

**A NEW VIEW OF SOCIETY: OR,
ESSAYS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE
FORMATION OF THE HUMAN
CHARACTER, AND THE APPLICATION
OF THE PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE**

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A new view of society: or, Essays on the principle of the formation of the Human Character, and the application of the principle to Practice by Robert Owen

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ROBERT OWEN

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A New Utiety of Society :

OR,

ESSAYS

ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE
FORMATION OF THE HUMAN CHARACTER,

AND

THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE

TO

PRACTICE.

" Any character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by applying certain means; which are to a great extent at the command and under the control, or easily made so, of those who possess the government of nations."

BY ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S JUSTICES OF PEACE FOR
THE COUNTY OF LANARK.

London :

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BY RICHARD TAYLOR AND CO., PRINTERS' COURT, SHOE LANE.

1813.

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TO

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, ESQ. M.P.

MY DEAR SIR,

In contemplating the public characters of the day, no one among them appears to have more nearly adopted in practice the principles which this Essay develops than yourself.

In all the most important questions which have come before the senate since you became a legislator, you have not allowed the mistaken considerations of sect or party to influence your decisions; so far as an unbiassed judgement can be formed of them, they appear to have been generally dictated by comprehensive views of human nature, and impartiality to your fellow-creatures. The dedication, therefore, of this Essay to you, I consider not as a mere compliment of the day, but rather as a duty which your benevolent exertions and disinterested conduct demand.

Yet permit me to say that I have a peculiar personal satisfaction in fulfilling this duty. My experience of human nature, as it is now trained, does not, however, lead me to expect that even your mind, without personal inspection, can instantaneously give credit to the full extent of the practical advantages which are to be derived

from an undeviating adherence to the principles displayed in the following pages. And far less is such an effect to be anticipated from the first ebullition of public opinion.

The proposer of a practice so new and strange must be content for a time to be ranked among the good kind of people, the speculatists and visionaries of the day, for such it is probable will be the ready exclamations of those who merely skim the surface of all subjects; exclamations however, in direct contradiction to the fact, that he has not brought the practice into public notice until he patiently for twenty years proved it upon an extensive scale, even to the conviction of inspecting incredulity itself.

And he is so content, knowing that the result of the most ample investigation and free discussion will prove to a still greater extent than he will yet state, the beneficial consequences of the introduction of the principles for which he now contends.

With confidence, therefore, that you will experience this conviction, and, when experienced, will lend your aid to introduce its influence into legislative practice, I subscribe myself, with much esteem and regard,

My dear Sir,

Your obliged and obedient Servant,

ROBERT OWEN.

New Lanark Mills.

ESSAY FIRST.

ON

The Formation of Character.

ACCORDING to the last returns under the Population Act, the poor and working classes of Great Britain and Ireland have been found to exceed twelve millions of persons, or nearly three fourths of the population of the British Islands.

The characters of these persons are now permitted to be very generally formed without guidance or direction, and, in many cases, under circumstances which *must* train them to the extreme of vice and misery, and of course render them the worst and most dangerous subjects in the empire; while the far greater part of the remainder of the community are educated upon the most mistaken principles of human nature, such indeed as cannot fail to produce a general conduct throughout society totally unworthy of the character of rational beings.

The first thus unhappily situated are the poor

and the uneducated profligate among the working classes, who are now trained to commit crimes, which they are afterwards *punished* for committing.

The second is the remaining mass of the population, who are now *instructed to believe*, or at least acknowledge, that certain principles are *unerringly true*, and to *act* as though they entertained the strongest conviction that they were *grossly false*; thus filling the world with *folly* and *inconsistency*, and making society, throughout all its ramifications, a scene of *insincerity*.

This state of matters has continued for a long period, its evils have been and are continually increasing, until they now cry aloud for efficient corrective measures, or general disorder must ensue.

“But,” say those who have not ^{deeply} investigated the subject, “attempts to apply remedies have been often made, and all of them have failed. The evil is now of a magnitude not to be controuled; the torrent is already too strong to be stemmed; and we can only wait with fear or calm resignation, to see it carry destruction in its course by confounding all distinctions of right and wrong.”

Such is the general language now held, and such are the general feelings on this most important subject,

These, however, if longer suffered to continue, must lead to the most lamentable consequences. Rather than pursue this course, it is surely deserving the attention of the legislators of the present day to make one grand and united effort; forgetting the petty and humiliating contentions of sects and parties, to investigate the subject to its foundation, and endeavour to arrest and overcome this mighty evil.

The chief object of these *Essays* is to assist and forward a measure of such vital importance to the well-being of this country, and of society in general throughout the world.

The view of the subject which is about to be given has arisen from extensive experience for upwards of twenty years, during which period its truth has been proved by multiplied experiments in practice. That the writer may not be charged with precipitation or presumption, when merely bringing forward the clear conviction, strongly felt, of one of the most important truths to which the human mind can be directed, he has had the principle and its

leading consequences, scrutinized, examined, and fully canvassed by some of the most learned, intelligent, and competent characters of the present day; who on every principle of duty and interest, if they had seen error in either, would have exposed it;—but who in lieu of this, readily acknowledged their incontrovertible truth and practical importance.

Assured, therefore, of his principles, he now proceeds, with a confidence not to be shaken by any opposition, and courts the most ample and free discussion on the subject; courts it for the sake of humanity, and in consideration of the misery of millions of his fellow creatures, who are at this instant experiencing sufferings, which, when they shall be unfolded in detail, will compel those who govern the world to exclaim, “Could these things exist and we have no knowledge of them?” But they do exist—and even the heart-rending statements which were exhibited to the public during the discussions on the West Indian negro-slavery do not exceed the afflicting scenes which, in various parts of the world, daily arise from the injustice of society to itself; from the inattention of mankind to the facts with which we are incessantly sur-