

Quest for Universal Harmony

"In this new world, all will know that far more happiness can be obtained by union, than by disunion".

"Every child of man should be, from his birth, as well trained and educated, as his original organs, faculties and powers, will admit".

"There shall be no human slavery, servitude, or inequality of condition, except the natural inequality of age and experience, which will for ever preserve order and harmony in society".

"War may always be prevented, by those who adopt the principles of peace, being at all times, prepared to resist injustice and oppression; and this preparation may be easily effected by wise arrangements in the education of the young".

Further Reading

The Works of Robert Owen ed. Gregory Claeys (1993) ISBN 1 85196088 0

A New View of Society & Other Writings by Robert Owen, 1813 (1991)


Historic New Lanark by Donnachie & Hewitt (1993) ISBN 0-74860420-0

Robert Owen: Social Visionary by I. Donnachie (2005) ISBN 1 86232 131 0

Robert Owen, Prince of Cotton Spinners ed. J Butt (1971) ISBN 07153 51648

Life of Robert Owen by Podmore (1906)

Life of Robert Owen by G D H Cole (1930)

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Robert Owen's Quest for Universal Harmony

Extracts from
his published works.



Many ideas expressed by Robert Owen (1771-1858) remain relevant today. The international cultural influence of his campaign for a better and fairer society is one of the criteria by which New Lanark was assessed by UNESCO as being worthy of World Heritage Status. A selection of extracts from Robert Owen's published works follows.

Owen often talked of the new Millennium; a time, he hoped, when society would be greatly improved. When he opened the *Institute for the Formation of Character* on New Year's Day 1816, he gave an Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark, in which he outlined his hopes and his belief that education was the means of achieving a better and fairer society:

"What ideas individuals may attach to the term "Millennium" I know not; but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any misery, and with intelligence and happiness increased a hundredfold: and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal".

Education

Owen's campaign for Education as a means of eradicating society's problems, and making people happier and more fulfilled, was prominent throughout his working life:

"To train and educate the rising generation will at all times be the first object of society, to which every other will be subordinate".

(The Social System, 1826)

"The three lower rooms (in the Institute) will be thrown open for the use of the adult part of the population, who are to be provided with every accommodation requisite to enable them to read, write, account, sew or play, converse or walk about. Two evenings in the week will be appropriated to dancing and music, but on these occasions, every accommodation will be prepared for those who prefer to study or to follow any of the occupations pursued on the other evenings".

(Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark, 1816)

"Where are these rational practices to be taught and acquired? Not within the four walls of a bare building, in which formality predominates.... But in the nursery, play-ground, fields, gardens, workshops, manufactures, museums and class-rooms. ... The facts collected from all these sources will be concentrated, explained, discussed, made obvious to all, and shown in their direct application to practice in all the business of life".

(Book of the New Moral World Part 3 1842)

Social Inclusion & Early Intervention

Social Inclusion and *Early Intervention* have both been key aspects of policy for the governments of today for many years. Robert Owen was including them in his plans for The Institute back in 1816 when he stated that the building would accommodate more than just the children of New Lanark, and that anyone in Lanark or the surrounding neighbourhood who could not afford to educate their children, would be at liberty to send them to it, where:

"They would receive the same care and attention as those who belong to the establishment. Nor will there be any distinction made between the children of those parents who are deemed the worst, and of those who may be esteemed the best members of society: indeed I would prefer to receive the offspring of the worst, if they shall be sent at an early age; because they really require more of our care and pity and by well-training these, society will be more essentially benefited than if the like attention were paid to those whose parents are educating them in comparatively good habits".

(Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark, 1st Jan 1816)

Parenting Classes

"One of the apartments (in the Institute) will also be occasionally appropriated for the purpose of giving useful instruction to the older classes of the inhabitants. For believe me, my friends, you are yet very deficient with regard to the best modes of training your children, or of arranging your domestic concerns".

(Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark, 1816)

Child Care & Workplace Nurseries

"The Institution has been devised to afford the means of receiving your children at an early age, almost as soon as they can walk. By this means many of you, mothers and families, will be able to earn a better maintenance or support for your children; you will have less care and anxiety about them, while the children will be prevented from acquiring any bad habits and gradually prepared to learn the best".

(Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark, 1816)

Working Conditions

Owen's extremely advanced system of factory management, which he pioneered at the New Lanark Mills gained him credibility, not only as a successful businessman, but also as a benevolent employer. He proved that commercial success could be achieved without exploitation of those employed; his approach to social and economic organisation was extended beyond the mill floor into every aspect of village life.

"The working classes may be injuriously degraded and oppressed in three ways:

- 1st-. When they are neglected in infancy.*
- 2nd-. When they are overworked by their employer, and are thus rendered incompetent from ignorance to make a good use of high wages when they can procure them.*
- 3rd-. When they are paid low wages for their labour "*

(On the Employment of Children in Manufactories, 1818)

"The lowest stage of humanity is experienced when the individual must labour for a small pittance of wages from others".

(From a Paper Dedicated to the Governments of Great Britain, Austria, Russia, France, Prussia and the United States of America, London 1841)

"Eight hours' daily labour is enough for any human being, and under proper arrangements sufficient to afford an ample supply of food, raiment and shelter, or the necessaries and comforts of life, and for the remainder of his time, every person is entitled to education, recreation and sleep". (Foundation Axioms of Owen's "Society for Promoting National Regeneration", 1833)

Employment Training

"Train any population rationally, and they will be rational. Furnish honest and useful employments to those so trained, and such employments they will greatly prefer to dishonest or injurious occupations. It is beyond all calculation the interest of every government to provide that training and that employment; and to provide both is easily practicable".

(A New View of Society - Essays 1813-1816)

Women

Robert Owen's views had particular appeal for women. At a time when men were hostile to women's rights, he courted controversy by denouncing marriage, as it then existed, as a form of slavery for women.

"Women will be no longer made the slaves of, or dependent upon men.... They will be equal in education, rights, privileges and personal liberty". (Book of the New Moral World: Sixth Part, 1841)

Community Responsibility

Robert Owen drew up a list of rules for the inhabitants of New Lanark. These encouraged community responsibility, religious tolerance, and other good habits amongst the villagers.

"Parents shall be answerable for the conduct of their children, and householders for their lodgers".

"None of the inhabitants of same village shall injure any of the fences about it, or upon the farm, whether stone, dyke, railings, or hedges; nor any of the houses, ground, or plantings, nor any of the company's property, of whatever nature it may be; but, on the contrary, when they see children or others committing such damage, they shall immediately cause them to desist from it, or if that shall not be in their power, give notice at the principal counting-house of the offences, and who are the offenders".

"As there are a very great variety of religious sects in the world (and which are probably adapted to different constitutions under different circumstances, seeing there are many good and conscientious characters in each), it is particularly recommended, as a means of uniting the inhabitants of the village into one family, that while each faithfully adheres to the principles which he most approves, at the same time all shall think charitably of their neighbours respecting their religious opinions, and not presumptuously suppose that theirs alone are right".

(Rules and Regulations for the Inhabitants of New Lanark, 1800)

Health & Preventative Medicine

"The advanced members of the medical profession know that the health of society is not to be obtained or maintained by medicines: - that it is far better, far more easy and far wiser, to adopt substantive measures to prevent disease of body or mind, than to allow substantive measure to remain continually to generate causes to produce physical and mental disorders".

"It is the interest of the individual and of all society, that he should be made, at the earliest period, to understand his own construction, the proper use of its parts, and how to keep them at all times in a state of health; and especially that he should be taught to observe the varied effects of different kinds of food, and different quantities, upon his own constitution - He should be taught the general and individual laws of health, thus early, that he may know how to prevent the approach of disease. And the knowledge of the particular diet best suited to his constitution, is one of the most essential laws of health".

"To preserve permanent good health, the state of mind must be taken into consideration".
(Book of the New Moral World, 3rd Part, 1842)

The Environment

"They will be surrounded by gardens, have abundance of space in all directions to keep the air healthy and pleasant. They will have walks and plantations before them".

"To obtain and preserve health in the best state to ensure happiness, pure air is necessary. It is at once obvious that large cities and extensive manufactories are not well calculated to permit pure air to be enjoyed by those who live in the one, or who are employed in the other. The advantage of pure, and the disadvantage of impure air are experienced each time we breathe, and all who understand the causes of disease know that an impure atmosphere is most unfavourable to the enjoyment of health, and an efficient cause to shorten human existence within the natural life of man. It is therefore most desirable that decisive measures should be devised and generally adopted to ensure to all a pure atmosphere, in which to live during their lives".

(Book of the New Moral World - 1842)

Question: Universal Harmony

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Care for the Elderly & Infirm

"In advanced age, and in cases of disability from accident, natural infirmity or any other cause, the individual shall be supported by the colony, and receive every comfort which kindness can administer".

(The Social System - Constitution, Laws, and Regulations of a Community 1826)

Campaign for Universal Harmony – Human Rights & Peace

"Is it not the interest of the human race, that every one should be so taught and placed, that he would find his highest enjoyment to arise from the continued practice of doing all in his power to promote the well-being, and happiness, of every man, woman, and child, without regard to their class, sect, party, country or colour?"

(A Paper Dedicated to the Governments of Great Britain, Austria, Russia, France, Prussia and the United States of America, published by Robert Owen, 1841. This is the 17th of 20 Questions to the Human Race)

"It is therefore, the interest of all, that every one, from birth, should be well educated, physically and mentally that society may be improved in its character, - that everyone should be beneficially employed, physically and mentally, that the greatest amount of wealth may be created, and knowledge attained, that everyone should be placed in the midst at those external circumstances, that will produce the greatest number of pleasurable sensations, through the longest life, that man may be made truly intelligent, moral and happy, and be, thus, prepared to enter upon the coming Millennium".

(A Development of the Principles & Plans on which to establish self-supporting Home Colonies, 1841)

"Exchange their poverty for wealth, their ignorance for knowledge, their anger for kindness, their divisions for union".

"Charity and kindness admit of no exception. They extend to every child of man, however he may have been taught, however he may have been trained. They consider not what country gave him birth, what may be his complexion..."