

NEW HARMONY.¹

DAVID STARR JORDAN, Stanford University, and AMOS W. BUTLER,
Indianapolis.

The Indiana Academy of Science celebrated from May 12 to 14 the Centennial Anniversary of Western Science in the town where scientific investigation in that region practically began. New Harmony lies in Posey County, the most southern of the 92 counties of Indiana. Posey County occupies the rich and level farming land of the southwest corner of the State, bounded on one side by the Ohio River, on another by the Wabash, the Ohio separating it from Kentucky, the Wabash from Illinois. On the east side, on the Wabash, is the village of New Harmony, with about 1,200 inhabitants, the scene of the great communistic experiment of Robert Owen, who was a prosperous mill owner, well known for his co-operative industrial effort at New Lanark, Scotland. Fertile soil, abundant water, salubrious climate, furnished a favorable setting.

A century and more ago the civilized world began to feel that the age of business competition was passing, and that a new social and industrial era was at hand. This was not the first time nor yet the last when ideal conditions seemed imminent in human relations. Franklin once indicated that if every one would work three hours a day at something useful, poverty would be banished and all men might spend the afternoon of each day and the whole afternoon of life amid the consolations of philosophy, the charms of literature or the delights of social intercourse. In the words of Robert Dale Owen, men "looked forward to the time when riches, because of their superfluity, would cease to be the end and aim of men's thoughts, plotting and lifelong stirring; when the mere possession of wealth would no longer confer distinction any more than does the possession of water, than which there is no property of greater worth."

With the same thought, the geologist, William Maclure, prominent in the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science, refusing to invest money in Philadelphia, asserted that "land in cities could no longer rise in value. The community system must prevail and in the course of a few years Philadelphia must be deserted and those who live long enough may come back here and see foxes looking out of the windows."

Entranced by these ideas, Robert Owen, of New Lanark in Scotland, successful author of various reforms, came to America to put his conceptions and experiences into practice. With Owen was associated William Maclure, one of the eminent geologists of the day and a friend of scientific men, many of whom he induced to join in a great humanitarian enterprise.

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The property at New Harmony was bought by Owen from George Rapp, the head of a celibate German communistic cult known as the "Economists." These then left Indiana to form a settlement in central Pennsylvania which they named Economy. Under Rapp's rule this experiment was financially successful because it was dominated by a single will. Both his ventures, in Indiana and in Pennsylvania, were ideal Theocracies, ruled autocratically under divine right. According to Rapp an angel appeared at his bedside every morning to direct what each member of the community should do each day.

At the foundation of New Harmony, Maclure and others came down the Ohio River on a boat named "The Philanthropist." This became locally famous as "The Boatload of Knowledge." It contained all the men of science whom the geologist was able to reach and influence. His plan was to build up in this community a School of Industry which should teach the "Conquest of Nature." Farmers should rise above the status of "tillers of the soil" to leading the land to do its best. A magazine was founded, called "The Disseminator of Useful Knowledge, Containing Hints to the Youth of the United States from the School of Industry." In "The Disseminator" appeared from time to time valuable articles from naturalist members of the community.

Thomas Say, one of the founders of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science, formerly a member of Long's Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, wrote learnedly on insects, birds and shells. Another pioneer naturalist, the French artist, Charles A. LeSueur, also came to New Harmony with the "Boatload of Knowledge." A friend of Cuvier, with an established reputation as naturalist and artist, he had been around the world on La Perousé's celebrated voyage. In the drawing and painting of animals he showed rare skill, and his woodcuts of the fishes of the Great Lakes are among the most lifelike ever published. It was he who painted the drop-curtain of the Community Hall. This represented Niagara Falls with "the other marvel of the New World," the rattlesnake, coiled beside it. Richard Owen was a favorite with LeSueur and once told Dr. Jordan how he used to wade barefoot in the bayous of the Wabash to gather mussel shells for the gifted naturalist. Three of the sons of Robert Owen—David Dale Owen, Robert Dale Owen and Richard Owen—were each highly gifted, David and Richard as geologists, Robert in literature and the humanities. Robert Dale Owen was long and favorably known as a charming writer, one of the group of essayists who early gave to the *Atlantic Monthly* its high literary character. As a member of the Indiana Legislature he had a large part in shaping the public school system of the State. David Dale, the second son, and Richard, the youngest of this remarkable family, were intimately associated throughout their lives. David, afterward the first United States geologist, was especially interested in fossils and minerals. He classified the great collection left by Maclure, which, with his own extensive accumulations, afterward formed the Owen Museum (of 85,000 specimens) of Indiana University, one of the largest displays of Paleozoic fossils in America until its partial destruction by fire in 1883. In 1886 a large part of this collection was sent to the United States National Museum,

in return for the re-identification and restoration of labels lost or destroyed by the fire. The only daughter of Robert Owen who came to America, Jane Dale Owen, a woman of much ability and of considerable scientific knowledge, married Robert H. Fauntleroy, astronomer and meteorologist in the service of the United States government. Upon his death he was succeeded by his son-in-law, Professor George Davidson, the well-known astronomer of the United States Coast Survey, who took up his abode for a time in New Harmony.

The New Harmony schoolmaster, Dr. Joseph Neef, was a blunt, plain spoken, honest man, a great favorite with his pupils. An Alsatian by birth, he had been priest, soldier and at the same time a mathematician of high ability—for a while, also, associate of Pestalozzi in his famous school at Yverdon, Switzerland. Pestalozzi once commended him as “an earnest, manly worker, who did not disdain to occupy himself with the elements of science.” Maclure met Neef in Paris, and brought him over to America. “It is my highest ambition,” said Neef, “to be a country school teacher amidst a hardy, vigorous community.” His two daughters both married Owens, the one David Dale, the other, Richard. Another who came on “The Philanthropist” was the Dutch scientist, Dr. Gerard Troost, who remained for some time, becoming state geologist of Tennessee.

Richard Owen was professor of natural science in Indiana University from 1863 to 1879, where Mr. Butler was one of his pupils. Dr. Jordan was chosen as Richard Owen’s successor. Owen was a man of broad scholarship and large sympathies as well as of courtly manners. Dr. Jordan gave a lecture in New Harmony with Dr. Owen in the chair. He was then very old and heard not a word which was said, but by watching the faces of the audience he was able to exhibit every appropriate shade of feeling for which the address seemed to call.

Many distinguished visitors came to New Harmony, among them Sir Charles Lyell, greatest of all geologists, who was once a guest of the Owens. Constantine Rafinesque, eccentric and ultra individualist, also passed that way “on foot, with a bundle of plants under which a peddler might groan.”

The New Harmony experiment, based on Communism, lasted but a short time. Its failure was in its economics; its successes in the study of nature. Some blamed Owen himself for his refusal to deed to the Community all its property. He chose to wait to see how it turned out. Common opinion asserts that it had “too many managers and too few workers.” Common ownership requires community of spirit. Drones and workers can not have equal access to honey cells, a fact that has many times been demonstrated. But from another point of view—that of common life among free spirits—“*Gemeingeist unter freien Geistern*”—the episode must be reckoned a great success. It marked the advent in the Middle West of serious work in science. More than any others, Owen and his sons were advance leaders in the progress. The beginning of the United States Geological Survey was the work of David Dale Owen, and till near the time of the Civil War, its actual headquarters were at New Harmony. The Brookville Natural History Society,

founded by Amos W. Butler in 1881, caught its first inspiration from Owen and Say and it was the chief influence in the founding of the Indiana Academy of Science in 1885.

After the failure of the Owen venture New Harmony continued as a center of scientific activity. The United States Geological Survey, the work of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey Meteorological Records and the libraries begun by William Maclure in New Harmony extended throughout the State. It was a training school for young geologists. Among those who worked there were Edward T. Cox, state geologist of Indiana; J. G. Norwood and A. H. Worthen, state geologists of Illinois; B. F. Shumard, state geologist of Texas; Dr. Robert Peters, Dr. Joseph Leidy, F. B. Meek and Leo Lesquereux.

It is fortunate that so much has been preserved for a century, that the Indiana Academy of Science has felt the urge to pay honor to the memory of these pioneers. For more and more, New Harmony is becoming a place of pilgrimage for the social scientist, the educator, the historian, the student of the natural and of the physical sciences and the tourist. A beaten pathway has been made to the door of New Harmony.