that carrying on manufactures of various kinds in connexion with their farming, they can

grow on their own land many of the raw materials of their manufactures, and in this way make a large saving.

March 18, 1854

On the mere economies of Shakerism I shall say but little further. With a brief notice of a single additional point, I shall leave to the reader's own reflections to fill up, if he so choose, the outlines I have projected.

This point is the *complete unity both of plan and of action* among the one hundred individuals of the supposed Shaker Family. A shrewd, sagacious man at the head, whose mandates are obeyed instantly and without appeal—he too, entitled to summon to council and take advantage of the suggestions of the wisest and most sagacious of the “brethren”—prescribes the various labors to be performed, and sees that his prescriptions are strictly and fully carried into effect. The consequence is, that *all*, whether men, women or children, know precisely what their tasks are, and have nothing to do or think of but the literal execution of them. All the laborers are so regulated, that (vulgarily speaking) “they play into each other's hands;” each department aiding and furthering the rest, and all tending consentaneously to the production of a single great profitable result.

The advantage of such a system is, that each individual is as efficient and profitable a worker, as though he were personally gifted with *first rate business capacity*. Whereas if you were to take these hundred persons, as living and enacting their parts in ordinary society, most likely you would not find half a dozen out of the hundred, who possessed such capacity. Shrewd, “get-ahead” business men are extremely rare. The majority are competent to work and to earn more or less money, but not so to use their earnings and administer their affairs, as to accumulate wealth. Out of the fruits of their toil they support, in one way and another, themselves and their families; but, as society is now constituted, the remainder of these fruits, and ten times the larger portion of them, go into the hands of a few individuals. *These* are the skilful managers, the keen traffickers, the sagacious business men. They, in number a comparative few, get rich, while the vast majority live little otherwise than “from hand to mouth.”

Now, as I said, the Shaker system has the advantage of making *every individual an accumulator* of more or less beyond the costs of subsistence, instead of a *consumer* of his *total earnings*. All working according to a plan

sagaciously devised and skilfully adjusted, the total result is the same, as though each individual were an apt, sound business man.

To this may he added, that the Shaker family enjoys the immense advantage derived from an extensive use of labor-saving mechanism. Whereas the same individuals, scattered abroad through the community, would for the most part be deprived of this advantage.

These hints must suffice touching the reasons for Shaker associations uniformly accumulating wealth.

I would now offer a few words on the causes of the strict order and correct morality, which prevail throughout the Shaker body. There is no great mystery about this state of things. The very nature of their organization sufficiently explains it.

In the first place, there is no *competition* of the ordinary kind among the Shakers. Their interests are one and the same, and emulation and rivalry, if existing at all, are altogether friendly and genial. What a host of evils of various sorts they thus escape, will appear on a brief consideration of what competition is, and what it leads to in ordinary society.

Thus among tradesmen or mechanics of the same class there is a constant struggle to get the better of each other and secure the largest share of the general custom to themselves. That ill will, envy and malice are often the result of this state of things, every body is aware. These cankering passions are themselves bad enough, but they are far from being all. Fraud, too, is extensively practised. Adulteration of articles on sale as become absolutely universal, applying not only to all foods and drinks, but to the very drugs administered to the sick. An act of Congress has been passed to stay the enormity of this last villainy, but from recent reports even this legislative movement would seem to have availed little. Intensity of competition induces vendors to use every means to secure patronage, and among others extreme cheapness. Such cheapness cannot be afforded without large adulteration of their commodities.

This same mania for cheapness is the cause of incalculable oppression inflicted by the vendors of manufactured goods on their operatives. It is enough, in respect to this matter, to refer to what is well known to the public touching the infamously low prices often paid to various classes of our needlewomen, though the same evil presses with greater or less severity on many descriptions of labourers besides. From these sources flows an immense amount both of misery and suffering in various kinds and of general moral depravation. A large troop of the bitter and cankering

passions; wide-reaching habits of fraud and cheaterly; and last, though not least, intemperance, debauchery, licentiousness and prostitution, may be traced, through channels direct and circuitous, to the same deep, dark poison-spring. And all this is apart from the physical injury and pecuniary loss attendant on the extensive use of adulterated foods and drinks and ill made, worthless manufactured articles.

The one radical cause of these manifold effects I have stated to be *competition*. But the evils of competition have scarce been touched upon even yet. They appear in myriad other forms; as rivalry under its innumerable aspects; as ambition personal or social; and, finally, as a passion for national supremacy. Instead of the prevalence of the Christian Law—the principle bidding each individual to love his neighbor as him self, or, in other phrase, to regard as a near friend and very brother every human being, whether a townsman, a fellow countryman, or a denizen of the antipodal regions, and to care for the best interests of such being as truly and practically as for his own; what do we actually witness? The universal prevalence and incessant vehement activity of bald, unleavened selfishness—a principle, which makes the world's teeming societies Ishmaelites to the very core. Each struggles exclusively for his own individual advancement, and employs his own superior talent, skill and cunning to elevate himself above his neighbor, if possible, and make, if practicable, his neighbor's capabilities and toils tributary to his own supposed advantage. To be distinguished *somehow* above the generality, whether by wealth, office, social standing, or some one of the myriad species of personal consideration—this is the universal passion. It is a passion so intense, that, if it cannot be gratified by fair means, so-called, it prompts the use, in cases numberless, of unfair, dishonest, dishonorable means, be they what they may. You need but glance superficially at public and political life, or at the thousand departments of private life, to witness an immense mass of vices and crimes, of woes and miseries, which are the direct product of this single cause.

But ambition does not confine itself within the boundaries of a single community or even country. It often burns for a far wider theatre, whereon to exhibit its prowess. Hence the devastating careers of conquerors, and of conquering nations. Yes, of the wars, which have made of one or another region of the earth a smoking, blood-crimsoned battle-field, with scarce an interval within human memory, and which, first and last, have cut off by untimely, violent deaths far more myriads than now inhabit its surface; the much greater number have sprung from that rivalrous ambition of

nations, which, in the last analysis, must be traced back to *that single principle of competition*, which, in its lower forms, we behold working hourly about us in the shopkeeper, in the mechanic, and even in the lady of fashion and the seventeen-years-old *belle* “just out!” Fancy not that this is exaggeration. It is bald, simple truth—nothing more or less or other. You remember the nursery rhymes,

“ Large streams from little fountains flow.
Tall oaks from little acorns grow.”

You know, too, that, standing on a steamer’s deck at a certain place in the western portion of South America, you might look abroad on a shoreless watery expanse, and never dream that you were elsewhere than on mid-ocean. Yet, if turning your prow westward you steam onward a few days, you reach an immense range of sky-piercing mountains. And in some crevice of that range you find a splash of water, which you might perhaps cover with your hat. In that *water-plash* you behold the origin of that liquid tossing world, in which old Ocean recognises the noblest of all his million tributaries!

In this example witness what is, after all, but a feeble illustration of the magnitude, number and importance of the consequences, that flow from the familiar principle of competition. Imagine then, if you can, what must infallibly be the favorable changes in the morality, the order and the happiness of the world, if this principle were swept completely out of existence.

It is so among the Shakers, as I have already remarked. Competition exists not among them, since their *interests* are in all respects *identical*. They are “many members” indissolubly united in “one body.” Though performing different offices, these offices are all alike essential to the unitary weal, and as such they are unanimously recognized. Nor is there the least room for rivalry of any other description, or for jealousy, envy, and their like, since all stand on the same platform of equality in rights, in privileges, and in whatever enjoyments obtain among them. True, there is a *seeming* exception in the case of the four Elders and Elderesses, but even this would alter but little the main fact. And the exception *is* rather *apparent* than *real*. For these leaders labor at the same vocations, and with the same regularity, as the brethren and sisters at large. From my own experience in fact, I should think they were the hardest workers in the community. In food, in dress,

and in every other particular of life, they enjoy no advantage whatever over a single other individual. As to spending money from the unitary funds, I know not precisely what their personal rights may be. But, as a matter of fact, they do *not* spend such money for *individual* purposes. Indeed there is no way, in which they can so expend it. Their food, clothing and general subsistence are provided out of the common funds, and precisely such is the case with all the others. Save in two or three items, then, they are on an exact equality with the members generally. These items consist in leading the worship, in giving general orders about labor, in hearing confessions; and in sum, administering the functions of government according to rules long ago established. Thus in addition to laboring with the hands like the rest, they underlie the cares, anxieties, toils and responsibilities of government. In my own view, their position is less desirable than that of the others, since with great additional burdens, they have no compensation unless they can find it in these burdens themselves. There is no occasion for enlarging on this topic. It is obvious how competition is done away in Shakerdom, and with the *cause* the multiform *effects* must vanish also.

And here comes in the consideration of another point, though on this I can here say but a word. *Poverty* in all its forms and degrees is unknown among the Shakers. Abundance, and even wealth, are universal, and of consequence the ample enjoyment by every individual of all life's material necessities and comforts. And this, too, not for the time present exclusively, while health and vigor for toil yet remain, but even in extreme age and second childhood, or in case of sickness, whether temporary or lifelong. The Shaker has no anxiety about the future. He has before him no vision of famine, nakedness and houselessness, or the (so deemed) disgraceful alternative of the Almshouse. He labors regularly while health and years permit, knowing the while that when *helplessness* through infirmity or years shall arrive, he is not only *entitled* by Shaker law and usage to a support and all requisite care until death, but that he will unfailingly *receive* all this—rendered, too, not grudgingly, but freely and with a kindly willingness. It should be chronicled to the honor of the Shakers, that their treatment of sickness and helpless age, is thoroughly and altogether admirable. The tendance in such cases is that of affectionate brothers and sisters.

Now put these two things together—a present absence of material want in its every shape, and a present abundance of all the material indispensables and comforts of life, together with an absence of all solicitude about *future* subsistence and an undoubting assurance of future support and requisite

care in all imaginable circumstances,—and what an incalculable influence must be exerted thereby on the feelings, the principles and the moral state of men? Who does not know what an eternally gnawing worm at the core of human happiness is poverty,—especially in its severest degrees? Who does not know how incompatible with present serenity, peace and enjoyment are goading anxieties about the prospective support of ourselves and the dear ones dependent upon us? And who has not seen again and again what terrible temptations keen penury offers to the perpetration of a thousand various crimes, and to the plunging into manifold vices destructive of both body and soul? Fraud, underhand practices, theft, robbery, burglary, and arson; prostitution partial and entire; intemperance with the throng of leprous mischiefs that accompany and follow it; and finally, a host of money-getting vocations and services too infamous even for description; all may be seen, at one time or another, starting directly forth from grinding poverty, especially when coupled with solicitude about the future. Could you, at one blow, strike out of existence poverty *present* and *prospective*, and substitute for it ample abundance, together with the full assurance that this abundance shall be co-enduring with life; you would at once dry up one of the chiefest fountains of human degradation, misery and wo; a fountain co-ëval with human history, and coëxtensive with earth's habitable regions. A little reflection will make this so manifest to the reader, that my enlarging upon it were entirely superfluous.

Now, as we have seen before, poverty and solicitude about the future, are utterly banished from Shakerdom, and in their place exist present plenty, coupled with entire absence of anxieties about the time to come. Of consequence the causes, which produce so vast an amount of the world's moral depravation and misery have among them no existence. No wonder, that order and peace and correct morals prevail universally through their families.

Now in the absence of *competition* and *poverty*, with the infinitely diverse evils flowing directly therefrom, as I have above pointed out, I think we witness the principal causes of the desirable and praiseworthy characteristics of Shaker life. I cannot believe these characteristics have any indissoluble connexion with their religious specialties either theoretic or practical, or with that secular feature so objectionable to many, their celibacy. Neither do I think it essential to their present thriving, that literary and scientific and artistic culture should be so utterly ignored. Were they to devote to manual toil precisely the number of hours they now do, and sequestrate

for the culture above named the six evenings now given to an eternal reiteration of services, which cannot secure any benefit, a change infinitely for the better would ensue, yet without the loss of any now existing good.

I might go further. Why labor so many hours per diem, as now, when thousands of dollars are yearly added to invested funds already vast, and doing no iota of good to one living human creature? Why not consecrate a portion of those hours to the acquisition of knowledge—a species of vested funds, which not only cannot possibly be lost or lie idle, but which benefit their possessor and all about him now, and will benefit him and others eternally? No valid objection can be urged against this change, but a host of most cogent arguments in its favor.

March 25, 1854

The truth is, that were the acquisition of wealth *alone* concerned, a more comprehensive and various mental culture were an advantage greatly to be desired. As matters stand, almost all the Shakers are neither more nor less than simple operatives, competent to obey directions clearly issued, but entirely without *inventive* capacity. They have among them, it is true, a few labor-saving machines, but of the simplest description. They accumulate wealth steadily, as I have said, but this is done more by dogged, persevering toil and excellently adjusted economy, than through the qualities born of high cultivation. Possessed of the latter, they might augment their resources far more rapidly even than now.

And then it were superfluous remarking, that material wealth and comfort and even a freedom from the ordinary vices, crimes and miseries, that torment society at large, do not fill up the measure of man's capacities, wants and inborn aspirations. His capabilities of eternal progress and indefinite, expansion, what shall be done with these? They cannot be extinguished; they will ever and anon stir and yearn within us; and a system, that ignores their existence, or makes no provision for their requirements, puts itself in contravention of the eternal laws of Providence, and without a reform in this feature must prove an eventual failure. As a friend to the Shakers, I would strongly press this matter on their consideration. How stands their case at present, and what are the probabilities of the future?

Their Society is not yet so old, as to have wholly lost the invigorating influences of the original enthusiasm, to which their establishment was

owing. They have yet among them firm believers and sagacious men brought up at the feet of the inspired Fathers and Mothers of the new Faith. But this race is nigh outspent, and who are to take their places?

First, there are those, who join them from the world without, and trained in the world's ways and opinions. Among these you will find no educated men,—no men of eminent ability of any kind,—no men, whose weight of character or native vigor is such, as to have given them wealth or a commanding position in the community. Cultivated persons will not go where cultivation is wholly ignored and its pleasures unknown. And men of wealth or commanding station find nothing in Shakerdom to attract them thither. Only the more *common* and *submediocre* class, whose force and ability have been inadequate to win prosperity, are likely to become Shakers, and how among such are you are to find the combination of qualities to fit them for *leaders*, or that “leaven” of vigor, which is to “leaven the whole lump?”

The other mode of supplying the places of the generation dying out, is from the children taken from the world and brought up within the Shakerfold. But, setting aside the consideration, that these children are not likely to possess, through inheritance, any very high order of natural qualities, their Shaker education is not of a sort to develop much ability of any kind. So *repressive* is this educational system in all its branches, whether of direct inculcation or circumstantial influences, that even native genius' and extraordinary talent would be more apt to be stifled than drawn forth by it, while children of average capacities are more likely to be fashioned into odd-looking automatons than any thing else.

From neither of these two sources, then, can I perceive how individuals are to be drawn to make good the places of those sons and daughters of the “Founders,” who are fast passing away. The inevitable tendency, I think, is towards deterioration and feebleness, and without the infusion of some renovating and reinvigorating element, Shakerism must, I apprehend, eventually go out like a lamp exhausted of oil.

This element, I believe, is an enlarged, sound and various cultivation. This, I feel confident, is the one thing especially needful—an absolute *sine qua non* to Shaker longevity. “By *bread alone*” man cannot live, and though he cater for the *body* however abundantly, the *man* must eventually perish unless the soul be also cared for.

Whether there be any *natural* end to my theme I know not. I do positively assure the reader, however, that I will ere long *make* an end if

I cannot *find* one. But I should first like to speak briefly of the Shaker celibacy.

The *celibacy* of the Shakers, as intimated before, is a matter with them of religious obligation. Anne Lee, their Messiahess, professes, to have been taught by angels, that man's original sin was an abuse of the marriage relation, and the fall and extrusion from Paradise the direct and premonished consequences thereof. The present quality of the relations of the sexes in the world, under whatever form and name existing, is so far infected with the primal taint, that absolute, literal celibacy is enjoined on all "true believers," and the whole world lying beyond the bounds of Shakerdom is reckoned one common slough of foulness and sin.

The religion, philosophy or common sense of this dogma, I have no occasion to discuss here. It is quite certain, that the race at large will never become converts thereto. The aspects, under which I would consider this celibate life are its economical tendencies, and its influence on the happiness and the intellectual and moral state of its subjects.

Now if we suppose the Shaker discipline and mode of life to remain in all other respects identical, what influence on their *economy*, both positive and negative, would be produced by the members of one of these "Families" holding towards each other the relations of husbands, wives, and children? Would they be less amenable to recognized authority? Would they be less disposed to labor, industriously? Would they be less inclined to a careful economy in the matters of expenditure and saving? In sum, would they be less likely than now to make their annual earnings transcend their subsistence-expenses, so as to maintain the present character of the Shakers, as a wealth accumulating people? I cannot see why or how the affirmative should be the fact.—at least when all the circumstances of the case are carefully considered.

True, the Shakers escape the care of infancy, which pertains to ordinary families, and thus the time, which elsewhere is so absorbed, is by them given to money-getting employments, The question, however, cannot be settled by confining our regards to this single point. We must take a far wider survey. We must inquire what is the predominant effect of marriage, as compared with celibacy, on the entire being, intellectual and moral of man and woman? Other things being equal, is not the married a creature of higher development and more completely unfolded capacities than the celibate? And if so, are not his powers both of thought and action, superior? If this latter question must be answered affirmatively, then the

superiority of power in all kinds of a married over a celibate community, must vastly overbalance the loss of a certain fraction of time, which, in the former, must be devoted to the offices of the nursery.

Now numerous as are the imperfections, abuses and evils pertaining to the matrimonial relation, as now existing in the world, the superiority of married to single life would seem to be established by a variety and weight of evidence, which cannot be rebutted. Statistics show, that duration of life is in favor of the former to the amount of several years. *This* fact, implies many others, such as health, happiness, &c., &c., while superior health and happiness involve superior capability, vigor and efficiency alike mental and corporeal. Even prior to experience we should anticipate these results from the fact, that marriage accords with a fundamental and universal law of Providence, and therefore the whole body of the laws and potencies of nature is operative on its behalf; while celibacy is an exceptional position and thus contravenes some laws preordained for the common weal. The matrimonial and parental relations evolve and bring into active and incessant exercise some of the most potent of human affections and impulses—and not *potent* alone, but such as, beyond most others, tend to purify, to elevate and to impart dignity and weight of character to their subject. In a word, the Family is the basis whereon the entire superstructure of civilised society is reared, and in precise proportion to the elevation of a land's individual households by the more and more perfect fulfilment of the duties pertaining thereto, does that land advance in light and happiness and universal well being. Every one's experience will suggest numerous instances, where an almost total transformation has been produced by matrimony, and a dignity, force and efficiency of character imparted to the man or the woman, of which before they might have been supposed incapable.

On these and like grounds, then, we conclude that a *marrying* community, organized otherwise like the Shakers, might, to say the least, thrive equally with the present *celibate* associations in *pecuniary* respects, since the general superiority of mind and character proper to the former must naturally exhibit itself in this, as in all spheres beside.

The question suggesting itself next in succession is, whether the order and correct morality, which mark the existing Shaker Societies, would be likely to survive the change from celibate to matrimonial life. If common experience, furnishes any test, we should infer that this question must be answered in the affirmative. In all known countries it has passed into

an axiom, that marriage is favorable to good morals and to the general tranquility and order. The new and peculiar affections awakened in the parental heart; the novel and weighty responsibilities naturally imposed by these affections; and the more serious character imparted to that prospective life, in which are involved the destinies for weal or woe of young, helpless, dependent creatures dear to him as his own soul; all these things constitute incitements to a pure, orderly, reputable life and safeguards against infractions of the laws of morality, which are *peculiar* to the married person and *additional* to all those *common* to the celibate and himself. If, then, you suppose a marrying community to maintain, in *all other particulars*, the Shaker organization, it would seem, that their preservatives of order and sound morals would, instead of being diminished and weakened, be vastly multiplied and strengthened.

And from this change would certainly result one very important advantage, which, I suspect, has never occurred to our Shaker friends. As I have previously stated, I was told by an Elder himself, that nine out of ten, who join their Society, abandon it within the first year. He *understated*, I suspect, the number leaving, for it is not uncommon for members to leave at all periods after admission, ranging from one even up to twenty years. Now these leaving persons are mostly specimens of the better sort,—individuals of too much compass, rigor and buoyant vivacity of mind to submit patiently to so many *needless* restraints,—especially to restraints so unnatural as those of *celibacy*. Celibacy, indeed, proscribes the exercise of sentiments and impulses so central and so potent in quality, that they may be pronounced absolutely the *main-springs* of human life. Strike out of existence all that has sprung from this source either directly or collaterally, and the globe whereon you stand would be a stranger to you. Its brightest lights and its chiefest embellishments and glories would instantly vanish, and little would remain but earth in its primeval savagery. By stifling, then, in the individual springs of emotion and action, thus demonstrably important and vital, you leave but a marred, etiolated, fragmental being.

No wonder, therefore, that persons of the class above named should sooner or later relinquish the Shaker-fold. The Society thereby loses its most capable, vigorous, promising members—those remaining permanently, being, for the most part, persons whose sensibilities are either organically dull or rendered obtuse by circumstances. From such no great vigor of capacity or action can be expected, for passion and affection are the very life whether of thought or performance.

Now from a marrying community such persons would not be very likely to migrate, since matrimony would furnish a large and congenial sphere for the exercise of their keen susceptibilities, and provide enjoyments especially adapted, to natures thus constituted. And they would be *certain* to remain, if to *this* change be added another, of which I have before spoken, the introduction into Shakerdom of a liberal education and a large and various culture. In such case the Shakers would possess, in combination with the two choicest advantages of the “world without,” all the other advantages now peculiar to themselves.

I have, thus far, spoken of married and celibate life, mainly in reference to the bearing of the two on the economic, pecuniary condition of a society. And I think it has been shown to be probable, that the economic superiority of Shakerdom has no *indissoluble* connection with its celibacy, but might still remain unimpaired though celibacy were supplanted by marriage.

I might say much on the superior influence of marriage over celibacy in promoting the happiness and general dignity and elevation of its subjects. But this influence is all along implied in what I have said on the general topic, and I forbear enlarging upon it here. It is a divine ordination, that all the faculties and susceptibilities originally bestowed upon us, were designed to be developed and exercised. Nor less is it a divine appointment, that properly unfolded and legitimately exercised, they all tend directly, to make us wiser, nobler, happier beings. This is enough for us to know in order for us to determine our course, and on this we may firmly rely. We cannot *gain*, on the whole, but must inevitably *lose* by *suppressing* and striving to *ignore* feelings implanted within us by Infinite Wisdom and Benignity!

April 1, 1854

“Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been—
A sound which makes us linger,—*yet*—farewell!
Ye, who have traced the Shaker to the scene
Which is his last, if in your memories float
A thought, which once was his, if on you swell
A single recollection, not in vain
He wore his round-toed shoon and broad-skirt coat;
Farewell! with *him* alone may rest the pain,

If such there were—with *you* the moral of his strain.”

One principal reason for my having dwelt so long on the concerns of the Shakers, is my conviction, that the World may, from their system and its results, gather most important hints for its own guidance. In fact I believe our present social organization to be so radically imperfect, that its tendencies, carried out to their logical ultimates, must inevitably produce a general chaos of vice and crime, misery, and intestine, deadly conflict. Through modern inventions and discoveries in all kinds, these tendencies are now evolving with unprecedented rapidity, and the goal must be far nearer, than might, a short time ago, have been supposed. Nor can we, more than Europe, expect to escape this catastrophe. Though in sundry items our *political* system differs from theirs, our social system in its main features is the same. Inequalities of wealth and condition, crime and vice, wide-spread misery and pauperism—all these growing with frightful celerity—as distinctly, if not as extensively, mark our social state, as that of the European peoples. We reiterate our conviction, therefore, that the civilized world must either reorganize its social system, or must perish. And we believe the new system must either comprise some of the principal items of the Shaker code, or it will be unavailing.

To authenticate my views of present society, I will cite certain statistics relating to the leading European countries,—facts demonstrating what have been the results of the operation of their existing social institutions for long centuries, with all the aids of science, art, literature, and Christianity itself. These statistics are drawn from governmental reports of the nations they concern.

I. In France, out of a population of 33,000,000, 22,000,000 have, on an average, but SIX CENTS PER DAY each to defray all expenses, food and clothing, housing, education, &c., &c.! (This report was made some years since.) Again, of the whole number of French dwellings, 348,401, HAVE NO APERTURE SAVE THE DOOR,—1,817,328 have *only one window*,—1,328,937 have *only two windows*. 16,000,000 of the population are sheltered in these wretched hovels!

II. In Great Britain 17,000,000 *live literally from hand to month*, each day's subsistence depending wholly on the same day's labor. By sickness or disabling casualty befalling the head of the family, the entire household is at once plunged into destitution.

In London, *one-tenth of the whole population are paupers*, and twenty or

thirty thousand persons rise every morning without knowing where to get a meal or a lodging! The number of paupers on the island is reckoned at *two or three millions!*

Again, the number of persons charged with serious offences in England is five times greater than 30 years ago—in Ireland, 6 times—and in Scotland 27 times. (Vide Allison.)

The *majority* of the English agricultural population never enjoy good health beyond 40 years of age. The *cause* is their being *fed with bad food; insufficiently clothed; greatly overworked; and having nothing to hope in life.* (Vide Robertson, English Physician.)

The care of paupers and the repression of crime costs England £30,000,000 (\$150,000,000), per year.

In Ireland, out of 8,000,000 population, *every third person, during 30 weeks per year, experiences a deficiency of even third rate potatoes!*

In Dublin 60,000 persons passed, in *one year*, through the fever hospital. (A consequence of their physical wretchedness.)

In Glasgow, nearly 30,000 persons are, every Saturday night, brutally drunk, and *every twelfth house is a dram-shop.* (The direct result and demonstrative proof of misery.)

Symonds, Government Commissioner, speaks thus of the Glasgow wynds or lanes:—"In some of these lodging rooms (visited by night), we found a *whole lair of human beings littered along the floor*, sometimes 15 or 20, some clothed and *others naked; men women and children huddled promiscuously together.* Their bed consisted of a layer of straw, musty and intermixed with rags. There was generally little or no furniture in these places; the sole comfort was a fire. Of this population, from 15 to 30,000, *theft and prostitution were the chief resources!*"

In Liverpool are 7,862 *cellars dark, damp, dirty and ill ventilated*, in which live 30,300 of the working people.

In Manchester 14,960 of the operatives *live in cellars!*

In Bury, one-third of the working class are so poor, that in 773 *houses, one bed served for 4 persons; in 207, one bed for 5; and in 78, one bed for 6!*

In Bristol 46 per cent. of the working classes have but *one room for a whole family!*

Of the whole 17,800 houses of Leeds, 13,600 are so poor, as to be under £10 rent per year.

In 1837 in Glasgow, 22,000 persons had fever out of a population of 250,000.

In Sicily, the granary of the ancient Romans, it is not rare for multitudes to be left, at winter's approach, without employment and utterly destitute of means of subsistence; and it is *common to find peasants starved to death in the fields with grass in their mouths, wherewith they had endeavored to stay the agonies of hunger!*

I might easily multiply statistics like these, but it is needless.

If it be said, that our country is so much better conditioned as not to come within the category of Europe, I reply, that a careful examination of facts would show, that we have far less reason for self-gratulation, than is often taken for granted. *Our* statistics prove the existence of three or four millions, out of our population, as suffering either *comparative* or *extreme destitution*. Hundreds of thousands are destitute of the first rudiments of education, and that vice and crime in all shapes and degrees are extensively prevalent, and rapidly increasing, our newspapers bear amplest testimony. But, above all, it should be considered, that this, being a new country with all the superior advantages thereto pertaining, should in the natural order of events be less infected with poverty, vice and crime, than older lands. But, as before suggested, our *social organization* being the same, time alone is wanting to evolve the same results here, as everywhere else. A few years more or less, then, should not affect our estimate. My proposition is, that the social system of civilised lands universally is so radically imperfect, that its ultimate result is *self-destruction*, and that the *very salvation* of our race imperatively requires a reorganization of this system “from turret to foundation stone.”

To establish this principle beyond the possibility of cavil, let us very cursorily survey the world, as it now stands, at the end of thousands of years devoted to its culture—contrasting its present condition, in sundry particulars, with what it *might* and *should* be.

I. How marred and spotted is the surface of our material globe! The polar snows and ices locking up from use one-quarter of its acres; barren, burning sand-wastes covering numberless square miles of the Tropics; vast swamps and bogs in the Temperate Zones poisoning the air with their exhalations; the finest regions in the world tenanted either by beasts of prey and monstrous reptiles, or by unimproveable barbarians, under whose blighting sway the arts of civilised life and man himself dwindle away, and the *very soil* is swallowed up in deformity and barrenness; such is the aspect now presented by that earth, which was entrusted to man's charge, and which, under suitable culture, *might* be transformed into one

universal garden. Yes polar ices, tropic sands and extra-tropic swamps are all capable of transmutation into genial human abodes by the intelligent, persistent industry of man, and might have been so already, had all the time, toil, and inventive and executive skill, hitherto *desecrated* to war, been *consecrated* to this end. But such an achievement, under our existing social organization, is not to be hoped.

This condition of the material globe symbolises accurately enough that of its inhabitants.

II. Thus, what must be said of a social system, which fails to supply fully the *mere physical wants* of those submitting to its laws and usages? And *such this system is!* Not simply thousands, but hundreds of thousands, and even *millions*, in the most advanced countries, are habitually *ill-fed*, *ill-clothed*, and *ill-housed*—insufficiently so for comfort, for health, and for securing their normal vigor and efficiency. And even worse, multitudes every year *absolutely perish with* famine, and not many years since, in Europe's wealthiest Land, the cry of "bread or blood" was abroad on the air, wrung from tens of thousands of hearts maddened by starvation in the very midst of mountain-heaped plenty! Nor is this an *accidental* or *temporary* circumstance. It is a *permanent fact*, and flows unavoidably from our *defective* organization.

III. That man *was endowed* with intellectual powers capable of that magnificent development, which characterise Plato, Bacon, Milton, and their compeers, is proof demonstrative, that the *normal condition* of the race is that, wherein to *every individual*, are furnished amplest appliances for developing to their highest attainable degree *all the capacities* bestowed upon him. But what is the present fact? The measureless majority are educated (technically speaking) scarce at all. "Darkness covereth the earth and gross darkness the people." In short, while multitudes are famishing, and often *perishing*, for lack of the *body's* food, myriads beyond counting are *intellectually* lean and dwarfed for want of the bread adapted to the nobler nature. Alas for a civilization, of which *this* must needs be affirmed!

IV. The normal condition of man is undeniably the amplest liberty. This is established by the fact, that, without liberty, it is utterly impossible for man to reach his highest, completest development, or to enjoy the largest happiness, of which he is susceptible, or, in fine, to become his *intrinsic, total self*. For the accomplishment of these several ends, he must not be evolved and moulded by a man-imposed exterior law, but must unfold spontaneously and freely *from within*, outward—from centre to

circumference.

Now, how stands the actual fact?

Despotic governments and arbitrary usages; the despotic paucity of means and opportunities; the compulsory necessity of excessive, everlasting toil for the pittance that barely keeps soul and body together,—such are the fetters, whereby the huge majority of our kind are robbed of the prerogatives and blisses of freedom. It is a lovely vision, this freedom, and all human hearts pant naturally for it, as the desert-traveller for the gushing fountain. Nor can any social system be counted the true one, which does not, for every child of Adam, transform this lovely phantom into a flesh-and-blood-fact!

V. Once more, man's normal condition is one of universal order and virtue and peace, and cordial reciprocities. What is his *existing state*?

For answer, I may point you to the prison and the gallows, that cast their shadow across every community; to the criminal courts in everlasting session; to the brothel disgracing and cankering every city; to the Bedlam “making night hideous” with its gibberings; to the poorhouse everywhere punishing that pauperism, which the best wisdom of the highest civilization has hitherto failed to *prevent*. If *such*, in spite of all concealments, are the *symptoms breaking out on the surface*, what must be the amount of *moral disease*, in all kinds and degrees, which is ravaging within the *vitals* of our social life?

I have thus, in the most cursory manner, glanced at existing evils and imperfections; at the same time intimating my conviction, that we cannot look for any essential melioration of the same under our present social organization. We have seen, that the Shakers have succeeded in banishing these evils and imperfections from their borders. I think, moreover, I have shown, that they have accomplished these results, not through the *objectionable* principles of their system, but through principles, which might work all their desirable effects in combination with all we most prize in our own existing system.

My inferences from all this narrative and discussion must be too obvious to the reader to need further words.