

CATECHISM

OF THE

RATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOCIETY,

AND

PROCLAMATION.

BY ROBERT OWEN.

Proclamation.

Know all Men, that the time is arrived, in the due order of nature, for a peaceable revolution in the mind and practice of the Human Race—a revolution most advantageous for all of every class in all countries.

The means to effect this beneficial change have been discovered; they exist in superfluity, except that there is not yet sufficient population upon the earth, to subdue it, and to make it so healthy and beautiful as to be the most desirable abode for full-formed rational men and women.

The means superabound in all nations, to make all good, wise, and happy,—that is, to well-form their characters, physically, mentally, morally, and practically; to well-employ; to well-govern; and to well-place them; and to unite them to create wealth annually for all, in great superfluity.

But before health can be secured to all, the overflowing rivers must be embanked,—the morasses must be drained,—the forests cut,—the seas restrained,—and the earth well cultivated.

The abodes of all must also be re-constructed, on healthy sites, with sufficient light and ventilation, and the means of perfect cleanliness, in order to remove existing corruptions, which produce cholera, fevers, and other infectious and destroying diseases.

Before these things can be perfected, population must mightily increase; and before they can be commenced in practice, the spirit of peace, charity, and love, must be introduced, and made universal.

But peace, charity, and love, are *effects*, which can emanate and become perpetual only through the existence of efficient causes; that is, from the knowledge, fully comprehended in all its perma-

nent illimitable beneficial consequences, of the great and glorious truth which is to regenerate the Human Race, by creating within them new minds and new feelings, from which will emanate new and superior conduct.

This all-glorious truth is—“*That the Great Creating Power of the Universe, called God, or Nature, creates all the natural faculties of Humanity; and combines them in different proportions, in each individual;—That, from the birth of each, these faculties are directed, wisely or foolishly, by Society;—And that, now, the means exist to enable Society to direct them wisely for all, through each succeeding generation.*”

The simple process to effect this change for mankind, is gradually, yet as rapidly as means will admit, to supersede the foolish and most irrational arrangements, with which the want of knowledge, arising from inexperience, has induced society, through all past ages to the present, to surround every one, from the sovereigns to the beggars.

This change in the condition of humanity, from contention and misery to unity and happiness, can be the most speedily and peaceably effected, by the populations of all countries, through their union and calm determination, inducing the existing Governments, whatever may be their form, to direct and accomplish the change.

The means by which this result may be effected with foresight, with order, in peace, and with incalculable permanent advantage to all, in every country, shall be immediately made known to the world, in outline and detail, in such manner that the knowledge of this now all-important subject shall be made plain to all who can comprehend facts and correct reasoning from them.

Catechism

OF THE RATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOCIETY.

Q. On what foundation is the Rational System of Society based?

A. On the fundamental principle that the character of man, before and after his birth, and through life, is formed for him, by the Creating Power of the Universe and by Society.

Q. What proof have you that the character of man is formed for him, previous and subsequent to birth?

A. It must be admitted that the Creating Power of the Universe, or God, or Nature, or by whatever name men are taught to call that incomprehensible Power which keeps the Universe in everlasting action, has created the general qualities of humanity for the human race; and has also created the peculiar combination of those general qualities possessed by each individual at birth, without the knowledge or control of the individual so created. Also, that from birth the born qualities of the individual become under the immediate direction of the local circumstances in which he comes into life, including the society which surrounds him; and that from these he receives his ideas, language, habits, manners, religion, and all which constitute his character as an individual of the human race. He is thus made by God and Society to feel, think, will, and act: having no power to do either, except as it has previously been given to him by God and Society. And thus is he the creature of those circumstances connected with his existence before birth, and of those which influence him from birth through life;—the individual having no power to feel, think, will, or act, except as it has previously been given to him by the power which created his qualities as an individual of the human race, and as these qualities have been wisely or unwisely directed by Society.

Q. Are these natural qualities of humanity good or bad?

A. Good, as formed by God or Nature.

Q. Has not the world been, and is not the world now, full of evil and misery?

A. Yes; and of evil and misery now daily increasing.

Q. Whence this evil and misery?

A. It proceeds from the ignorance or inexperience of man at his birth; although he has been born with the usual instincts to preserve life, and with powers peculiar to his race to acquire new knowledge by slow experience.

Q. Has man acquired the knowledge of the cause of the evils and misery which he has thus far suffered?

A. Yes; it is now just acquired; and also the knowledge how it may be removed, and superseded by the cause of goodness and happiness to the entire of the human race.

Q. What, then, is the cause of human evil and misery?

A. The erroneous belief, taught to all from their birth, that they form their own qualities or character, and are responsible for them to God and Society.

Q. How can such belief produce the evils and misery suffered by the human race?

A. Because this belief is inconsistent with the experience of mankind through their past history; and is contrary to the great facts, in relation to the formation of human character, which have been stated; and, therefore, is not true. In consequence of this error, the character of all individuals has been mis-formed from birth; and Society, through all its ramifications, has been misconstrued.

Q. To what extent have the character of mankind and Society been mis-formed, through this error?

A. This error has made all so irrational as to call, and believe, evil to be good, and good evil; and, although they have previously created it, to praise and reward the evil, and to cling to it through life to death;—and to avoid the good—to reject, despise, and punish it. And, thus, has Society over the earth been made false, deceitful, disunited, and opposed to the interest and happiness of every one; and human life artificial and wretched, compared with that which it will become when men shall be made rational in mind and conduct; that is, when “the mind shall be born again in spirit and in truth,” by being reformed, on the new and true fundamental principle, in its ideas, and associations of ideas. In short, by this error, Society has been mis-formed to an extent quite incredible to those who are under the influence of the supposition that man forms his own character; because, Society being constructed on this false formation, it has required error upon error, continually increasing through every succeeding generation, to support and maintain the fundamental error upon which

it has been based. In consequence, Society, as it now exists, has attained such confusion of theories and practice, that it cannot be much longer maintained, without falling into universal anarchy.

Q. How is the evil of this fundamental error, in mis-forming the character of the human race and mis-constructing Society, to be overcome?

A. By no other means than by governments and people openly abandoning the false fundamental principle on which the entire fabric of Society has been built from the beginning, and permitting all the injurious practices which have emanated from that principle gradually to cease, and quietly to die their natural death; and by governments and people as openly adopting the true fundamental principle, on which alone a good and superior character can be formed, and on which alone a good and superior Society can be created and permanently established. These changes alone can create permanent progress, prosperity, and happiness, to the human race.

Q. If the permanent progress, prosperity, and happiness, of the human race, depend upon the abandonment of one false notion and its consequent practices, and the adoption of one fundamental true principle, and its consequent practices—the false notion being opposed to this great fundamental true principle—how is it that this great truth has been so long hidden from the human race?

A. Because the false notion had been the first imagined, and believed, without doubt, by our inexperienced, early ancestors; whose minds being young and undeveloped, were formed on that base, and all their ideas and associations of ideas, language, habits, customs, institutions, and practices, emanated from this error. In consequence, errors have been continued and increasing through every succeeding generation, to the present period. But now, when the mind is more experienced and developed, the errors of these proceedings have become so glaring, and the evils so extended and unbearable, that a longer continuance of them is impracticable.

Q. Why do you say that a longer continuance of this error and its consequent evil practices, is no longer possible?

A. Because it is a law of nature that man shall perpetually progress, and be forced into right paths by the always-increasing pain produced by continuing in the wrong, until he shall be forced to abandon the one and adopt the other. This old system of error and evil now creates so much pain and misery to the multitude, and such fear of danger in those who inflict the pain and misery, that all will soon desire the change, that they may enjoy in peace the full happiness of their nature, when they shall thus be made to become rational in mind and conduct.

Q. But if the minds of all from birth have been based on this fundamental error, and all their ideas, associations of ideas, habits, customs, institutions, and practices, have emanated from it—

and as men are so much the creatures of habit, produced by previous surrounding circumstances—by what means can this great change be made in the mind, habits, and practices of the human race?

A. By Nature's own means. By one or more individuals discovering the true cause of the error and its evils, and their true remedy; and by the knowledge of the true remedy creating a new mind and a new spirit in those who are enabled to make the discovery.

Q. How can this discovery create a new mind and spirit?

A. Because this discovery will imbue them with such unceasing kindness and charity for their fellow-men—who, they perceive, are in bondage to error, crimes, and misery—that they will ultimately, by patience and perseverance, succeed in opening their minds so as to enable them to perceive the cause of, and the remedy for, the irrational and wretched condition of humanity as existing at this day over the earth.

Q. Do you believe that this period is approaching, and that the change from the false and evil system to the true and good, is now practicable?

A. From the anarchy, confusion, and misery of all nations—from the dissatisfaction of the multitude in countries the most civilised—and from the apprehended danger of the rulers of the people, whatever may be the form of government—it is probable that this is the period, according to the laws of Nature, when the change shall become practicable, and when the desire for it shall become universal and irresistible.

Q. Can the change be made from the one system to the other, in peace, with foresight, in order, and without the delay of many years; so that the present generation may witness its progress, and enjoy some of its many promised advantages?

A. The abandonment by the authorities of the world of the fundamental error, and the adoption of the fundamental truth, which have been stated, and both of which must soon become unavoidable, will hasten the commencement of this change, and will make it practicable to effect it with foresight, gradually, in peace, with order, and with the good-will of all; and to make such progress with it, that the present generation shall enjoy many preliminary advantages, and shall be enabled to advance them greatly for the next and all succeeding generations.

Q. Can you explain the practical steps by which, in the due order of Nature, the change can be the most easily and speedily effected, without disturbing existing Society?

A. Yes; by gradually effecting the change, without disturbing Society as it is, except by improving the condition of all parties, through the period while the change is in progress.

Q. Explain how this greatest of all changes can be made, in the manner stated, without injury to any.

A. Firstly, the change from the false to the

true—from the evil to the good—will be essentially and permanently advantageous to every one; and, secondly, all will willingly act for their own advantage, when they understand how it can be accomplished. Therefore, by giving instruction to the directing minds of Society, in the genuine spirit of charity and kindness, and continuing it with patience and perseverance, they may be taught to comprehend this subject in principle, and how they may apply the principle to practice; and when they shall have been so instructed, they may easily teach those whose minds they direct, by the exhibition of the practice, and of the happy results which it will produce.

Q. Whom do you consider to be the directing minds of Society?

A. On the one side, those who by their position are now placed at the head of the civil and ecclesiastical governments of the most powerful nations, and who are endeavouring to maintain things as they are; and, on the other, the most popular of their opponents, who are equally urgent to advance to some other condition of Society.

Q. How do you expect to unite these violently opposing parties in changing the present system of Society for another, the reverse in principle and practice, when neither now desire any such change?

A. By convincing both parties of their present error; and inducing each to abandon their false views, and to agree to promote another system, based on truth, and consistent in principle and practice, which shall be greatly more beneficial for all, of every party.

Q. How is a general conviction of the truth and benefit of the new proposed system to be produced?

A. By the system being fully placed in principle and practice before the world, without mystery, or mixture of error, either in its outline or in the detail.

Q. But will not such change require the aid of great physical force, to oppose the armies and navies enlisted in the support of old errors and of things as they are?

A. Physical force, anger, violence, and wars, will never effect the change to a true and rational state of human existence, or convince ignorance and inexperience of their error. The truth must be openly and fully stated to the world, in the genuine spirit of charity and kindness; and reiterated, again and again, with untiring patience and perseverance. With these weapons—having the laws of Nature for the foundation, the principles in accordance with all facts, and the practice permanently the most beneficial for all—the victory over error, in due time, will be certain and complete. Truths which are, and are made evidently to appear to be, for the advantage of every one, and when taught to mankind—not in a sectarian spirit of opposition to class, or sect, or

party, or even country—but with an evident love for the entire family of man, will prevail over all obstacles, however formidable these may at first appear. And these measures can now alone allay the wild fury of ignorance, which threatens to overthrow all nations, by opposing parties attempting by violence and gross injustice to destroy each other, making life and property insecure, and rendering the enjoyment of existence by rich or poor impracticable.

Q. Will not the introduction of these new principles into practice, create great confusion throughout Society, and destroy the property of the rich, and such comfort and happiness as they now possess?

A. No. There need not be any confusion or destruction of property, or even disturbance of the present rich; although their riches have been so far obtained through the hard labour and misery of the poor.

Q. But how do you reconcile the retention of this wealth with the injustice of its acquisition?

A. Because the rich are rich, and the poor are poor, by the circumstances, not of their own creation, in which both have been placed from birth. If their circumstances had been reversed, the poor would have been the rich, and the rich would have been the poor. Both are, therefore, blameless, for their present position; and both, by being placed in these—now especially—unfortunate circumstances, require sympathy and help to better re-place them.

Q. That is now what is required in practice. But how is this great and difficult change to be effected with the willing consent of all parties, differing so much as they do, in mind, means, and position?

A. By new placing—and, when understood, better, far better, re-placing—all.

Q. Why do you expect such great results from merely re-placing the population of the world?

A. Because the Creating Power of the Universe has made man to be influenced to good or evil, and to experience happiness or misery, by the kind and quality of the circumstances in which Society shall place him from his birth through life.

Q. What power has Society to create good or bad, inferior or superior circumstances?

A. It has now great power, by possessing the most ample means to create a new combination of good and superior circumstances, in which, gradually, to well-place all of the human race.

Q. Would not this creation of these new good and superior circumstances, require an expenditure of funds more than any nation could supply?

A. With a full knowledge of the subject, the gradual creation of the requisite superior circumstances will be, by far, the most economical arrangement for forming and governing the populations of all countries; and the means of supplying the funds, in superfluity, can be easily provided.

Q. Would not these extensive new measures

require a long period before they could benefit Society, while the suffering populations of all countries stand in need of immediate relief?

A. These measures, if understood by governments, and immediately acted upon by them, would give more *immediate and general relief* to the suffering poor, and to all classes, than any of the petty or temporary plans of relief which have been yet proposed for adoption.

Q. This requires explanation; first, how are the governments to acquire this knowledge?

A. By the people giving it to them in an efficient manner, and in a right spirit; and making it appear to be, as it is, the interest of the governments to put these measures into immediate practice.

Q. Would it not be difficult to enable the governments to know how to introduce a practice so new to them and to the population of the world?

A. No. The practice required is, *to devise new arrangements to produce and distribute wealth, to form character, and to govern locally and generally, in the best manner*; that is, to create new and superior arrangements for the most easy, direct, and economical government of the human race, in the best manner for all, without exception. And this will now be done, because it will prove to be the only substantial permanent relief that Society can receive; and because it will be in accordance with Nature's laws, and, therefore, in accordance with human feelings, and most beneficial for every one.

Q. What causes have arisen to make this great change in the condition of Society now so immediately necessary and unavoidable?

A. The progress in the acquirement of the knowledge of facts, and of the laws of Nature;—the increasing poverty and sufferings of the poor;—the increasing riches and cruel injustice of the wealthy;—and the sudden breaking out of this last French revolution, with the profound ignorance of those who deem it their interest to oppose it;—and, especially, the enormously-rapid increase of mechanical and chemical scientific productive power, limiting to an incalculable extent the necessity for manual labour, and rendering, not only useless, but highly injurious, the slavery or servitude of any portion of the human family, in any part of the world.

Q. What causes have occurred to make this regeneration of the mind of man and re-construction of Society now so easy, when previously both have been impracticable?

A. The discovery of "*the science of the overwhelming influence of circumstances, for good or evil, over the human race*," developing the knowledge how to create the good, and to supersede the evil circumstances around all, so as to make the family of man good, wise, united, and happy; and the attainment of the knowledge how pro-

perly to apply the newly-acquired scientific powers of production, to render wealth, by means that will give pleasure to all, everywhere abundant for all.

Q. Will not this new machinery for accomplishing the whole business of society be too complicated for the population of the world to understand how to construct it, direct it, and keep it in permanent order and repair.

A. By basing Society on the fundamental principle of truth, and making it, throughout, consistent with that principle, it will become so simple as to be easily understood, constructed, kept in order and permanent repair, and also made to govern itself, justly and most beneficially for every one.

Q. What nations are the most likely, or the best prepared, to commence this change with foresight, with order, in peace, and to set an example to the world of the first rational state of human existence?

A. The British and the North American Empires are greatly the best prepared, and are now in a most favourable condition and position to commence this change, to progress with it, and to induce and assist all nations to follow their example.

Q. Will the British and American Governments listen to such a proposal, and adopt it?

A. Yes. As soon as a majority of the population of these countries can unite, in the spirit of charity and kindness, to desire the change; and will apply, in this spirit, to their respective governments to effect this change, through the existing government machinery, in a manner not unjustly or injuriously to any. As soon as this can be done, it will be so evidently for the interest of these governments to meet the thus expressed desires of the people, that the request will be, with satisfaction to all, readily granted.

Q. But must a majority of both populations apply to their respective governments, before these governments will make the change?

A. Until the majority of a nation shall desire this change, it would be as unreasonable and unjust to expect it from the governments, as it would be in the governments to comply with such request.

Q. What could governments do to change the system of society from its past and present fundamental principle of error—an error opposed to all facts, and which has produced so much ignorance, falsehood, deception, disunion, poverty, injustice, crime, and misery—to another system, based on a fundamental principle in accordance with all facts, and which will produce knowledge, truth, honesty, union, wealth, justice, goodness, and happiness universally?

A. They could easily adopt measures to convince their respective populations that it would be

greatly for the permanent well-being, interest, and happiness of themselves, their children, and their children's children, through all coming generations, to effect the change in principle immediately, and in practice, as speedily as a wise foresight will admit.

Q. What would be the general result of this change in principle and practice?

A. That the populations of all countries would be speedily changed into rational beings; that is, would be made to begin to feel, think, will, and act, rationally; and then they would be soon made to become good, wise, and happy—the ultimate object of human existence

Q. Whence your conviction that the knowledge of the fact “that the character of man is formed for him and not by him,” will produce the wonderful—not to say miraculous—change in man and society?

A. Because that knowledge will create a new mind and new feelings in all, and will regenerate man into a new life, in which truth will become the universal language of humanity; for no motive will exist to express a falsehood, in look, word, or action; and all will be as honest and straightforward in their practice as in their language, and suspicion of evil in any one will become unknown; and the human countenance will become rational, and will express so strongly that universal confidence, that all will feel and act upon it.

Q. You have said that this fundamental principle will advance society to that state in which there will be, over the world, but one nation or family, having one interest, using one language only, and having but one object, namely, to increase the excellence and happiness of each other? Why should there be but one language, and if but one, will there not be a difficulty among contending nations to determine what that language shall be?

A. The immense advantages of one language have been long perceived and desired; but with the endless causes of disunion, and of all manner of irrationalities, created by the erroneous fundamental principle “that man forms his own character,” it was hopeless to expect that union upon such a subject can ever be attained. It has, therefore, remained only as the wish of those who have been made to be the least irrational through past ages. But as soon as society shall be based on its true fundamental principle, then, disunion upon any obviously beneficial practical measure for the human race, will be as impossible, as, under the existing system, the union of mankind upon any general subject, ever has been, now spoken by the two most advanced and powerful of nations, and their language being at present the most widely spread over the earth, the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons will be the most easily introduced, and will be readily adopted, under natural improvements, by all people. By the discovery of the Electric Telegraph—a discovery made also by these two nations—a ready daily communication with every

one of the proposed new arrangements, when they shall extend over the world, may be easily established.

Q. What other practical measures will be required from the governments?

A. To make the new arrangements requisite to insure the creation of wealth sufficient for all, and of a superior physical, mental, moral, and practical character for all.

Q. Is it the business of governments to form arrangements to create wealth and character for all?

A. It is their chief and almost their only business; for the creation of character and wealth will necessarily include the whole practical arrangements of society.

Q. To effect this change, is to rebuild and recreate society;—how will the governments find the money and means to carry on such extensive operations?

A. As soon as the false fundamental principle shall be openly abandoned, and the true fundamental principle as openly adopted, society will speedily become rational; and, as soon as they are made rational, they will discover that the people everywhere possess within themselves the means to effect this change speedily over the earth; and by a rational circulating medium, which can be made as universal as labour and intellect, the real producers of all wealth will be everywhere independent of any metal circulating medium.

Q. What will be that circulating medium?

A. *National Bank Notes*, as long as any circulating medium can be required, which necessity will not long continue.

Q. Could not the Organization of Labour, as the phrase is, effect a more immediate beneficial change for the working classes?

A. No. It is an illusion—a will-o'-the-wisp—calculated to lead all parties far from the object intended.

Q. How can this be, when it is so popular with the working men and their leaders?

A. Because the minds of both are barren of true associations of ideas; and, consequently, have been unable to dive to the foundation of this subject. The Organization of Labour, as proposed by the good and talented Louis Blanc, under the other existing arrangements of society, will withdraw the present suffering from some of the now unemployed, and give it to an equal number of the now employed; and will ultimately create greater confusion and suffering throughout society than already exist; and (except on the principle that the worse the better, as likely to produce a more immediate general beneficial change) it had better be abandoned, and a wise direction given at once to the business of life.

Q. Would not the *trades* be benefited by the introduction of this popular system of the Organization of Labour?

A. No. They would be injured by it; and their minds would be more and more stultified.

Q. How has it become so popular as to induce those friends of the working class who belong to other classes, to lend great aid to introduce it?

A. Because all who are anxious to improve the condition of the working or any other class, as society is constituted, are, like drowning men, eager to catch at any straw. Not knowing the cause of, or the remedy for, the evils of society they have no chart to guide them to the object they benevolently seek.

Q. Why is the Organization of Labour, then, a delusion?

A. Because there are two preliminary measures to be acquired, both in precept and practice, before anything respecting the Organization of Labour can be understood?

Q. Explain those two measures.

A. The first is the organization of the human mind; and without which society must remain, as heretofore, an enigma to all parties. And the second is, the organization of society; which is now, also, an enigma to all parties.

Q. What will the organization of the human mind effect for mankind?

A. It will from birth fill the brain of all with consistent ideas only—all in accordance with ascertained facts, and, consequently, all true; the language of the world in look, word, and action, will become the language of truth only; and the conduct of all, open, frank, honest, and straightforward. It will pervade the whole being with charity and love for the human race, and with kind feelings, as far as practicable, for all that has life; and contests between man and man will

cease for ever. When the human mind shall be rationally organized, all will be trained from birth to have their never-ceasing pleasure in promoting the progress, excellence, and happiness of the human race; and their whole proceedings will be rational through the lives of all.

Q. What will the organization of society effect for mankind?

A. It will at once apply the sciences to become the most faithful and efficient slaves and servants of the human race. It will make all into full-formed rational men and women, who will be always occupied in a superior manner; who will give a wise direction to the illimitable powers of science, and will make a continual progress in inventing new applications of these powers; and who will regard and know the world to be their inalienable estate, which they will highly cultivate and beautify, so as always to superabound in all things necessary for their happiness. But it will make no more mere tailors, shoemakers, weavers, cotton-spinners, needle-women, or any such mere fractions of irrational animals.

Q. Are there, then, to be no higher and lower classes in society in succeeding generations?

A. All such divisions of society are most irrational, and deeply injurious to all. There will be but one class throughout society; all noble, rational, well-informed, equal in education and condition, without artificial distinctions, and all in the full enjoyment of a rational existence; surrounded alone by superior external objects, and always under the influence of superior circumstances, which will make and keep all superior.

The Five Fundamental Facts

ON WHICH THE RATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOCIETY IS BASED.

1st. That man is a *compound being*, whose character is formed of his constitution or organization at birth, and of the effects of external circumstances upon it, from birth to death; such original organization and external influences continually acting and reacting each upon the other.

2nd. That man is compelled by his original constitution to receive his *feelings* and his *convictions* independently of his *will*.

3rd. That his *feelings*, or his *convictions*, or both of them united, create the motive to action called

the *will*, which stimulates him to act, and decides his actions.

4th. That the organization of no two human beings is ever precisely similar at birth, nor can art subsequently form any two individuals, from infancy to maturity, to be the same.

5th. That, nevertheless, the constitution of every infant, except in case of organic disease, is capable of being formed or matured either into a *very inferior*, or a *very superior* being, according to the qualities of the external circumstances allowed to influence that constitution from birth.