

Robert Owen's Religious Views: Extracts from Four Essays (1813)

^{1st.268} That Power which governs and pervades the universe has evidently so formed man, that he must progressively pass from a state of ignorance to intelligence; and in that progress to discover, that his individual happiness can be increased and extended only in proportion as he actively endeavours to increase and extend the happiness of all around him.

2nd: *[Owen describes the evil conditions he found at New Lanark.]*

²⁸⁰ Considerable jealousies existed on account of one religious sect possessing a decided advantage over the others. This was corrected by discontinuing that preference, and by recommending the same consideration to be shown to the conscientious opinions of each sect.

[Owen describes the teaching in the New Lanark schools.]

²⁸¹ To avoid the inconveniences which arise from the introduction of a particular creed into a school, the children are ²⁸² taught to read in such books as are common to all Christian denominations.

3rd: *[Owen describes his intentions for the Church in his proposed New Institution.]* ³⁰⁰ The principle on which the doctrines taught in the New Institution are to be founded is, that they shall be in unison with universally revealed facts, which cannot but be true. The following are some of them:—

That man is born with a desire to obtain happiness.

That he is also born with the desire to sustain, enjoy and propagate life.

That he is born likewise with faculties of receiving and comparing ideas.

Etc. etc.

³⁰² When these truths are made evident, every individual will necessarily endeavour to promote the happiness of every other individual within his sphere of action; because he must comprehend such conduct to be the true cause of self-happiness.

It is to bring into practical operation, in forming the characters of men, these most important of all truths, that the religious part of the Institution at New Lanark will be chiefly directed.

4th: *[Owen describes his plans for national education of the poor.]*

³²¹ At this hour a national system of education for the lower orders on sound political principles is really dreaded, even by some of the most learned and intelligent members of the Church of England. Such feelings are only to be expected.

The establishment of the Rev Dr Bell's system of initiating the children of the poor in all the tenets of the Church of England is an attempt to ward off a little longer the yet dreaded period of a change from ignorance to reason, from misery to happiness.

Extracts from Address to New Lanark, 1st January 1816.

³⁴⁵ That which has hitherto been called wickedness in our fellow men, has proceeded from one of two distinct causes:—

1st— Because they are born with faculties and propensities which render them more liable, under the circumstances, than other men to committations usually denominated wicked.

2nd— Because they have been placed in particular countries; have been influenced from infancy by parents and playmates; and have been surrounded by circumstances which necessarily trained them in the habits called wicked.

³⁴⁶ Whence have wickedness and misery proceeded? I reply, *Solely from the ignorance of our forefathers!* ³⁴⁷ When these great errors shall be removed, all our evil passions will disappear; the period of the supposed Millennium will commence, and universal love prevail.

³⁴⁹ 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 hundred-fold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment, except ignorance, to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal.

³⁵⁴ The New System is founded on principles which will enable mankind to *prevent*, in the rising generation almost all of the evils and miseries which we and our forefathers have experienced. A correct knowledge of human nature will be acquired. ³⁵⁵ There will not be any counteraction of wishes and desires among men.

³⁵⁹ Will you not have charity for the habits and opinions of all men? Will you not actively endeavour to do them good? Will you not patiently bear with their defects and infirmities? Herein consists the essence of philosophy; of sound morality; of true and genuine Christianity; of pure and undefiled religion. Without this, your professions of religion will be but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. *[end]*