FRANCES WRIGHT D'ARUSMONT:
CASE STUDY OF A REFORMER

DISSERETATION

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Frances Wright was a minor reformer of the Jacksonian era who espoused causes that invariably failed, and is noted primarily for being the first woman to lecture publicly to mixed audiences of males and females. Labelled an infamous radical by many of her contemporaries, she has been described more sensibly if not more courteously by recent historians. Two biographies of her have been written in the twentieth century that record the major events and activities of her life.¹ To engage in further study of a relatively unimportant figure seems to require some explanation.

A new biography of Frances Wright, feminist and reformer, offers an opportunity to develop and to test new methods for understanding the process of an individual's social and intellectual development and the commitment to certain ideological positions and forms of behavior in a particular historical period. Wright is especially attractive because her development reveals concerns, interests, and problems less well-known women may have faced in the early nineteenth century, while her notoriety guaranteed that a record of her activities

¹William Randall Waterman, Frances Wright (New York, 1924), stressed Wright's political activities in a scholarly monograph. A. J. G. Perkins and Theresa Wolfson, Frances Wright Free Enquirer: The Study of a Temperament (New York, 1939), pretends to be a psychological study, although the analysis consists of a liberal use of the term passionate as descriptive of Wright's friendships, hatreds, and activities.
would be kept. Her large output of fictional and prose writing allows for a more thorough analysis of her personality development than would be the case with less prolific public figures. Her involvement with a number of reform efforts—antislavery, communitarian, educational, and anti-monopoly—offers a chance to determine what concerns linked a variety of reform interests within the mind and career of at least one person. A study of Wright, then, is useful for isolating factors which may reveal more about the lives of other women, other reformers, and the attraction of certain sorts of reform in one era.

The insights to be used in analyzing Wright's development and activities are taken from Karl Mannheim's theory of sociology and Erik Erikson's system of psychoanalysis. Mannheim's value is to remind historians that choices exist among ideological elements at any given historical period and that the selection of certain elements is the result of environmental factors or the needs of a particular group and is not necessarily dependent on the logical consistency or superiority of the ideas chosen. Eriksonian analysis offers a theory of personality development which may reveal particular concerns and interests that motivate one reformer to support or to formulate the program he does.

The necessity for describing a theoretical framework to use in the study of Wright may not be apparent, unless it is recognized that most studies of reformers and reform in early nineteenth-century America have not done so. In fact, debate over whether it is legitimate or useful for the historian to bind himself with social science theories and how the choice is to be made among
theories, even within psychology, is still in progress. Too often descriptions are offered in such a way as to imply that they are explanations, and explanations are offered in such an offhand manner that the experiences of one person or group cannot be related to those of another. A survey of the literature on the enthusiastic period of nineteenth-century reform will clarify the weaknesses involved in working without a consciously articulated framework.

The first sort of description-explanation of reform movements in the nineteenth century attributes them to intellectual influences pervasive during the period. Typical and compressed is the statement by Russell B. Nye:

The reform movement had deep roots at home and abroad. Nineteenth-century Americans were direct heirs of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, with its tradition of natural rights, human equality, and human perfectability. The Declaration of Independence guaranteed every man a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The Romantic movement reinforced the bequest of "natural rights." . . .

On another level, the Perfectionists who followed the great evangelist Charles Grandison Finney added their reinforcement to reform.2

The inspiration for specific reform movements has been found in various of these strands, although there has been disagreement about which influence fits with which movement. The most controversial movement of the period, militant abolitionism of the Eastern or Western variety, has been attributed to two of the ideological strands. Gilbert Hobbs Barnes' classic, The Anti-Slavery

Impulse, 1830-1844, describes how "[Charles Grandison Finney] left groups of young men emancipated from sin and Calvinism and overflowing with benevolence for unsaved mankind."³ The greatest of these young men was Theodore Dwight Weld, whose career of leadership in abolitionist agitation Barnes then recounts.

In a much different vein, Stanley Elkins describes the Eastern abolitionists as captive to ideas and the logic of certain ideological positions—not because ideas are necessarily primary, but because no institutional obligations mediated the free play and influence of ideas during the period before the Civil War. Elkins sees the main ideas influencing the Eastern abolitionists as the radical individualism of the Declaration of Independence and the belief in human perfection, whether from a religious or Romantic-Transcendentalist source.

Admittedly the focus of Elkins' argument is not to prove the primacy of ideas in sparking reform movements; but after he finishes showing the alternatives a socially oriented, non-ideological reformer might have taken, ideas are all that are left to the nineteenth-century abolitionist. Elkins makes the bias explicit in tying (hanging might be more appropriate) the abolitionists with the Transcendentalists. For "if intellectual cues for the solution of social problems were to come from anywhere, one supposes that it would be from within such a circle as this [Transcendentalist one]."⁴

The impetus for communitarian reform has also been found in ideas, either of an eighteenth-century secular origin or of individualist-perfectionist origin. A British historian argues that "Owenite philanthropy was predominately secular. . . . [It] was part of an earlier tradition, rooted in the humanistic values of the Enlightenment."\(^5\)

Implicitly stressing the importance of the idea for communitarian efforts, John L. Thomas points out that while "the concentrated antitheocratic attacks of Robert Owen and his secular followers [were] purportedly atheistic and environmentalist, in reality [they were] Christian in spirit and perfectionist in method." They were simply part of "the transformation of American theology . . . [which] released the very forces of romantic perfectionism that conservatives most feared."\(^6\)

The major work on utopian communities, Arthur Eugene Bestor's Backwoods Utopias, also argues for the religious character of the "communitarian ideal," which developed in America from "the religious theology of the radical Protestant sects that arose in the Reformation."\(^7\) Bestor, however, is one of the first students of reform to relate the influence of ideas to particular


social needs. The communitarian scheme held appeal in the 1820's, he briefly argues, "because alternative methods of social reform appeared to have reached a dead end during this particular period." Although he does not attempt to prove this assertion, this is at least a recognition of the fact that ideas are not simply disembodied influences.

Studies which suggest that ideas may be accepted and developed so as to fit the needs of a particular group in a particular historical setting are rare. Most of them are of recent appearance, and they seek mainly to explain how and why conservatives accepted only parts of certain ideals, not why the reformers accepted the ideas they did. If, for example, John L. Thomas is correct in his argument that Owenite communitarianism and Christian perfectionism are part of the same ethos, why didn't Frances Wright and other Owenites recognize this, instead of continually making attacks on clerics and the evangelists who led the perfectionist revivals? The categorization is so broad that it obscures real differences. Further, how can Bestor say that the communitarian ideal was accepted because the other two models for reform--revolution and liberal individualism--seemed discredited by events immediately previous to the 1820's? Certainly, as Marvin Meyers has demonstrated, the promise of individual liberalism to effect human improvement enjoyed a resurgence in the public rhetoric of the Jacksonian period.9

8 Ibid., p. 7.

9 The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief (New York, 1960). Meyers' work does demonstrate the conformance of ideas to social needs, in
The exceptional works which point out more specific relationships between a group's needs and the adoption of a certain ideological position generally describe the group's response to an attack on its position or actions. Aileen Kraditor's work on militant abolitionists demonstrates how tactical considerations affected the ideological arguments used by and for women in the group.

Leonard L. Richards, examining the "Gentlemen of Property and and Standing," whom abolitionists charged with leading anti-abolitionist mobs, argues that particular sorts of businessmen and professionals became more strongly committed to the colonization solution as they defined their principles this case the need of Jacksonian America to justify its acquisitiveness in light of its Jeffersonian professions, but does so on such a broad scale that one wonders why everyone didn't support the Jacksonians and their jeremiads for exorcising the fear of a fall into materialism.

Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (New York, 1967). Chapter 3, "The Woman Question," demonstrates the major point of disagreement between the Garrisonians and their opponents within the abolitionist movement, a point which was most forcefully raised by the issue of women's participating equally with men in the movement. The immediate issue for the Garrisonians was one of the tactical importance of maintaining consistency; "unless they demonstrated that the biblical arguments used against women's speaking were similar to those used against the Negro's equality, they would be undermining the abolitionist rationale itself." (44) The anti-Garrisonian response was that consistency (which they did not have themselves) was not important if avowal of the principle meant antagonizing moderates who might otherwise be converted to abolitionism. The issue illuminated more than tactical differences, however. The Garrisonian tactic resulted from a commitment to human rights in all spheres; the anti-Garrisonian tactic resulted from the belief of that group that American society was basically sound and required only the removal of slavery to become perfect. Kraditor is interested only in the intellectual arguments within the movement, not the reasons why particular men were on one side or the other; the implication of the study, however, is that ideas are related to group needs, not to some immanent logic.
in opposition to those of immediatist abolitionists, who represented a threatening overturn in the social order.

The abolitionists . . . included among their ranks a greater percentage not only of manufacturers and tradesmen but also of British-born manufacturers and tradesmen. The rioters, on the other hand, were more likely to be high ranking commercial and professional men of old American stock, deeply aware of their place in society. 11

Men of old American stock supported colonization on the basis of maintaining racial purity as basic to the maintenance of an acceptable social order, but they became even more strongly committed when it seemed the most effective barrier against abolitionist demands for emancipation and a radical transformation of the social structure in America.

Clifford S. Griffin begins his monograph, Their Brothers' Keepers, Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865, with a brief account of the development of principles of benevolence and trusteeship in American society from the Puritan strain infused into American religion. Such principles came to hold peculiar meaning and value, however, for certain groups in the Jacksonian era.

The trustees [wealthy men and men becoming wealthy through business, finance, and the law] believed they would suffer if men playing lesser roles on the great American stage did not respect their economic and social obligations, and if American voters did not choose proper men as rulers. Religion and morality, as dispensed by the benevolent societies throughout the seemingly chaotic nation, became a means of establishing secular order. 12

The second major type of explanation for reform has three strands, but it relates the appearance of reform basically to changes in environmental


conditions. The first, and oldest, view stressed the advance of the frontier and industry, with the opportunities they offered and the examples they presented of individual initiative and success in conquering a new world. Ralph Gabriel, Merle Curti, and Alice Felt Tyler follow this form, although it is unclear whether the impetus for reform was given by example, by inspiration, or by disorganization resulting from rapid changes in the way people lived.

The second and more specific environmental approach attributes the appearance of reform sentiment to rapid changes taking place in the society, but seeks to show where particular tensions within traditional institutions might elicit reform energies. The approach leads to a clearer understanding of the fact that reform could be double-edged, designed either to adjust institutions to maintain the order under attack or to adapt them to a new order.

The disestablishment of the church and the rapid movement of population into areas not served by churches would elicit the efforts of Eastern

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13 The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York, 1940) argues that Americans believed in the progress of the free individual towards fulfillment of God's moral order, a feeling which arose due to the "advance of the frontier and . . . the expansion of industry" in a country freed from the threat of external enemies. (11)

14 The Growth of American Thought (New York, 1943) posits that "plain people" were more important in the 1830's and 1840's because of "the advance of political and social democracy which in turn owed much to the continued growth of the West, the advance of industries and cities, [and] the coming of immigrants on a striking scale." (295)

15 Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860 (Minneapolis, 1944) sees the reformer as a "product of evangelical religion, . . . and dynamic frontier democracy," (2) one who functioned in an environment in which "an expanding West, . . . growing industrialization and urbanization in the East, new means of communication and transportation, new marvels of invention and science, and advance in the mechanization of industry, . . . were dislocating influences." (1)
clergymen to instill traditional morality through the agencies of the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, the American Home Missionary Society, and the American Tract Society, all of which created an example for anti-traditional perfectionists. Whitney Cross' work on The Burned-Over District shows how the techniques used and excitement aroused by the American Home Missionary Society opened the upstate New York area for perfectionist harvesters.

The fear of disorder resulting from rapid change lay behind reform in the treatment of criminals, the insane, and the poor, according to David B. Rothman. Americans, faced with demographic, political, social, and economic transformations that threatened a breakdown of all social influences sought; the causes of individual deviancy and (under the influence of Lockian psychology) located them within the environment. At the same time, their faith in human improvement led them to believe that deviants could be re-formed. Coupling a pessimistic evaluation of the present social influences on human development with hope for the beneficial influences of a proper environment, reformers created the institution or asylum to cure America's ills. The asylum would

16 Thomas, "Romantic Reform," p. 657. It is interesting that Thomas traces the conservative reform impulse to the interests of recognizable groups, but ignores the issue for those espousing its radical offshoot.

17 (Ithaca, 1950). Chapter 7, "Yorker Benevolence," concludes that "Sunday-school pupils, temperance advocates, and Antimasons all had a training in religious enthusiasm which would make them easy targets in the next revival." (137) I have not treated the Cross study more thoroughly, because, while he does demonstrate the economic and social conditions which might underlie mass enthusiasm, he does not worry about the problem of how particular ideas are related to these conditions.
remove deviants from the disorderly environment which had infected them and
instill self-discipline by enforcing an orderly, precise routine of life.

Rothman's conclusion that reformers "conceived of proper individual behavior
and social relationships only in terms of a personal respect for authority and
tradition and an acceptance of one's station in the ranks of society," 18 raises
the question of which men or groups would favor such a goal.

Conservative attempts to maintain order generated opposition from
those who might have accepted moderate change. David Brion Davis argues
that the position of immediatism adopted by militant American abolitionists in
1830 was a response to the hostile environment in which antislavery advocates
functioned, as well as a logical development from earlier antislavery thought.
Faced with complete resistance to even the most moderate reform, critics of
slavery whose sense of the absolute sinfulness of the institution had been mod-
erated by a belief in inevitable progress, were left to emphasize only its sinful
character. Further, slavery in America was so intimately connected with
political institutions and the distribution of power among the sections that those
committed to order would disavow immediatism from a "fear of disunion and
anarchy." 19

18. The Discovery of the Asylum. Social Order and Disorder in the New
República (Boston, 1971).

19."The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery
Likewise, Rush Welter's study of *Popular Education and Democratic Thought* in America emphasizes that the workingmen's parties which formed the main support for democratic education advocated a new concept of public education, one strikingly different from what he styles the republican conception prevailing at the time. In opposition to those who wanted education to support authority, "their theory called for a popular education that could abridge—not enhance—the authority of established leaders of the society."  

The third environmental explanation is to credit immoral conditions in American society with eliciting a desire for change. Thus, James McPherson sees "the abolitionist movement [as] essentially a direct response to the existence of slavery in America."  

Eleanor Flexner believes that the women's movement "grew naturally out of the unsatisfactory position of women in a changing world," although it required the impetus of the rejection of women delegates at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 to create an organization. Helen L. Sumner argues that "the cause of the awakening [of American wage-earners] was economic and political inequality between citizens of different classes, not primarily between employers and wage-earners, but between 'producers' and 'consumers.'"

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The environmental historians rarely explain the connection between environment and reform thought and action. Kraditor and Sumner offer two examples of attempts to do so. Kraditor's argument that women were forced to argue for their rights in the form they did because of the close connection of women's movement leaders with the abolitionists indicates that logical consistency may be necessary between two groups drawing support from each other. Helen Sumner's conclusion that it was not surprising "that it was through politics that the wage-earning class attempted to register its first protest," because the main evils facing working men seemed to be "laws or judicial practices which bore unequally upon the rich and the poor," implies that groups will attempt to reform the structures that are perceived as directly harming them.

The third major form of explanation for the reform impulses of the early nineteenth century relates them to psychological needs of the leaders and participants, though usually only in an unsystematic manner. The militant abolitionists, especially, have evoked such interpretations, usually framed in such a way as to discredit their stability if not their cause.

The severest psycho-sociological indictment has been made by David Donald in his influential work, Lincoln Reconsidered. Essays on the Civil War Era. Associating a certain psychological state with a particular socio-economic

24 Ibid., pp. 175-177.
group, Donald implied that, for a displaced elite, unable to attack the new industrial elite directly, "an attack upon slavery was their best, if quite unconscious, attack." In contrast to the moderate Lincoln, whose goals were conscious and realistic, the abolitionists were interested only in the glory of a crusade, not the abolition of slavery.

Slightly less virulent is Hazel Wolf's characterization of the abolitionists as seekers after martyrdom. The result, however, is still to see motives in terms of personal needs rather than as having some relationship to the ostensible goal. In the case of Elijah Lovejoy, for example, "so temperate a program [as the American Colonization Society's] could not long contain his crusading impulse."

By 1955, Betty Fladeland could contrast James Birney's unneurotic commitment with the popularly accepted psychological motivation of less reasonable abolitionists. She concluded that "there were some emotional fanatics among the abolitionists; but there were countless more sincere, moderate men whose antislavery efforts were based on intellectual convictions and on deep-seated humanitarianism."

25 (New York, 1961), p. 34.

26 Ibid., p. 36.


The concept of guilt is often used to explain the reformer's overly emotional response to social ills. The earliest and most comprehensive statement about the component of guilt in American reform personality was made by Stanley Elkins. Claiming that guilt was "always a necessary element in any reform movement anywhere," he argued that people who became abolitionists came from exactly those groups most susceptible to feelings of guilt, "groups relatively sheltered, . . . without connections and without clear and legitimate functions."\(^{29}\)

The second sort of theory about psychological motivation to appear in the literature on reformers, albeit not formally stated, is that parental identification and socialization are primary in developing a reform personality. Thus, the concern for slaves exhibited by Benjamin Lundy derives from the early influence of antislavery Quaker parents and community.\(^{30}\) Benjamin P. Thomas' description of Theodore Dwight Weld's development is echoed throughout the literature:

Scion of Puritan forebears, Weld grew up under the rigorous Puritan discipline which relied on Biblical precepts and a stern, dogmatic theology to thwart the ever-present beguilements of sin. From his boyhood he was infused with an unwavering sense of right and wrong, and with that inquisitive and intrusive morality which insists that one must not be satisfied to purge oneself of sin, but must also try to ransom others from Satan's clutches.\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\)Elkins, Slavery, p. 161.

\(^{30}\)Merton Dillon, Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom (Urbana, 1966).

Parental influence is one of the two explanations most commonly used to explain a woman's involvement in reform—the women, in general, having escaped the charge of being "fanatic." Margaret Farrand Thorp, who has written one of the few books on women reformers, sees the most important factors common to the six women she studied as a New England upbringing, either in New England or one of its western colonies of emigrating New Englanders, and a Quaker or Calvinist training, which impart "a tender conscience and a sense of social responsibility." 32 Alma Lutz, writing the other major survey of women also leans heavily on the influence of parental values, although she uses this explanation interchangeably with that of response to injustice which is experienced by the reformer or by those with whom he can empathize. 33

The third possible motivation, then, is the reformer's personal or empathic experience of injustice, which leads him to view certain aspects of society as unfair or evil. Lutz, for instance, uses this to explain the anger that drove Lucy Stone:

[Her father's attitude that women's education was folly] and the degrading legal status of the farm women in the neighborhood aroused rebellion in her and she resolved to learn Latin and Greek for herself to find out whether it [the Bible] actually taught men's sovereignty and their domination of women. 34

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34 Ibid., p. 228.
Although a more complex and thorough study, Gerda Lerner's work on The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels Against Slavery basically follows this tack. She stresses the early concern both Sarah and Angelina felt for the family's slaves, as well as Sarah's frustration when her brother's education continued at Princeton while she was condemned to make her appearance in Charleston society's endless social gatherings and parties.\(^{35}\)

Stronger expressions of the importance of empathic influences occur in descriptions of Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison. Merton Dillon points out the concern for others Lundy's Quaker parents instilled, but then describes an important phase in Lundy's development when he saw slaves in Wheeling, West Virginia. "[His] isolation from youthful society, his early quarrels with the world, fostered his sympathy for the world's outcasts, because in his own fashion he had become one of them himself."\(^{36}\) Likewise, Lundy's ideas appealed to William Lloyd Garrison because "the hardship and loneliness of his own youth made him temperamentally sympathetic to the underdog; Garrison knew what it was to beg."\(^{37}\)

In the 1960's, the civil rights movement brought a renewed interest in and greater sympathy for reformers, especially abolitionists, and historians

\(^{35}\) (Boston, 1967).

\(^{36}\) Dillon, Benjamin Lundy, p. 5.

began to apply psychoanalytic insights with greater care and precision to explain why particular individuals responded to evils in the society to the extent of becoming active reformers.

The most clearly structured psychological work on the abolitionists thus far is a short study by Silvan Tomkins, "The Psychology of Commitment: The Constructive Role of Violence and Suffering for the Individual and for his Society." Tomkins' argument is divided into two parts, the second of which is very convincing. This section delineates how violence and suffering inflicted on the reformer as he works for a cause to which he has already committed himself, heighten the reformer's commitment (after a period of doubt, perhaps), because he feels "an increased identification with the oppressed Negro [and] an increased hostility toward the oppressor and toward those who remain uncommitted."  

The first part of Tomkins' argument is less convincing, however, as he seeks to explain why men initially become engaged with a movement or ideal. Tomkins says that the men he studied "resonate" to abolitionism, that the movement engaged the individual's thoughts and feelings, "fit" with them. The characteristics of the four examined (James Birney, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Weld) which Tomkins believes made "resonance" possible were: Christian upbringing; affectionate parents who were active in helping others; extroverted and physically active childhoods; and physical courage.  

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38 In Duberman, ed., Antislavery Vanguard, p. 286.
39 Ibid., pp. 280-281.
The concept of "resonance" does not explain why one becomes amenable to ideas which are threatening to the social order, or socially unacceptable. The term is too amorphous and obscures real problems. For instance, Tomkins would attribute a penchant for action to the fact that "all were early prepared and destined for leadership of a special kind." This might be argued from the backgrounds of James Birney, Wendell Phillips, and Theodore Weld. It would hardly seem to apply to William Lloyd Garrison, deserted by his seaman father and raised in poverty, with no promise of being a future leader.

The preceding, brief survey of the literature to ascertain the sorts of explanations that have been given for the origins and direction of reform in early nineteenth-century America does not, perhaps, do justice to the work that has been produced. It does, however, illustrate the lack of clarity which exists in much of the discussion. No single study can bring complete enlightenment, but a biography of one of the reformers, utilizing a consciously articulated framework, may demonstrate useful tools for the effort.

Locating the influences that affected Frances Wright, who progressed from colonization to communitarianism to educational reform and finally to support of the Loco-Foco, anti-bank faction of the Democratic party, is to study the formation and development of a particularly versatile reformer. The tools to be used are derived from the work of Karl Mannheim and Erik Erikson.

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40ibid., p. 280.
Mannheim argued that thinking and thought are "existentially" determined, that is, they are "influenced in many decisive points by extra-theoretical factors of the most decisive sort." Although Mannheim in this instance was describing how it is that "perspective," or the manner in which one views an object, could be located historically and culturally, the theory also has application to the formation of ideologies and utopias, that is of statements of ideals which transcend reality.

Ideologies and utopias are theories about what is good, theories which postulate conditions not presently existing in the society or culture. The difference between the two is that ideologies, although they may inspire "good-intentioned motives for the subjective conduct of the individual," also protect the existing order by having within them elements which make it impossible to discover the divergence of reality from the ideal. Utopias, on the other hand, uphold a good which is presently non-existent, but they are revolutionary, they have no elements which disguise the divergence between ideal and reality.

One of Mannheim's weaknesses was the failure to describe the conditions which supported either ideological thinking or the origin of tensions that might generate, by some mechanism, a utopian outlook. The study of Frances Wright may illustrate the manner in which one individual formulates a reform position composed of both ideological and utopian (in Mannheim's sense)

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41_Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge_ (New York, 1968), p. 239. The work was originally published in German in 1936.
elements, and the interaction of the two. To determine why she was susceptible to particular values and methods of effecting change, insights drawn from Erik Erikson's description of stages of life critical in the development of personality will be used.

In general psychoanalysis has been used by historians to explain deviants and deviance, to locate the pathology which causes men to act in unapproved and, in the case of the militant abolitionists, socially disruptive ways. Erik Erikson, however, has given a number of examples of how a psychoanalytic approach may be used to provide coherence and an enlarged understanding of the past, without denigration of historical figures. As Robert Coles has said in evaluating Erikson's work,

Erikson talks about "trust" and "initiative" and "industry," plain and risky words that bring us closer to life and imply judgment on human experience. . .

[There are] affirmations that have their own authority, momentum, and, yes, psychohistory. 42

The dangers involved in applying Erikson's theory are recognized, particularly in light of Jacques Barzun's recent criticisms of psychohistory. 43


43"History: The Muse and Her Doctors," American Historical Review, LXXVII (February, 1972), 36-63. Barzun criticizes those who think that history can be made a science, that the historian can or should explain human activities and a course of events by the application of systematic principles borrowed from the social sciences. As there is no agreement on the truth of any particular theory in the social sciences, he argues, or in psychoanalysis, the use of such theories, at best, "adds to our understanding";
The intention is not, in this case, to illustrate how Frances Wright's development conformed to or deviated from a norm posited by Erikson or to test Eriksonian analysis by how well its theoretical constructs "explain" Wright's behavior. Rather, Erikson's theory is used as a heuristic device to enable the biographer to select from the large amount of data and to organize the evidence into a coherent description with a consciousness of what principles of selection or organization are being used. A psychoanalytic approach may suggest why she engaged in activities that distinguished her from her contemporaries and why certain political and ideological positions were more attractive to her than to others.

Erikson sees himself as an historian, one who studies the development of individual personality through time. He accepts that individuals form unique solutions at each stage of psychological growth and that the outcomes of earlier stages affect the character formation that takes place at later stages. Thus, although he posits a necessary order in the building up of certain critical elements of personality, he does not pretend to predict the outcome for any individual.

It does not provide a true explanation. Moreover, the reality that history studies is not the "reality of nature." History is composed of unique events which cannot be ordered in the same way natural events can. Barzun concludes that an historian orders his information intuitively, and the process, "like all products of the intuitive mind [,] eludes definition."

My disagreement with Barzun is that the intuitive historian intuits on the basis of some principles of order, whether or not they are clearly articulated in his work or in his own mind. Accepting that social science theories should be used heuristically and not as separate evidence, one may use them to clarify, test, and reorder the preconceptions that necessarily influence the selection and interpretation of historical data.
Briefly, the stages of development during childhood, as charted by Erikson in relation to physical maturation, are:

1. Infancy, when the child is dependent upon others for all care and develops, as a consequence of the regularity and affection related to his care, the basic sense of trust in others.

2. Early childhood, roughly one and one-half to three years old depending on the culture's practices, when the child has greater physical mobility, an understanding of verbal cues, and begins to be told he must act in such and such a way, and develops a sense of "rightness" as an autonomous being or a fear of being shamed before other people;

3. Childhood, two to five years old, when the child has gained muscle and manipulative coordination, and develops a sense of confidence in initiating activity or feelings of doubt and guilt about acting independently;

4. Late childhood, beginning about five years, when the child begins to master productive techniques valued in the society and develops a sense of confidence or of inadequacy relative to other producers.

The manner in which each child adapts to the stages is dependent on his experiences at earlier ones and on the practices and expectations of the society within which he grows. Erikson is not only an historian of personal development, but an anthropologist who recognizes the influence of cultural practices.

The fifth stage of development, adolescence, during which the identity is formed for adult life, is especially relevant to the study of a person who did not conform to the normal role expectations of her culture. At this stage, the individual must integrate his particular personality "with the aptitudes developed of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles." While no

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44 Childhood and Society, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963). Part Three describes the stages of development and the sorts of problems faced by the child in each.

psychoanalyst, including Erikson, would say that the individual is completely self-conscious, aware of all his needs and fears, the youth does have choice and the power to create or select social roles which both conform to the image he has of himself and carry with them whatever social recognition or approval is necessary. 46

In the study of Frances Wright, a woman who enlarged the social role considered normal for women of her class and culture, the concept of identity formation is especially important. It will be demonstrated that her political activities, which seemed so outrageous to her contemporaries, were the necessary result of accommodating role opportunities to personality needs in such a way that an acceptable self-identity, combining elements of the rejected social role and winning limited social recognition, was created. The identity was composed of values considered proper to women, but it necessitated behavior which was totally unacceptable. Wright did not lead a rebellion against her culture's values, but sought to create a place for herself within their terms.

CHAPTER TWO

Frances Wright at Home and Abroad

The evidence or data for Frances Wright's childhood years are meager, and both her previous biographers cover them quickly, devoting the greater parts of their books to her adult activities. Most of William R. Waterman's first chapter comes directly from a biography published in 1844. A. J. G. Perkins and Theresa Wolfson unearthed a few letters in the now-missing collection of Wright's papers, but they, too rely heavily on the 1844 biography.¹ The reconstruction of Wright's childhood experiences and the possible effects of these depends, therefore, on imaginative use of her writings, especially the works of fiction. There is also material available on the life styles of the classes in which Wright circulated which can be used, with some discretion, as the basis for describing her experiences. While it is admitted that individual families and experiences vary, that an individual's childhood is always in some sense unique, the society has standards of appropriate behavior, of education and training which are roughly maintained by all families. Also, descriptions of childhood recorded by contemporaries present some picture of the emotional and psychological effects of the society's

¹Miss Perkins had made transcripts of a number of Wright letters held by her grandson, Norman William Guthrie, by 1924. Waterman used some of these, citing them as Wright MSS. and giving credit to Miss Perkins. For her own work, Miss Perkins borrowed letters from the Guthries which were never returned and seem to have disappeared with her.
treatment of children and childhood. The most pertinent source is the autobiography of Harriet Martineau, another British commentator of American society and only five years Wright's junior.

Frances Wright was born on September 6, 1795, into a well-to-do family of the Scottish trading class. Her father, James Wright, was a linen merchant, who had been educated better than a tradesman, attending Trinity College at Dublin. He was a radical in the 1790's, supporting the French Revolution and circulating copies of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Wright's mother, Camilla Campbell Wright, was from a better social class. Camilla Wright's father, General Duncan Campbell, was an officer in the British army and her brother also became a general. Although Duncan Campbell was Scotch, he had married an Englishwoman and enjoyed London society.

Wright was the second of three children, with a brother, Richard, two years her senior, and a sister, Camilla, a year and one-half younger. The children were spoken of with affection, although the home life may have witnessed some tension due to the parent's differences in background and some financial difficulty that hit James Wright's business in 1797.

Wright was not weaned until she was seven months old, but the first break from her mother's care was followed by the birth of her sister. The sense of being deserted by her mother may have been compounded by the children's having a nurse, perhaps necessitated by Camilla Wright's poor
None of the forced separation from her mother might have affected the development in Wright of a sense of trust, a belief that she could expect affection and approval from others, but for the death of her parents at about age two and one-half. Her mother died first, her father living about two months longer.

Erikson points out that children can be reared with a variety of practices and still gain a sense of trust, so long as the parents communicate a sense of security and later experiences support the justice of earlier treatment. The substitution of a nurse, early weaning, competition from a younger sibling might have had no important effect on Wright's development had they not been followed by the critical loss of her parents. Orphaned in early childhood, however, her fear that those she loved or depended on would die or forsake her had strong roots in reality.

Wright might be expected to feel guilt at the fulfillment of her childish wishes that those adults who set so many boundaries to her activities would disappear. In her case, they had, leaving a sense of loss and a necessity to assuage the guilt arising from her implication in their deaths. She would stress, later, how her values and career carried on her father's political interests, noting "the singular coincidence in views between a father and

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2 Camilla Campbell Wright to James Wright, April 11, 1796, quoted in Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 5. This letter mentions the nurse, the weaning, and opens by saying that James Wright is missed less "when I think how tenderly you are employed in caring for our beloved children."
daughter, separated by death when the first had not reached the age of twenty-nine, and when the latter was in infancy."

The loss of her real parents as models also created a problem of determining who she was, how she was to behave, what her work was to be. At the same time it gave her a freedom in constructing a sense of self that could not be shared by those who have to define themselves in relation to living parents.

After Camilla and James Wright's deaths, the children were dispersed. Richard Wright was sent to the home of his paternal great-uncle, James Milne, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow. Camilla, a baby, was left with a nurse in Dundee and rejoined her sister "some years" (probably one or two) later. Wright herself was sent to her mother's sister, Frances Campbell, who was living in London and became the guardian of her niece's estate.

Wright's life from age three to eleven, except for the fact of her residence in London, is an enigma. She lived the life of a child in an upper middle-class urban home. Her aunt's home was stylish, however. The child was dressed by a maid and given an education to fit her for proper society, as her knowledge of French, Italian and art testify. Although she was probably

3 Frances Wright D'Arusmont, Biography and Notes of Frances Wright D'Arusmont (Boston, 1848), p. 4.

4 Ibid., p. 5.
petted as the orphane d daughter of Frances Campbell's sister, even this would have been interrupted by Camilla's arrival a year or so after Wright's.

The household in which she saw her first models for adult behavior was atypical. An unmarried aunt, living alone, and a peripetatic grandfather (Duncan Campbell) were the important adult figures. With the arrival of Camilla, Wright could fancy herself tutor and guardian of her sister, deflecting the anger she might have felt otherwise at the competition for attention. Without models for the normal life of marriage and family that a young girl was taught to expect, Wright's sense that her aunt's injunctions to behave in a certain way, to do certain things--reprimands given to every young child--were valuable or correct, would depend more on an affectionate, trusting relationship with the aunt than might be the case in a family where such models existed.

Yet, English children of her class were often offered little overt affection. One historian concludes that "childhood was regarded as a tiresome stage, which it was hoped might pass as speedily as possible." Harriet Martineau, noting the same habit of mind, believed that "a little more of the cheerful tenderness which was in those days thought bad for children, would have saved me from my worst faults, and from a world of suffering." The insecurity

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5Ibid., p. 7. Wright attributed her precocious seriousness to "the presence of a sister who looked to her for guidance, and leaned upon her for support."


7Autobiography, I (Boston, 1877), 9.
about one's worth and the fear of disapproval which such lack of affection might develop could lead to the sense of being an outcast, if there were unusual factors—such as Wright's orphanage and Martineau's physical weakness.

The fact of orphanhood bothered Wright, and her aunt apparently did nothing to assuage this feeling, as a section on Indian youths in American schools from Wright's Views makes clear:

Where is the young mind of vigor and enthusiasm that is not curious to trace the character of those who gave it being and is not prone to ascribe to it something noble and singularly excellent? They who have known the feelings of an orphan—when in a house and a country foreign to his race—how he yearns to hear of those who nursed his infancy, but whose voice and features are lost to his memory, how he muses on them in solitude, calls upon their names in moments of distress, and idly fancies that fortune could never have wrung from him a tear had they lived to cherish and protect him—they whose fate it has been to know such feelings will easily conceive how the young Indian . . . must look wistfully to the wilderness. 8

The social standards concerning the appropriate behavior towards children, coupled with Wright's sense of being an alien, indicate that by the time she entered late childhood, she could not have gained a sense of trust in other people or an assurance that her activities would be approved. Having arrived at the age, six or so, when she might have compensated for these threats by beginning to learn socially valued productive skills, she was faced with the difficult reality that the skills to be developed in girls of her class were those of being a social ornament and of attracting and pleasing a husband. In

8 Frances Wright, Views of Society and Manners in America; in a Series of Letters from the Country to a Friend in England, During the years 1818, 1819, 1820, ed. by Paul R. Baker (Harvard, 1963), pp. 111-112.
the novels of Jane Austen only two possible roles are described for women of Wright's class—marriage and family or unmarried service to dependents and friends. Such a prospect for a young girl, eager to act, to do, must have been depressing. Seen as an integral part of a functioning family, the role of wife and mother might have seemed more acceptable, but Wright did not live in such a family. Even the work considered proper for a woman, such as cooking and sewing, were denied to Wright because of her social class.⁹ And the primary male figure who visited the house, her grandfather General Campbell, told her that his class (her class) did not work.¹⁰

In 1806, when Wright was eleven, Frances Campbell set up a country house in Dawlish. Perhaps the move was an economy measure; at least in 1809 the aunt could pay £500 for Richard Wright's commission in the army. Also, Frances Campbell, apparently a fairly young woman in 1798, may finally have reached an age when she was willing to give up the social life of the city. Even in 1809 Richard Wright remarked that "she was a much younger and prettier woman than I expected to see,"¹¹ but she had certainly passed the age at which a woman married.

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⁹ Joel Brown, "Memoir of Frances Wright," n.d. Cincinnati Public Library. Brown was a carpenter who worked for Wright in Cincinnati during the early 1840's. He recalled that she told him she had not learned "general housework," had "never dressed, washed, comb my hair, hemd [sic] a kerchief, made my bed."

¹⁰ Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p.8, recount such a story without citing their source, a common failing in their work.

¹¹ Richard Wright to Betsy Watson, June 12, 1809, quoted in Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p.11. Betsy Watson was Richard Wright's paternal aunt.
In London Wright had probably been denied an active life out-of-doors, the sort of life which became possible in Dawlish. In the country she learned to ride, and she continued to ride horses throughout her life. Riding, studying, and visiting were the only pursuits encouraged, and the focus on marriage as the proper goal to be attained must have narrowed as she approached the age to marry.

Wright, in the Biography, described herself as estranged at an early age from her aunt's household, because of "the absence of all sympathy with the views and characters of those among whom her childhood was thrown." The reasons for disaffection seem unclear, as Wright could hardly have evolved a distinct set of political and ethical ideals by age six or eleven or even fourteen to set her apart from her relatives, unless their failure to offer her an acceptable identity as worker is taken into account. She was given no work and no model for the role she was being told she must fill.

Other causes might also be found for the tension in the household. Wright's aunt, an English woman of the upper middle-class might be expected to feel disapproval for her politically radical brother-in-law, James Wright. Censure of his life, used to warn his daughter against overly-active or improper behavior, might easily have led Wright to feel resentment against her aunt.

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12 Ibid. Richard Wright reported to his aunt that he and his sister had taken a six-mile horseback ride.

13 Wright, Biography, p. 7.
Looking at Wright’s energy in later years, one can assume that she was an energetic young girl and that her aunt disapproved of the unladylike behavior such energy necessarily evoked.

Whatever the reason, Wright did feel herself an alien, and she responded by isolating herself, seeking solitude. As she recalled in the Views:

Oh England! Well I love thee; oft recall
Thy pleasant fields; thy hills’ soft sloping fall;
Thy woods of massy shade and cool retreat;
Thy rivers in their sedges murmuring sweet,
Where once, with tender feet, I wont to stray,
Muttering my childish rhyming by the way;
And pouring plenteous sighs, I know not why;
And dropping soft tears from my musing eye.14

Wright's solitary musings could only have disturbed her aunt further if the numerous accounts of proper behavior for women in this era are correct.

In Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park the major criticism of Fanny Price (also an alien in a strange house and class, that of her wealthy uncle) is her desire for solitude.

There is something about Fanny, . . . She likes to go her own way to work; she does not like to be dictated to; she takes her own independent work whenever she can; she certainly has a little spirit of secrecy and independence, and nonsense about her.15

Harriet Martineau, seven years younger than Wright and growing up in a family where useful activity was expected from the women, recorded how at thirteen,

14Wright, Views, p. 99.

My beloved hour of the day was when the cloth was drawn, and I stole away from the dessert, and read Shakespeare by firelight in winter in the drawing room. My mother was kind enough to allow this breach of good family manners.\textsuperscript{16}

Certainly the inactivity expected of women conflicted with the later, selective view Wright had of her family, her heritage. As she described her background in the \textit{Biography}, it was formed of active people. Her father's achievements and those of various members of her mother's family are recorded, the only woman spoken of in any detail being her great-grand-aunt, Mrs. Montague.\textsuperscript{17} Even her brother, who was killed at sea in 1809, is mentioned as "a youth of uncommon promise."\textsuperscript{18}

Wright's sense of alienation from her aunt and grandfather made her sympathetic to the needs of others rejected by her aunt's class. She recorded in 1844 that at the age of fifteen (1810), "she pronounced to herself a solemn oath, to wear ever in her heart the cause of the poor and the helpless, and to aid in all that she could in redressing the grievous wrongs which seemed to prevail in society."\textsuperscript{19}

The material Wright could use to formulate schemes to effect her resolve had to be taken from the values offered by her family and friends and

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Martineau, Autobiography}, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Wright, Biography}, p. 5. Wright was referring to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, author of poetry and writer of letters, later published, to Alexander Pope and others. She died in 1762 and could have been only a legend to Wright.

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 17.
in books. Religion might give direction. Church attendance (Anglican) was required for a young woman, and after she began her attacks on the clergy, Wright remembered that in her childhood, she "was religious, devoutly, enthusiastically, yet . . . hardly savingly." Faced also with the deaths of two more members of her family, that of her brother in 1809 and her grandfather in 1811, it would not be surprising that an adolescent girl would seek solace in religion.

Yet, religion could not hold her long, not because of theological aridity, but because in the early nineteenth century, the traditional image of a vengeful God no longer seemed acceptable, especially to a young girl fearful of being condemned, but certain of her innocence. As Wright said in the New Harmony recollection, "Love suited me better than fear, a sentiment to which, physically or morally, I never inclined." Harriet Martineau, a more self-conscious contemporary, recorded the same feeling in her Autobiography:

My religious belief, up to the age of 20, was briefly this. I believed in a God, milder and more beneficent and passionless than the God of the orthodox, inasmuch as he would not doom any of his creatures to eternal torment.

Although raised in the home of a non-conformist, middle-class tradesman, Harriet Martineau elaborates on some problems she and a young woman like

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20 New Harmony Gazette, July 23, 1828.

21 Ibid.

22 Autobiography, p. 31.
Wright seem to have shared. The similarities are moderated somewhat by Wright's greater physical energy and Martineau's deafness, but both were girls who felt isolated and unloved. For both religion was a first step in a search for truth that would lead each into philosophy. While they would choose different philosophical schools, each expressed a need for absolute certainty, which is not unusual for an adolescent unclear about her future role in life.

Martineau recorded in her Autobiography the need she felt for "a clear distinction between the knowable and the unknowable, --of some available indication of an indisputable point of view."23 Wright's view of the same state sounds more like that of a plodding student:

I remember an uneasiness and restlessness of mind during the earlier states of enquiry which held me fast to the subject until I clearly saw to which side the solution inclined and can yet more distinctly recall the sweet composure which spread over my intellect when I finally drew the conclusions and felt satisfied with their truth.24

Wright's education, her formal schooling, she called "aristocratical," and it was composed of those arts necessary to a young lady--French, Italian, and art. But she began to teach herself, reading in history and philosophy in her aunt's library. There she found Carlo Botta's History of the American Revolution to which she later ascribed the greatest influence on her developing

23 Ibid., p. 82.
24 New Harmony Gazette, July 23, 1828.
25 Joel Brown, "Memoir."
ideals. Wright may have exaggerated the influence of Botta after she had
made a commitment to activity in the United States. At any rate, she was
self-taught in history and philosophy, and she never outgrew the desire for
certainty, for truth, which is a normal characteristic of the adolescent mind,
but remained with her throughout adult life.

A description of her new found interest curiously reveals almost as
much about her social training as about her self-perceived rebelliousness. As
she describes the first test of her new interest (in America), she was on a
courtesy visit to an old, blind, and infirm British admiral. The admiral was
distraught by the new attack of "the colonies" in the War of 1812. Wright says:

Then came such a storm of passion and honest vexation, from the
worthy veteran, that her curiosity was silenced by her sympathy,
and she passed some hours in diverting his attention from a subject
which she burned to investigate.27

The girl of sixteen may have found a new interest, a new world in
which women, perhaps, could be as free as men, but for the time being she
was quiet, performing visiting duties and being prepared for the role of women
of her class, marriage and family, for which her time was growing close.

By 1813, at the age of eighteen, Wright found herself faced with a
choice of marriage or a future of spinsterhood, and she did not even look like
the popular ideal of young womanhood. Already, at fourteen, she had been
described by her brother as "so tall that I took her for my aunt."28

26 Wright, Biography, p. 10.
27 Ibid., p. 11.
28 Richard Wright to Betsy Watson, June 12, 1809, quoted by Perkins
and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 11.
Dale Owen was to describe her as she looked at thirty-one as having "a tall commanding figure, somewhat slender and graceful, though the shoulders were a little bit too high, a face the outline of which in profile though delicately chiselled, was masculine rather than feminine, like that of . . . a mercury; the forehead broad but not high." 29 Add to this ungirlish appearance a penchant for reading and isolation in rural Devonshire, and it is unlikely that Wright could have approached the marrying age with much joy.

Her solution was to flee Dawlish and Devonshire, her aunt, and the problem of winning a marriage partner. Unprepared or unwilling to appear in society and to accept the role of husband seeker, she took Camilla and returned to her homeland and the home of her great uncle James Milne in Glasgow. 30 At eighteen Wright simply removed herself from all immediate pressures to fulfill her designated role, one which she had been given so little reason to accept. She simply took a moratorium from her responsibilities—one that was to last six years and to see a number of different attempts on her part to discover what she was and what she could be. 31


30 Wright, Biography, p. 11.

31 Erikson, Youth and Crisis, describes George Bernard Shaw's unwillingness, at twenty, to continue in business where he might be trapped by his success. He broke loose, which "meant to leave family and friends, business and Ireland. . . . He granted himself a prolongation of the interval between youth and adulthood, which we call a 'psychosocial moratorium.'" (143)
Wright enjoyed the release from social pressure and the freedom to read which her uncle’s home gave her. She was in an environment of greater seriousness, in which her relatives worked and her uncle, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, devoted himself to teaching and academic inquiry. Allowed to train herself only in reading and writing (if train is a proper word for her undirected attempts), Wright immediately began to write; according to the Biography she wrote *A Few Days in Athens* in 1814 during the first year in her uncle’s house\(^{32}\) although it was not published until 1822 after reputation had been made by the *Views*.\(^{33}\) The manuscript consisted of a serious-minded, but romantic attempt to deal with her feelings of frustration in inactivity, her desires to be doing something; yet, it was also an injunction to self-control.\(^{34}\) The intellectual source she drew on, Epicureanism, was a result of her Glasgow environment. Her uncle was a follower of the school of Scottish common sense philosophy, and related to one of its minor leaders, John Millar, by marriage to Millar’s daughter.\(^{35}\) The utilitarian leanings of

\(^{32}\) Wright, *Biography*, p. 9.

\(^{33}\) The published version of the treatise, which appeared in 1822, may not be completely faithful to the original, but given the pressure of bringing out the *Views*, it seems unlikely that she made many revisions in the smaller work.

\(^{34}\) Wright's literary works, a play, a short story, some poetry, and *A Few Days in Athens* are not creative pieces of art. They are simple, didactic, and apparent, the work of a young woman revealing herself in fiction as she could not in polite conversation.

the Glasgow thinkers would appeal to Wright, and her explication of Epicureanism was similar to certain utilitarian principles. 36

Wright had done some reading in philosophy by the time she wrote the work, but, like most of her female contemporaries, she had not had academic training, and the work was not scholarly. In the preface, she admitted that she did not have "either the inclination or the ability" to supply marginal notes on the classical allusions, and her readers were directed to see the "eloquent and ingenious [Pierre] Bayle" for assistance. 37 Lightly treated by previous biographers, the composition offers insights into Wright's view of herself at nineteen, her precocious formulations of the character of a good life, and her developing ideas on the nature of man and a good society.

_A Few Days in Athens_ tells the story of a young seeker after truth, Theon, who had come to Athens to study with Zeno but finds himself captivated by the rival Epicurus after accidentally meeting him on a country walk. The story is interrupted by long sections of explanation of Epicurean philosophy and a debate between Zeno and the friendly Epicurus. It ends with a completely unnecessary and somewhat puzzling adventure in which Theon saves Epicurus' adopted daughter Hedeia from drowning in a swollen stream only to have Hedeia, 36

_36 Ibid._ Lehman says that Millar, Professor of Civil Law at Glasgow, viewed "every subject, whether law, politics, history, morality, religion, or art, in terms of what he called 'utility' as over against 'authority' and mere tradition." (35).

at the conclusion, announce that there is no man, "the wisest, the gravest, or the sourest, that a bright pair of eyes can't make a fool of."³⁸

Wright's picture of herself which emerged was generally flattering. She also engaged in many discussions of ambition and self-confidence, a problem that she returned to often in the next few years. Having taken up the masculine pursuits of study and philosophical investigation, she seemed to be struggling to reconcile her womanhood with the image of male-like women who engaged in such pursuits. Her persona was Leontium, Epicurus' daughter; the description of Leontium is close to that drawn of Wright by her friends:

What a countenance was . . . revealed! It was not the beauty of blooming blushing youth, courting love and desire. It was the self-possessed dignity of ripened womanhood, and the noble majesty of mind that asked respect and promised delight and instruction. The features were not those of Venus, but Minerva. The eyes looked deep and steady from beneath two even brows, that sense, not years, had slightly knit in the center of the forehead, which else was uniformly smooth. . . . Her stature was much above the female standard, but every limb and every motion was symmetry and harmony.³⁹

Whether Wright felt truly confident in her own womanly self, it is difficult to say. But the picture of Leontium is what she wanted herself to be--womanly and handsome, although not conforming to the popular standards of beauty. It was her first attempt to portray a woman who had not sacrificed womanliness and yet looks and acts differently from the accepted standard, her first attempt to create an identity acceptable to herself.

³⁸Ibid., p. 160.
³⁹Ibid., pp. 18-19.
Leontium, however, cannot be allowed to depart from the conventional image of woman so far as to engage in philosophical arguments, so Theon is the persona of Wright as young seeker. The underlying tone of the discussion seems to be how to reconcile ambition with virtue and how to temper impatience and youthful passion with restraint. In the context of the nineteenth century, Wright might easily see herself as an ambitious, aggressive woman. Somehow, she had to justify her penchant for unfeminine activity and also come to grips with the conventions that restricted it. Moreover, as with so many women of the period, certain of the inadequacy of their early training, she had to convince herself that she could overcome her deficits and produce work of the same quality as that of men with the educational advantage.

The opening pages justify her impertinence. When Theon asks who can rival Zeno, Epicurus replies:

You, my young friend: Why should you not?
You have innocence; you have sensibility; you have enthusiasm; you have ambition--with what better Promise could Zeno begin his career? 40

Wright also has Epicurus approve her desire for distinction, although such a desire is proper only for those who have means and character to achieve it. "It is dangerous in the head of a fool; unhappy in that of a man of moderate abilities, or unfavorable situation, who can conceive of a noble aim, but lacks the talent or the means necessary for its attainment." 41

40 Ibid., p. 6.

41 Ibid., p. 55.
The most curious aspect of the work is the tack taken in explicating Epicurean doctrine. In only one passage is its social utility talked of, and that is in a statement of criticism by Cleanthes, a student of Zeno. Rather, the system is described as a personal one for self-satisfaction. The body and soul experience two affections, pleasure and pain. The goal of life should be to seek the former and avoid the latter. But pleasure is ultimately based on prudence and virtue, not fulfillment of momentary passions. Indeed, "sensual pleasure is pain covered with the mask of happiness. Behold she strips it from her face, and reveals the features of disease, disquietude, and remorse." To be comfortable and happy, one must be moderate and virtuous. More specifically, as Epicurus says, "The perfection of wisdom, and the end of true philosophy, is to proportion our wants to our possessions, our ambitions to our capacities."  

The doctrine of Epicurus, as presented by Wright, seems to be little more than Christian resignation, if one reads "religion" in place of "philosophy." This appears more clearly in a discussion of death, which sounds like an evangelical warning on the misery of death unrelieved by religious certitude.

Nature levels us with death; but how mild is the death of nature, with philosophy to spread the pillow, and friendship to take the last sigh, to the protracted agonies of debauchery, subduing the body by inches, while philosophy is not there to give strength, nor friendship consolation.

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42 Ibid., p. 128.

43 Ibid., p. 57.

44 Ibid., p. 132.
Wright had traded religion for philosophy and the uncertainty of an unknown God for the certainty of natural laws. But with her strictures on temperance, moderation, and acceptance, she was seeking a personal solution for social problems. She must accept things as they were, although her financial and intellectual resources might offer her hopes of some distinction. It was a view which might allow her some freedom and might reason her into calm, but it was essentially conservative.

Once again, Harriet Martineau echoes Wright's feelings, although she called the belief in ceaselessly operating natural laws necessarianism. As she said, "Not knowing what was good for me, and being sure that every external thing would come to pass just the same, whether I liked it or not, I ceased to desire, and therefore to pray for, any thing external."\footnote{Martineau, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 87.}

Wright had felt desertion, but not oppression. Her view of man as "more fool than knave, more weak than depraved... more ignorant than vicious"\footnote{\textit{A Few Days in Athens}, p. 43.} was gentle, and her hopes for reform were likewise moderate—"to teach them that in the discharge of their duties as sons, as husbands, as fathers, as citizens, lies their pleasure and their interests."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 95.}

During Wright's first year in Glasgow, she enjoyed the family circle, read, and wrote. She probably did not study science, as, according to her
description of Epicurus' teaching, it was not greatly recommended for his
disciples' studies. Wright would mention this defect later, in the Views,
although in the Biography she exaggerated her studies, claiming that "she
applied herself by turns to various branches of science, and to the study of
ancient and modern letters and the arts."  

If a young woman were to gain distinction in Britain in the early nine-
teenth century, writing seemed the most promising route as Jane Austen,
Frances Burney d'Albray, and Mary Berry illustrated with their successes.
Wright proceeded to compose one play, Altorf, which she unsuccessfully sought
to have produced in Glasgow. Written, probably, within a year after A Few
Days in Athens, it is suffused with scenes of romance and heroism such as
concluded the Epicurean manuscript. She claimed, in the preface to the 1819
publication, that its intention was to instill nobility in sentiment and heroism
in action. She set the play against an heroic background, the Swiss wars for
independence, but once again the virtues stressed were calm fidelity.

The play ostensibly glorified active resistance to tyranny, lauding
peasant soldiers and denouncing vain and selfish monarchs. The heart of the
play, however, is a love triangle, with one devoted woman offering a model of
calm devotion to duty and two young lovers recreating the tragic ending of
Romeo and Juliet.

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48 Ibid., p. 117.

49 Wright, Biography, p. 8.
The story is about Eberard de Altorf and Rosina de Rossberg, betrothed as children by their fathers, but separated when the Baron de Altorf and Count de Rossberg take opposing sides in the Swiss war for independence from Austria. The Baron de Altorf has given up his wealth to the Swiss patriots, his son Eberard to be their leader, and his son's happiness by persuading him to marry the sister (Giovanna) of the peasant leader (de Rheinthal) to cement the alliance. The Count de Rossberg seeks to corrupt Eberard de Altorf and to win him from the cause by using the love which his daughter and young Altorf still pledge. Count de Rossberg does not succeed, but Eberard does help the Count and Rosina flee the Swiss camp for their home, thus implicating himself in treason. At the end of the play, the Swiss patriots, who have almost been forgotten, defeat the Austrians in a major battle and capture de Rossberg's castle. On entering the castle, they find Rosina dead, having killed herself for helping her father destroy Eberard's reputation. Eberard is dying from a self-inflicted sword wound. It is not clear whether he is more distraught over Rosina's death or his loss of honor, since he is certain he cannot erase the conviction of his guilt which his patriot comrades have.

In the midst of this complicated story, which is unrelieved by the occasional humor of its Shakespearean models, are some interesting elements. Giovanna and Rosina seem to represent opposing ideals of true love. Giovanna is the picture of selfless, kind-hearted devotion, asking Eberard to describe his beloved Rosina, so that he will have no thoughts separate from his wife, but they will "hold . . . converse then in common, in common think, in
common feel, and weep."50 Stressing her own uncommon virtue, Giovanna says, "I follow you, not with a weak and sickly woman's dotage. Hearts are not won by importunity, nor, if they were, would one so gain'd suffice to do me pleasure."51 More, she is physically as well as morally courageous:

Have I not kept thy soldier's fasts and vigils,
Have I not footed all thy soldier's travels,
Nay, Have I not my tender bosom steel'd
In soldier's armor and shared thy risks of battle?52

The woman is a warrior; yet, she has not lost any of woman's truest virtues--patience, compassion, and the art of reconciling differences.

The recognition of Giovanna's truly remarkable qualities leads Eberard to reaffirm the wisdom of his marriage vows, only to lapse very quickly from sense into foolish sensibility. He still loves Rosina, and is undone when she appears near the camp disguised as a young pilgrim. She brushes aside the political conflict which separates them, saying she knows "but little of these public quarrels,"53 and describes a loving woman's dependence on a man:

His favour was my pride, his will my law,
His lips my oracle, his smile my sun,
His eyes my mirror, and his face the book
In which I studied all things.54

On hearing of Eberard's marriage, she recalls the passions which misled her, "the sighs, the tears, the burning kisses."

Rosina's ignorance, passion and importunity are set against Giovanna's good sense, calm, and charity. As Eberard falls prey to the passion of love, at least enough to damage his honor, the point is clear. Passionate love untempered by wisdom and restraint leads to death and dishonor. If Eberard had only restrained himself, Giovanna's good sense and Rosina's devotion might have reunited the young lovers; instead, all is lost. But, undoing the simplicity of Romeo and Juliet, Rosina kills herself not because she has lost Eberard, but because she has caused him to lose honor. Eberard then, under his father's curse, fulfills the curse and dies.

At the age of twenty, Wright was falling into the romantic mode of the period, but she could not embrace a romantic spirit of the beauty of young, passionate love. Giovanna, the superior woman, is neither a romantic heroine, nor a model for the proprieties of the era. Wright still wanted, believed in the rightness of, her desire for distinction and greater freedom of movement than her society allowed. But she felt the pressure of convention, the danger of her own passions, and sought, still, to inculcate the virtues of restraint and self-mastery. How could she learn to live with her energy, her antisocial desire to be unusual, and her feeling that such desires might lead to disaster?

55Ibid., p. 43.
Whatever she might wish to be, Wright had been trained to value the social proprieties. And her only opportunity for distinction without violating these proprieties was as a writer, which clearly was not her calling. She was too much the product of a financially secure upper middle-class home to make the straightforward attack of a Mary Wollstonecraft, and she desired approval too much to face the opprobrium heaped on a Wollstonecraft. So she simply must suffer with her frustrations. As she had Eberard, mimicking Shakespeare, say:

\[
\text{What is this life?} \\
\text{Some call't a dream, and some--a gossip's story.} \\
\text{And some--the tricksome acting of a player.} \\
\text{Forgotten soon as ended. Psha! an twere such,} \\
\text{Should we find in it so many bleeding rubs?} \\
\text{Should we build up so many fairy hopes?} \\
\text{Grasp at such heights of happiness and greatness;} \\
\text{And plan, and feel, and act so many things;} \\
\text{And sigh such sighs, and fret so in the core,} \\
\text{For losses, crosses, wants, and disappointments?}^{56}
\]

Instead of accepting her own advice about resignation, Wright left Britain to seek a freer sphere for her ambition. In 1817 Wright was twenty-two and her sister Camilla turned twenty-one. Removed from the custody of their guardian Frances Campbell, they sailed for America in July, 1818, so that Wright might "seize the crown that fame there distant holds."^{57} This

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\(^{56}\text{Ibid., p. 20.}\)

\(^{57}\text{Frances Wright, "To Harold," a poem quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 25. No date is given for the poem, but it seems to have been written at the time of the first American voyage.}\)
interest in finding recognition, and the fear that she might fail, appears, also, in a story written in 1817, just before the voyage, and not published until 1828.

"The Highlanders," written by Wright in 1817 and printed in three issues of her newspaper, The Free Enquirer (December 24 and December 31, 1828, and January 7, 1829) tells the story of two highland orphans, brother and sister, who were forced off their father's land by enclosure, and had come to Edinburgh for the promising young man to seek his fortune. Disappointed in finding recognition for his poetry, he is discovered too late by the patron and narrator of the story, Mr. Isaac Harding. Mr. Harding promises to protect the sister and then publishes the young man's story of exile, unrecognized attempts at poetry, and death from fatigue and poverty. The young man, the orphan accompanied only by a loyal sister, had started with the belief that "The world is before me, I am young; I feel that I have talent." Yet, he had failed, and Wright must have sailed for America with as much fear that she would do the same as with hope for success.

The major source of information on Wright's stay in the United States is her Views of Society and Manners in America. The book was based on a series of letters written to Mrs. Rabina Craig Millar. Although some additions were made to the letters before publication, many sections are

58 The Free Enquirer, January 7, 1829.

59 Mrs. Millar was the widow of John Millar, the son of Professor Millar at Glasgow, and, sister-in-law by marriage of Wright's great-aunt Mrs. Milne.

60 Wright added to the published work accounts of events that occurred after the letters had been written, such as her eulogy to Mr. Garnett, who died after she sailed for England.
ingeniously written and seem to make no attempt to conceal the author's responses and interests.

The first visit, lasting one and one-half years, was to fulfill many of her expectations. Landing at New York in September, 1818, Frances and Camilla were quickly introduced into respectable New York society by Mr. Charles Wilkes, President of The Bank of the City of New York, a British emigrant, and a correspondent of Mrs. Millar.

Her tour, she recalled, "had been made entirely for her own instruction, and with no immediate view to that of others."\(^{61}\) The evidence, however, indicates that she came with at least some hope of producing her play on an American stage. In the Views, there is a long break between letters in November, 1818 and February, 1819, the month Wright succeeded in having the play produced in New York City. Although she would later view the United States as a theatre for social and political reform, in 1818 she saw it as a haven where individual genius could flourish. Her play could initiate the liberation of American theatre from the aristocratic works of European playwrights.

On February 19, 1819, Altorf was performed in New York City. Although Wright had allowed William Theobold Wolfe Tone to be considered the author for the purpose of getting the play on the stage,\(^{62}\) she very quickly

\(^{61}\)Wright, Biography, p. 7.

\(^{62}\)William Theobold Wolfe Tone was the son of the Irish radical leader Theobold Wolfe Tone. His mother, widowed after her husband's death in a
claimed her audience. In the "Preface" to the Philadelphia edition of 1819, written in March, she placed herself in the vanguard of the creation of a renaissance in the theatre.

Wright criticized the current state of British theatre, in which "rapid movements, stage tricks and fine scenery have filled the place of poetry, character, and passion." In the United States, free from the weight of tradition and of political oppression, a theatre could be formed "where all that is noble in sentiment, generous and heroic in action should speak to the hearts of a free people, and inspire each rising generation with all the better and nobler feelings of human nature." With gratuitous modesty, she admitted that she was "far from supposing [herself] equal to the forming of such a theatre," but she hoped by her example "to encourage other and more gifted minds to employ their powers in this work." She would then feel that she had "not wholly laboured in vain" and merited, perhaps, "to leave [her] name in remembrance with the people of this great country."

Wright spent the remainder of the spring enjoying her success and planning the publication of the play, which was printed by Matthew Carey in

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British prison, had married an American, Mr. Wilson, and resided with him in New York, where she was a friend of the Wilkes. William Theobold had served in Napoleon's army and joined his mother in the United States after 1815. The appearance of his name on a liberal play like Altorf, would not, it was felt, disturb the public so much as the notion that it was written by an unknown young woman.

63 Wright, Altorf, p. iii.
64 Ibid., p. iv.
65 Ibid.
Philadelphia in May. She was brought to Carey's attention by Wolfe-Tones, William Theobold and his widowed mother who had married Thomas Wilson. Mary Wilson described Wright's background to Carey and gave the impression that the young author's reluctance to reveal her talents had been overcome by her friends' persuasion. 66 Wright wrote to Carey on the same day, however, and her letter made her literary ambitions clear.

Sh'd the public favor continue to animate my exertions, Altorf, I trust, is not the last dramatic work that shall breathe those sentiments of liberty for which you, with other of your generous and gifted countrymen, have suffered so greatly, and which in a land of exile, you still continue to assert. 67

Unable to restrain her enthusiasm, she wrote again on April 4, and the letter marked a step in the process of self-definition, as she claimed an identity with Carey and other liberal publicists.

I believe my pen is guided by motives very similar to those that have guided yours. The task in which you have been so long employed and in which I likewise hope to employ whatever powers nature may have given me, [is] that of warring with the prejudices of mankind. 68

Although Wright would often change her mind as to what mankind's

66 Mary Wilson to Matthew Carey, April 1, 1819, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, (Hereafter cited as HSP), Carey MSS.

67 Frances Wright to Matthew Carey, April 1, 1819, HSP, Carey MSS.

68 Frances Wright to Matthew Carey, April 4, 1819, HSP, Carey MSS. Carey had emigrated from Ireland in the 1780's after trouble with the British authorities over his advocacy of freedom for Ireland. He had been aided in America by Lafayette and belonged to the European republican group that defined itself in the 1770's and 1780's by its support of the American and French Revolutions.
most troublesome prejudices were, this is a fair definition of the course of
her activities until the end of her life. In a few months, she had solidified
her opinion that she was unusual, freed enough from the bonds of society to
be able to examine society's rules, and capable of literary work of such a
caliber as to enlighten those unable to question existing beliefs and institu-
tions. She had also reduced her feelings of loneliness and solitary agony by
identifying herself with a group of liberal American thinkers and writers
dedicated to a common goal.

Wright's view of how change could occur was related to her own needs
and experiences. Unoppressed by economic or political institutions, she
seems to have viewed human ills as arising simply from incorrect or incom-
plete knowledge. Presented with the truth in a convincing manner, men would
reform their thoughts and, then, their actions. For Wright, social opinion,
not institutional arrangements, had brought the greatest trials. She had seen
in her own intellectual development an example of how the mind could improve,
not so much through acquisition of knowledge or improved powers of reasoning,
but by "unlearning . . . the false notions which have been implanted in . . .
young minds,"69 by overly restrictive aunts and a tradition bound society.

Wright now wrote of the heroism and nobility that characterized the
few of ambition and ability who might distinguish themselves, and hoped that

69 Wright, Views, p. 217.
she might be one of them. What she encouraged for society in general, however, still corresponded to the values set forth in *A Few Days in Athens*. In Epicurus' words:

I grant that I do not look to make men great, but to make men happy. To teach them that in the discharge of their duties as sons, as husbands, as fathers, as citizens, lies their pleasure and their interests.\(^70\)

Wright at first believed that she would teach by writing for the theatre, and she immediately sent off a copy of *Altorf* to Scotland for publication. Mary Wilson noted how earnestly she worked on her writing, that "to grammatical suggestions she [was] docile but on her verses . . . very tenacious. It [was] her principle and her pride to take no poetical help."\(^71\) By October, however, the poor public reception of the Philadelphia edition led Wright to dismiss her interest in writing poetry at the same time as she dismissed the undiscerning public.

Were the muse my caterer I might have been long since satisfied that she wd never barter a tragedy for a loaf of bread. I sh'd be fool enough to set some value on the empty praise than the solid pudding [sic]; that is at least I sh'd have done so once, tho' now perhaps the one were almost as indifferent to me as the other. . . . If the will of Thespis is out of fashion, I am not strong enough to change the taste of the age.\(^72\)

Wright had not written *Altorf* out of dedication to the theatre, but because literary creation offered the only acceptable manner by which a young woman

\(^{70}\) Wright, *A Few Days in Athens*, pp. 94–95.

\(^{71}\) M[ary] Wilson to Matthew Carey, May 6, 1819, HSP, Carey MSS.

\(^{72}\) Frances Wright to Matthew Carey, October 6, 1819, HSP, Carey MSS.
might advertise herself to the public. If her plays could not win her the praise she desired, she would find another way to win the public to recognition of her genius.

The shortlived New York success was unfortunate, because it deceived Wright about the ease with which she might accomplish great feats. At twenty-three she was an unusual young woman, but her friends seem to have made so much of her ability that she was persuaded she had only to find a proper field in which to display it. Her play was not a good play, but it was a remarkably sustained effort for a young woman of the upper middle-class in a period when young women were expected to have neither energy nor interest for such work. Her dedication to any intellectual pursuit could only strike her friends as a sign of peculiar high-mindedness and intelligence, and for such she was praised. She did have energy and intelligence, but she does not seem to have applied herself to serious study, and it was a failing she might have overcome had not her friends made so much of what she had been able to accomplish without it.

Wright was eager to please, to win from public and friends an assurance of her worth and approval of her unusual course. The need for assurance, which existed as a consequence of her parents' deaths, was enhanced by the constant, inevitable comparison with Camilla, both her support and a paradigm of those feminine qualities which Wright lacked. The Milnes apparently were fonder of Camilla than of her sister, 73 and Mary Wilson's letter of

73 Waterman, Frances Wright, p. 29, makes this assessment on the basis of a letter from "one of the Milne family to Sylva D'Arusmont, Frances Wright's daughter," which he saw in the collection of letters lent him by Wright's grandson, Norman William Guthrie.
introduction to Matthew Carey leaves the impression that the New York acquaintances were similarly inclined. As she said, "Your daughters can judge for themselves as to her [Wright's] beauty. I think she looks all her talents but she has a sweet pretty little sister with her called Camilla."  

Wright was already beginning to characterize herself as a spinster. She had escaped the passions of youth and could now feel the calm of a truly independent spirit. She was forced to join the evening entertainments, which she noted, were composed almost exclusively "of the unmarried young." For herself, 

A crowded room is in this way a pretty scene for a quiet observer to look into for half an hour; but if he [she] have survived the bouyant spirits of first youth, he [she] will then find it better to walk home again.  

Wright liked the young women of America, who had "a certain untaught grace and gaiety of the heart," and conducted themselves modestly—"the bosom never forgets its screen, nor are the ankles and arms exposed to court every idle gaze." Their only defect was that they entered society too early, "far too early, indeed, to be consistent with a becoming attention to their minds." Since the practice was the same in England, Wright was feeling her oddity for

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74 Mary Wilson to Matthew Carey, May 6, 1819, HSP, Carey MSS.
75 Wright, Views, pp. 23–24.
76 Ibid., p. 23.
77 Ibid., p. 33. [Her italics.]
the second time, but she could now make a virtue of it.

The young men she did not like so well, and one may imagine the awkwardness on both sides in a meeting between the tall, serious young woman and the intimidated young men. Wright described one such meeting humorously, although in a way that put all the fault on the young man.

In accosting a stranger they often assume a solemnity of countenance that is at first rather appalling. . . . I have more than once, upon such an occasion, hastened to collect my startled wits, expecting to be posed and shamed by some profound enquiry into the history of the past or the probable events of the future. I could ill convey to you the sudden relief I have then experienced on hearing some query on the news of the day, or as to my general opinion of Lord Byron's poetry. 78

Wright approved of marriage at this period of her life. Marriage was valuable to society in regard to "its morals and its happiness." 79 Two months later, after seeing the Carey family and the John Garnetts, British emigrant friends of Charles Wilkes, she would more forcefully maintain that "the sober happiness of married life is here found in perfection. Let the idlers smile at this, it is assuredly the best of heaven's gift to man." 80

With the play produced and some measure of applause received, Wright could, by May, begin the tour and inquiry which had ostensibly been her reason for coming to America. In early May she and Camilla left New York City

78 Ibid., p. 24.
79 Ibid., p. 27.
80 Ibid., p. 69.
for Philadelphia. After a month there, they went up the Hudson to Albany, through the Mohawk River Valley to Niagara Falls, across Canada to Montreal, then back to New York by way of Vermont.

Observations on the trip were, not surprisingly given her feelings about England, favorable to the American's energy, virtue, and manners. Her typical American was a model citizen—hard-working and honest, but neither so oppressed by labor nor so disinterested from lack of influence that he could not pay close attention to the activities of the government. Indeed, her earlier criticisms of the young men in New York City were wiped away, she said, when she saw them stamped with manhood, which was "when they have been called upon to exercise their rights as citizens, and have not merely studied the history and condition of their country, but are thoroughly imbued with the principles of its government and with the philosophy which their liberal institutions are so well calculated to inspire." 81

Good manners could be found everywhere. In travelling, she "often met with a refinement of civility from men, whose exterior promised only the roughness of the mechanic or working farmer, that [she] should only have looked for from the polished gentlemen." 82

All the experiences of the trip would confirm her expectations about American character. She found that "even ... the plain farmer" was well

81 Ibid., p. 24.

82 Ibid., p. 65.
informed. She admired the settlers of upstate New York, where "the wilderness was transformed into beauty, . . . the human species absolved from oppression, and, with it, absolved from misery, extending their dominion, not unjustly over their fellow creatures, but over the peaceful earth, and leaving to their posterity . . . the pure example of time well employed."84

Indeed, Wright's view of what the success of America consisted in, comes very close to Leo Marx's description of the pastoral society which American intellectuals valued—the society which tamed nature and harvested its bounty, and lived in a place uncontaminated by over-civilization, on the cultivated land.85 The one frontier farmer she criticized had marred the woods by cutting down all the trees around his cabin, which "all [would] agree [was] in very bad taste." She believed that any man who failed in the city could not suffer while he had "the wide field of bounteous nature before him . . . [and could] seek treasures in the wilderness!"87

Wright believed that the greatest danger for America lay in abandoning

83 Ibid., p. 98.
84 Ibid., p. 219.
86 Wright, Views, p. 102.
87 Ibid., p. 25.
its simplicity for the lure of wealth and European fashions.

Which of the patriots can anticipate, without anxiety, the period when the road to the senate house shall lead them through streets adorned with temples and palaces? And when the rulers of the republic, who now take their way on foot to the council chamber, in the fresh hour of morning, shall roll in chariots at mid-noon, or perhaps midnight, through a sumptuous metropolis, rich in arts and bankrupt in virtue? 88

Over-civilization caused man’s good sense to degenerate and led to political tyranny. Wright praised the American for his common sense view of knowledge, which corresponded to her more abstract definition in A Few Days in Athens—that "that must exist to man which exists to his senses." 89 For "they [were] accustomed to rest their opinions on the result of experience rather than on ingenious theories and abstract reasoning." 90

The relationship of liberty and education, or improvement of the mind, was so integral that it is not clear from her Views which she considered more essential. Education, which gave virtue, was necessary to liberty. But freedom of action and political participation was equally important in forming virtue. One of Wright's complaints about confining women to the home was that it kept them from "the world of varied society, where youth loses its presumption, and prejudice its obstinacy, and where self-knowledge is best obtained

88 Ibid., p. 261.
89 Wright, A Few Days in Athens, p. 36.
90 Wright, Views, p. 64.
from the mind being forced to measure itself with other minds, and thus to
discover the shallowness of its knowledge and the groundlessness of its
opinions."\textsuperscript{91}

Education and liberty led to that peaceful progress which seemed
impossible in Europe. Man's views will change, or circumstances will
change so that he cannot fulfill his desires. In a free country, presumably,
laws and institutions can be changed accordingly. With the fresh example
of France, however, one knew:

\textbf{If} law oppose barriers, [man's] spirit is checked but not quelled. The
flood of knowledge gathers strength, and the mound is swept away with
a sudden fury, which shakes the very foundations of society and spreads
a momentary ruin over the wide field of civilized life.\textsuperscript{92}

In the United States only two dangers seem to threaten. One was
Southern slavery, which must be ended. The other was the tendency to follow
a pattern already apparent in England, of confining women and restricting their
activities so that they became too delicate and degenerate and dragged down
their husbands and children with them.

The need for eradication of slavery in the South and improvement of
blacks through education and freedom of activity in the North was apparent to
Wright. Slavery was an evil which civilized Europe had imposed on the
American, since the British refused to allow the colonies to close off the trade,
she believed. The Americans did not want to maintain slavery after winning

\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., p. 62.
independence from British control, but there were very real difficulties to be faced, she admitted, in giving freedom to a large number of men trained to be slaves. Given this problem, she thought that colonization might be necessary to avoid the risk involved in freeing slaves. She expressed no doubts that slaves, given education and the opportunity to work for themselves, could advance to the state of virtuous citizens. If the nation was not willing to make that effort, however, then she would accept colonization, for slavery must be ended. Otherwise, white society in the South would see "the ruin of moral character, the decay of her strength, . . . vice, indolence, degradation. . . . The helots [would] sink into worse corruption, and the spartans become helots themselves."94

The moral degradation of women also threatened to degrade the society, although Americans had shown some recognition of the need to educate the women who would train the sons of the Republic. Imagine her chagrin when Wright discovered that in America, as in England, "French, Italian, dancing, drawing engage[d] the hours of the one sex. . . , while the more appropriate studies of the other [were] philosophy, history, political economy, and the exact sciences."95 She was quick, feeling the deficits of her English situation and education, to point out where this might lead. She justified both her own conduct

93 Ibid., p. 40.
94 Ibid., p. 269. [Her italics.]
95 Ibid., p. 218.
and pointed out the dangers of reducing women to a state of dependence.

I know not a circumstance which more clearly marks in England the retrograde movement of the national morals than the shackles which are forged for the rising generation of women. . . . I now apprehend that the children and grand-children of these matrons [who could ride unattended and walk abroad alone] are now condemned to walk in leading strings from the cradle to the altar, if not to the grave, taught to see in the other sex a race of seducers rather than protectors and of masters rather than companions. Alas for the morals of a country when female dignity is confounded with helplessness. 96

When Wright sailed for England in May, 1820, she had not gained fame or determined her career. She had, however, transformed her vague longings for freedom from the restrictions of her family and her culture into a more general theory of the benefits of liberty. She had emphasized, particularly, the advantages gained for a society by the more liberal treatment accorded women, her major complaint being that America seemed to be falling into the restrictive social customs of England. She had also begun the pattern of meeting her need for recognition, approval, belonging, by seeking public acclaim, depending on an impersonal audience rather than unreliable individuals. At the same time, her dismissal of the public's lack of appreciation for her work, lay the blame on the public taste not on her own inadequacy as a playwright. Unable to trust others to support her, she also would not trust their criticisms. The result, as already apparent, would be a continual movement from one audience to another, from one friendship to another. For the time

96 Ibid., p. 219.
being, however, she seemed to have found a group that was amenable to her principles and personal needs, the liberal publicists who upheld American institutions as a model for Europe and England.
CHAPTER THREE

Friendships: Bentham and Lafayette

The Wright sisters embarked for England in May, 1820, after a stay in the United States of almost two years. It is not clear why they brought the tour to a close, although Perkins argues that the unsettled political situation in England may have attracted Wright to a more promising field of activity. It seems more likely that, as the trip had been undertaken in the fashion of a grand tour and as Wright had not found a specific arena for her literary pursuits, it was simply time to return to home, family, and friends.

The return to Britain was undoubtedly depressing. Wright was approaching her twenty-fifth birthday, and, as yet, she had no place, no work. The poor reception of Altorf had destroyed her dreams of being a literary figure, and she returned from America with only the vague plan of using her talents to free men from the bondage of superstition and political despotism. She knew she wished to associate with the Matthew Careys of the world, but her course of action was unclear.

The political atmosphere of England was repressive after 1819, and Wright must quickly have become aware of how unusual her evaluation of the American experience was for a Briton. The idea of correcting British opinions of America by turning her voluminous correspondence with Mrs. Millar into the
travel book so often written by British visitors to America must have come naturally. She did have some experience in writing, and her impressions of America could be an important contribution to the liberal arguments for governmental reform. Moreover, she had convinced herself, perhaps because writing seemed to be the one acceptable career for a woman, that men could be persuaded to reform themselves and their societies by intelligent argument.

The Views of Society and Manners in America, in a Series of Letters from that Country to a Friend in England, During the Years 1818, 1819, 1820, appeared early in 1821.¹ The book was reviewed and, apparently, widely read, in England, France, and the United States. A printing was issued in New York in 1821, and by the time The North American Review noticed the book in 1822, it admitted that "this work has been so extensively read in America, that a review of it, at the present time, may seem unnecessary."² While there was some quibbling about the accuracy of all the facts, and hesitancy on the part of those who disagreed with Wright's sanguine descriptions of the near-perfect character of American institutions, the reviews—in the United States, England, and France (after translation in 1822)—were generally favorable.

Wright could, it seems have been awarded the title of lady author, writing pleasant descriptions of scenery and society which were proper work

¹The work was published originally in London. The citations in this paper refer to an edition by Paul R. Baker (see supra, n. 8, p. 28).

²The North American Review, XIV (1822), 15.
for a woman of her class. *Le Miroir*, a French newspaper, exclaimed that:

Miss Wright describes with a purity of taste of which her compatriots offer few examples. . . . The colours which she uses are always drawn from nature, her pencil frank, her touch firm, and her expression bold.³

If she could have abandoned her unfortunate polemics on politic, she might have found a secure, almost conventional, role and work.

Already, however, Wright had closed off that possibility. She had identified her own freedom with the support of republican institutions, and she could not give up her political interests without undermining the justification for her own independence. Moreover, the most exciting applause came from prominent political liberals.

Jeremy Bentham, the English utilitarian and legal reformer, wrote to her and invited her to visit him in London. Wright was delighted with recognition from the intellectual leader of British reform, and she joined Bentham's household as a student and admirer.

Her relationship with Bentham set the pattern for the exciting, hectic, but basically unproductive life that Wright was to lead for the next four years. A young woman with no need for money, with youthful enthusiasm, and adulatory of her elders, she had accomplished the phenomenon of writing a book which hymned republican government and rationally formed institutions in the midst of a travel narrative. She was thus entitled to recognition, but

³*Le Miroir*, March 13, 1822.
she would also prove her charm by not demanding it at her elders' expense.

Granted admission to a circle of European liberal thinkers, she saw herself as a protégée. They, apparently, saw her only as a pleasant admirer, for she was not encouraged to embark on further projects and spent the four years without producing another piece of work.

From the few references to Wright in the Bentham correspondence, the relationship of respected subordinate which Wright assumed can be seen. Bentham used her to deliver a letter on the reformation of Spanish penal codes to Count Toreno, a leader of the Spanish republicans then resident in Paris, mentioning that she was a person "on whose punctuality [he] could depend."4

Yet in philosophical argument, the young woman, though she might have a good heart, was a novice. In the Bentham memorabilia, he said:

Fanny Wright told me Socrates was pure as an icicle. I answered that it was my misfortune to read Greek, and to know better. What I read of Socrates was insipid. I could find in him nothing that distinguished him from other people.5

As a protection for the ignorance which she felt so severely in herself, Wright began to adopt a flattering tone for her teacher and a deprecatory one about herself. In a letter written to Bentham in the fall of 1821 to inform him of her first meeting with Lafayette, she described how she set off from Paris to LeGrange (the Lafayette estate about forty miles from Paris) unannounced,


5 Ibid., X, 583.
only to discover that she had passed the General on his way to Paris. Making light of the mischance resulting from her enthusiasm, Wright remarked, "You will say again, 'giddy goose,' why did you set off for LaGrange without having written beforehand? There are reasons for everything, great philosopher." She then explained that she had hoped to see Lafayette before having to spend the next ten days entertaining friends from England; yet, her reasonable account still made fun of her carelessness.

Lafayette, who must have heard of the Views almost immediately after its publication, wrote to Wright in July, 1821, to compliment her on the work, to suggest a translation's being made into French, and to request a meeting. As she had already been contacted by a Mr. Blaquiere about a translation, she may already have been considering a trip to the Continent. Lafayette's request confirmed her intention, and in her reply of July 16, she expressed a wish to be in Paris by September 1.

Wright's first letter to Lafayette illustrates the peculiar relationship she had with many older men, who assumed the role of her lost father and offered her male approval. She thanked him modestly for the praise of her work, then flattered him, saying:

Would to heaven that the English senate possessed a patriot and legislator at once as tried and as enlightened as the deputé de

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6Ibid., X, 526. No date is given for the letter.
la Sarthe! Or that the condition of the English people could afford as much ground for congratulations as that of the French. 7

Finally, while explaining in detail her efforts to be accurate in her account of America, she asked him for a correct spelling of the name of the young American who had attempted to rescue him from Olmutz—"Euger," as she had thought, or "Huger," as she had been told by a critic. 8

Lafayette was flattered, and he found the young woman and her work exciting. The two met sometime before September 19, as Wright reported to Bentham that Lafayette had spent the previous evening with her. Their initial meeting had been described in an earlier letter, in which she said their "meeting was scarcely without tears."

The enthusiasm and heart affection with which he [Lafayette] spoke of Our Utopia (America), the high respect he expressed for the character of its people, the ardent love of liberty which breathed through all his discourse, found, I need not say, an answering note of sympathy in me. 9

Lafayette also found Wright's work useful, seeing her encomium to the United States as a piece of material to be used in the campaign for a French republic. She reported to Bentham that "Genl Lafayette is going this morning to whisper dispatch into the ear of my translator. He is

7Frances Wright to M. de Lafayette, July 16, 1821, University of Chicago (Hereafter cited as UC), Archives, Lafayette MSS.

8Ibid.

anxious the work shd come out before the meeting of the chamber, wh if he waits to finish another work he has in hand I much doubt if it will be." 10

For Lafayette, at the moment a leader of the left-liberals in the Chamber of Deputies and on his way to adopting armed insurrection as a mode of action against Louis XVIII's government, 11 Wright's work was helpful, but not essential.

Wright, however, gained both confidence and a new sense of security. She told Bentham, in relating the difficulty in getting the book out quickly in French, that:

He [the translator] has made some agreement with a bookseller touching the translation of "Palmers'[ I forgot what--but a book in the style of "The Age of Reason" prohibited in Engd. . . . I do not see, any more than Genl Lafayette, what cause of haste there is for the appearance of a book against religion--a thing of whch there seems to be very little in the country. 12

She also reported that she would be leaving for LaGrange with Lafayette as soon as he finished business keeping him in Paris.

Lafayette, a man of action rather than a philosopher, very quickly drew Wright into the intrigues of the European left to establish republics in France, Spain, and Italy, activity which she would characterize in later years as doomed to failure because of "the general want of political

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10 Frances Wright to Jeremy Bentham, September 19, 1821, University College, London, Bentham MSS.


12 Frances Wright to Jeremy Bentham, September 19, 1821, University College, London, Bentham MSS.
knowledge and political experience, the frequent vanity and frivolity of individuals, the confidence placed in more than suspicious characters, the absurd drawing-room intrigues and fashionable conspirators."\textsuperscript{13}

She did not evaluate Lafayette's friends so harshly in 1821.

Life as Lafayette's companion and correspondent was pleasant at first. Wright spent much of the fall at LaGrange and the winter in Paris. Lafayette was involved, at this period, in plans for a series of armed insurrections against the government, although he apparently did not tell Wright of this until later. As a member of the Central (Paris) sale of the French Carbonnerie, Lafayette, although still a member of the Chamber of Deputies, had helped to plan a series of uprisings which were to occur simultaneously in late December, 1821, at Saumur and Colmar in Alsace. Lafayette and Voyer d'Argenson were due in Belfort on December 30. They did not arrive on time and barely escaped when the uprising was betrayed and crushed.\textsuperscript{14}

Wright was unaware of the scheme, but she was already cognizant of Lafayette's commitment to action in which she could not be involved.

Writing on December 29, to Lafayette, whom she assumed to be at LaGrange, she estimated her value:

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\textsuperscript{13} Wright, \textit{Biography}, p. 18.
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\textsuperscript{14} de Bartier de Sauvigny, \textit{Bourbon Restoration}, pp. 181-183.
\end{flushright}
Time at present hangs heavy on my hands and on my heart and it seems as if the burden could be lightened by discoursing with a friend. I mean not however to call your attention from important matters to my idle words. Throw them aside till you have some moments of leisure—or perhaps of weariness,—then possibly they may serve to banish some anxious thoughts,—the prattle of a child has sometimes done as much for a wise man.\footnote{Frances Wright to Lafayette, December 29, 1821, UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.}

Already she was losing herself and her own need to work in his activity and the security of being attached to a great man. Wright had sought affection from a number of older men—her great-uncle, Milne; Matthew Carey and John Garnett in Philadelphia; Charles Wilkes, to whom she had dedicated the \textit{Views}, in New York; Bentham; and now Lafayette. She was finally at peace and desired to cement the relationship. She did not want to become Lafayette's lover, only his daughter. She was willing to give up her own work, a separate course, to give him the affection of a child, even an adopted one. As she said:

To possess this title [of daughter] was the highest of my wishes—to deserve it my proudest ambition.

She deserved the title by the reverence, that I bear to your virtues, by my sympathy in all your sentiments, in all your undertakings, in all your pleasures and all your pains—by the devotedness of my affection, the fulness of my confidence,—by all this and more than this I feel that I merit the friendship and parental fondness of the best and greatest man that lives.\footnote{Ibid.}
That she saw the relationship as fulfilling the need for a father, which had been denied her since infancy, was indicated by her belief that the connection with LaGrange marked an important change in her life.

What sweet hours I have passed in those walls! I must pass many more there my good friend & (receive the threat for a prophetic one) shall pass many more there. Hitherto my life has had so little pleasure in it, that I am sure there must be a great deal in store for me. 17

Wright may have felt ambivalent during the fall about giving up her own career. She wrote a curious letter to Albert Gallatin, United States minister to France, in which she exhibited delight at her recognition as an author, but also indicated the insecurity she felt in relation to men of learning.

As for my authorship--it is true that I have amused myself and perhaps tired others, with prose and verse, and so far I suppose am an author; but if the character supposes much learning, any pretension, a spark of ill-nature, or an atom of self-conceit I really do apprehend that I am after all not entitled to claim it. 18

The curious position of informally adopted daughter, however, had many advantages. She could enjoy the security of being treated like a daughter and alliance with an important political figure, without the sacrifice of the independence that marriage, the only comparably close

17 Frances Wright to Lafayette, December 27, 1821, UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.

18 Frances Wright to Albert Gallatin, October, 1821, HSP, Gallatin MSS.
connection, necessitated. Moreover, the position of "daughter" in the household of Lafayette, whose own children performed the social duties required of the family of a well-known man, meant that she retained some freedom from the restricting conventions that bound a "fair lady," a title, as Wright said, that "would be an absolute ursupation shd I arrogate it to myself or accept it from another."\(^{19}\)

Wright's affection and praise must have endeared her to Lafayette at a moment when some of his fellow liberals were disenchanted. After the failure of the insurrection in Alsace, Lafayette's retreat to LaGrange, and capture of some of the lower-ranking conspirators, the prestige of the government and of the royalist ministry of Villèle rose. Benjamin Constant, a colleague of Lafayette in the Chamber and an acquaintance of Wright, said in early 1822, referring to Lafayette's ill-planned scheme, "How can we have anything to do with people, who, after leading us to the edge of the precipice, without our realizing it, skip out and leave us in the lurch."\(^{20}\)

The letters that passed between Lafayette and Wright during this period are filled with unlimited praise for him and appreciation of her affectionate nature. Wright became necessary for Lafayette as a pleasant companion, who occasionally undertook errands connected with his projects. Otherwise, her only activities during the years she spent in France consisted

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\(^{19}\)Ibid.

\(^{20}\)Quoted by de Bertier de Sauvigny, *Bourbon Restoration*, p. 184.
in revising and publishing the works she had already written—a second
(1822), and a London edition of A Few Days in Athens (1822), which she
dedicated to Bentham.

Lafayette did act as mentor for her work. He suggested revisions
for the second edition of the Views, recommending that she add a note on the
merits of the Revolutionary army to the book, recalling the finest time of
his own life.²¹ He may also have suggested that she publish the pieces on
Epicurus—at least she sent the rough sheets to him shortly after she returned
to London in 1822 to supervise the second edition of the Views.²²

The years 1822–1823 had an illusion of useful activity, although at
the expense of the development of Wright's own work. One of her first
letters to Lafayette from London indicates how his interests were replac-
ing her own.

I trust . . . I shall soon see my friend's [Lafayette's] affairs arranged.
I have, as yet, attended little to my own. Next week I hope to be free
to set about them. I have a copy of the second edition of our book,
Views of Society and Manners, by me, but have scarcely looked into it.
I think, however, that our corrections have been properly made.²³

Two days later, she wrote again that she had been on errands for him,

²¹ Lafayette to Frances Wright, n.d., UC, Archives, Lafayette
MSS.
²² Frances Wright to Lafayette, March 21, 1822, UC, Archives,
Lafayette MSS.
²³ Frances Wright to Lafayette, February 7, 1822, quoted by
Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, pp. 72-73.
stressing his unusual fortune in having her services, as well as her own independent behavior:

I dare say you marvel sometimes at my independent way of walking through the world just as if nature had made me of your sex instead of poor Eve's. Trust me, my beloved friend, the mind has no sex but what habit and education give it, and I, who was thrown in infancy upon the world like a wreck upon the waters, have learned as well to struggle with the elements as any child of Adam's. 24

She might want to undertake activities like those of "any child of Adam's," but she was not going to let Lafayette forget that she also needed paternal affection.

She wrote to Lafayette on March 21, that she was travelling north to see a friend (probably Mrs. Millar), and had been detained so long in London only by the "gentlemen of the press." She was already involved in aiding one of Lafayette's exiled friends in London, for whom she begged letters, as well as for herself, for how could she "subsist without them in the North?" 25

In the same letter, she intimated her loyalty and importance for Lafayette. Another Charbonnerie conspiracy, led by General Berton, had failed at Thouars, near Saumur, and Berton had been captured. A plot at La Rochelle likewise resulted in another chance to interrogate Charbonnerie

24 Frances Wright to Lafayette, February 9, 1822, quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 74.

25 Frances Wright to Lafayette, March 21, 1822, UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.
about the leadership of the movement. Lafayette clearly was in some danger, and Wright begged that he keep no bad news from her, "that [he] not say cloignez vous (stay away) when you ought to say venez (come)."
Dramatically, she concluded, "yours most fondly and decidedly till death."

Wright returned to Paris in the summer of 1822, and her mind was occupied with Lafayette's interests—the failure of the Charbonnerie plots and the disintegrating situation of the Spanish liberals. She and Camilla were apparently staying with the Garnetts, Harriet, Julia, and their mother, who had emigrated to France after the death of the father, John Garnett, and Wright was kept busy entertaining visitors and attending to problems of failing revolutionaries. She and Lafayette corresponded and saw each other often, but Wright reduced the effusive expressions of sentiment of her first letters to him.

The summer of 1822 was a difficult time for Lafayette and the liberals. Berton was brought to Paris for trial and finally executed in October. The Spanish liberals, who had imposed a constitution on Ferdinand VII in 1820, were in the process, after July, of attempting to maintain themselves against a popularly supported rightist movement, aimed at restoring the power of the monarch. Lafayette came through the government investigation of the Charbonnerie unscathed, and he led opposition in the Chamber of Deputies to French intervention in support of the

26 **bid.**
Spanish monarch.

Wright, apparently unaware of Lafayette's questionable desertion of his co-plotters and excited by his defense of the Spanish constitutionalists, wrote to Lafayette, after he had reported to her on his performance in the Chamber, that "this weakness [of other opponents to the Villèle ministry] ... only makes the greatness of my friend and father more striking and conspicuous, and while he exists to speak firmly and not fearfully the nation wants no other leaders." 27

The Spanish rebels were forced to release Ferdinand VII in May, 1823, after a triumphal entry of French troops into Cadiz. Lafayette wrote Wright a note, stressing the defeat of their interests.

There is talk of placing the Duke of Angoulême atop the column of the Place de Vendôme. However, liberty will not perish, even in old Europe. But the present will not be easy to endure. 28

Indeed, Lafayette would soon lose his seat in the Chamber, as Louis XVIII's government, triumphant in its Spanish success, was able to pass a new election law, dissolve the Chamber in December, and call elections for early spring, 1824. The result of the elections was a personal defeat for Lafayette and a defeat, in general, for the liberals, who retained only nineteen seats as opposed to one hundred and ten in the previous assembly. 29 Lafayette, in

27 Frances Wright to Lafayette, n.d., UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.
28 Lafayette to Frances Wright, n.d., UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.
29 de Bertier de Sauvigny, Bourbon Restoration, pp. 193-194.
some sense, had nothing to do. He had been voted out of the Chamber and insurrection had failed. Seemingly at the disappointing end of a career and in debt, he finally accepted the petition of the American Congress that he revisit the scene of his glorious youth and receive the thanks of the American people for his service in their revolution.

Lafayette's last journey abroad would finally liberate Wright from her dependence on him. 1822-1823 had not been productive years for her, and her attentions and devotion to Lafayette could be redeemed only by some success in the liberals' efforts or by her becoming attached to him in a more formal manner. By early 1824, the chances of the former seemed to have faded, and Wright pressed strongly for Lafayette to adopt her, a scheme which would also fail.

Facing the prospect of traveling around the United States, very visibly, with a man whose only relation to her was friendship (for Lafayette expected her and Camilla to accompany him), and beginning to face the inevitable rumors which surfaced about the friendship of a twenty-eight year old woman with a man of sixty-nine, Wright finally proposed that Lafayette adopt her and Camilla. Lafayette's family objected, and he would not override them. He persuaded Wright to accompany him on the voyage, however, by making her feel that he was dependent on her. She agreed that she and Camilla would travel to the United States with him, but assured Camilla that Lafayette was so broken by his election failure and the disagreement with his family, that "the coming voyage, which has now lost for my paternal friend every charm,
seems yet to hold out the only prospect, I say, not of happiness or peace for both are ended, but of occupation and relief."30

Wright's adoption plan revealed her dependence on Lafayette and social opinion, a dependence that was becoming trying, as one lacked courage and the other set unreasonable restrictions. Camilla was her support in dealing with the difficult problem of presenting an acceptable social face. First, if Lafayette did adopt them, then it would make clear that he was adopting them as daughters and not finding a clever way to bring Frances Wright into the family as a mistress. Second, Wright did not have to face the world as a single woman traveling about without the protection or countenance of a man. The constant presence of her sister made them a natural family unit, acceptable in a way she alone would not be. Wright simply considered Camilla an extension of herself. During the crisis with Lafayette's family, she wrote that, "I know that in venturing to consider you as part of myself I shall best consult your wishes."31 Yet after deciding to accompany her sister and Lafayette to America, Camilla wrote to her cousin, "I dislike the thought of another voyage across the ocean to which experience has only tended to increase my aversion."32

30 Frances Wright to Camilla Wright, June 2, 1824, quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 98.


32 Camilla Wright to James Milne, June 20, 1824, quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 104.
Lafayette sailed from Havre on June 13, 1824, arriving in New York in August. The Wright sisters arrived in September and became part of his touring group, although one would not know it to read the account of his secretary, Mr. Levasseur, who discreetly never mentioned the sisters. Returned to public homage, feted everywhere, Lafayette quickly recovered his spirits, reducing his dependence on Wright and making her even more conscious of her position as satellite. A description of Lafayette's visit to Mt. Vernon gives some hint of the subsidiary position a woman was allowed to occupy on the triumphal journey of a military hero.

On leaving the tomb [of Washington], we [Lafayette, his son, and Levasseur] found the three nephews of Washington ardently praying for their uncle, and mingling in their prayers the name of Lafayette. One of them, Mr. Custis, offered the General a gold ring . . . ; and we returned by the path to the house where our traveling companions were awaiting us.  

Cheering crowds and a parade awaited Lafayette in every town he visited, and the celebrations were for men and military display. A typical account is that of the procession in Maysville, Kentucky:


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Wright could no longer believe that Lafayette was dependent on her companionship, deriving no pleasure in his old age but from their relationship.

Wright had not found a father, a home, recognition, or productive work during the years with Lafayette. She had gained even more habits of independent movement, however, which did not fit into the confined roles offered European women. The United States seemed both a haven and a promising country in which to work. She would throw herself into perfecting the best of existing societies with the conviction that political freedom was all that was necessary for men to grow in wisdom and that America must be protected from the corruptions of over-civilized Europe. Having become more firmly imbued with principles of Continental republican liberalism, she did not think that America's political or social institutions needed reforming; the only barriers to perfection were ignorance and the power of superstitious prejudice.

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the Western and Southern States in 1825, as Reported by the Local Newspapers, ed. by Edgar Ewing Brandon (Athens, Ohio, 1944), p. 239.
CHAPTER FOUR

Practical Reformer: The Nashoba Experiment

At some point during Lafayette's tour of the United States, Frances Wright made the decision to establish a model plantation and school that would indicate the mode and prove the efficacy of ending slavery. Having left behind in Europe a debacle of liberal attempts to reform the political system, she found herself once again in a free country, where political reform seemed unnecessary. Believing that the United States suffered from only one flaw (slavery), and needing a project that would allow her to avoid returning to France or England, she fell under the propitious influence of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

Wright (and Camilla) met Jefferson and Madison during the fall of 1824 as traveling companions and protégées of Lafayette, although Jefferson had formed an independent opinion of her on the basis of her writings, which he praised effusively. As he had written Lafayette, in response to a gift of the Views and A Few Days in Athens:

Miss Wright had before favored me with the first edition of her American work; but her Few Days in Athens was entirely new, and has been a treat to me of the highest order. The matter and
method of the dialogue is strictly ancient; and the principles of the sects are beautifully and candidly explained. . . .

May we not hope more from the same pen? 1

The sisters were welcomed at Monticello and later at Montpelier, the home of James Madison. Wright's conversations with the two theorists, and her first view of plantation society, probably reignited the interest she had expressed earlier in the Views, and confirmed her assessments about the problems of emancipation, which could bring economic ruin to the planter and social disorder to the South.

Wright had made clear in her travel account of 1820 her view that slavery had been imposed on the colonies by Britain and was an imposition from which all sensible Americans wished to be free. But by the time of independence the size of the slave population in the Southern states had become so great and the condition of the slaves so depraved that they could not be freed without considering the impact of untutored citizens in a democratic polity. Consequently, intelligent and humane men had thought it necessary to form elaborate schemes for emancipation, the most promising of which, by 1825, seemed to comprise compensated emancipation and colonization of the freed slaves.

Wright started with the belief, supported by her contact with Jefferson and reaffirmed in the Biography of 1844, that "the Negro was

originally carried to colonial North America forcibly by the ships of the mother country, contrary to the feelings, and in despite of the resistance of the colonists,"² and that all Americans still desired to eradicate slavery, if a way could be found which was not "menacing to the major interests of public order, industry, and the general welfare of the country."³

In drawing up her plan to end slavery, Wright accepted the need to "consult at once the pecuniary interests and prevailing opinions of the southern planters." She proposed to establish an experimental farm which would illustrate the advantages of cooperative labor engaged in by slaves who would be stimulated to unusual "exertion . . . [by] the prospect of liberty, together with liberty and education of the children." The slaves, working cooperatively, would produce more efficiently, and could be expected to make profits large enough to purchase themselves and their children and to pay the expenses of removal from America, along with the purchase of farm implements necessary for success in their new homes. At the same time as they were working to purchase themselves, the slaves would be "taught orally (in simple language) the necessity of industry, first for the procuring of liberty, and afterwards the value of industry when liberty shall be procured." The children would be given a more complete education than their parents,

²Wright, Biography, p. 21.
³Ibid., p. 22.
and all would be prepared to conduct themselves as responsible freemen. 4

Wright apparently believed that the major economic barrier to emancipation was the fact that most plantations did not produce large enough profits to allow the owner to compensate himself for emancipating his slaves and paying the costs of colonizing them. The belief that slavery was a financial burden to the owner might certainly have been gained from seeing Jefferson's debt-ridden estate. At any rate, Wright thought that it was necessary only to demonstrate a profitable method of using slave labor—the method of cooperative labor—and the owners would be willing to adopt the new productive technique just long enough to make a fair compensation for themselves and their heirs. 5

The cooperative labor principle attracted Wright after she heard Robert Owen deliver a lecture to the United States Congress in February, 1825, on the community he was establishing at New Harmony, Indiana. When Lafayette traveled South (without female companions) on a tour through rugged country to New Orleans, she was free to take the Northern route, which allowed her to

4 Frances Wright. "A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States Without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South," in New Harmony Gazette, October 1, 1825. The "Plan" was also printed in Benjamin Lundy's The Genius of Universal Emancipation and Baltimore Courier, October 15, 1825.

5 The "Plan" proposed an establishment of 100 slaves, with initial capital costs of $41,160. The slaves could be expected to produce crops earning a gross profit of $12,500 a year, leaving a net profit of $9,980 after paying 6% interest on the investment. Calculating the additional money necessary for colonization and support for the aged, infirm, and young, a plantation of 100 slaves would pay off the initial costs and costs of colonization within five years.
visit New Harmony and Harmonie, Pennsylvania, the site to which George Rapp was moving his community of German farmers after selling New Harmony to Owen. 6

Wright arrived in New Harmony in March, 1825. She inspected the Rappite buildings, talked with William Owen, one of Robert Owen's sons, and the Rapps, and then set off for Albion (Illinois) with George Flower.

Flower was a critical link between antislavery and communitarian interests. He had been involved with Morris Birkbeck in settling Edwards County, Illinois, in 1817, where freed blacks had been given land to farm. He had worked with Benjamin Lundy in 1823 in the fight against calling a constitutional convention that would have considered legalizing slavery in Illinois. He had also acted as Owen's agent in settling arrangements with George Rapp for the sale of New Harmony. For the first time, Wright saw the two interests in conjunction, and she herself seems to have formulated the idea of establishing a community where slaves would work together, under a communal organization, to make the profits necessary to buy freedom and to colonize themselves.

William Owen recorded that "Miss Wright, [Flower] says, is very much interested in the system." 7

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6 The Rappites were a German communitarian sect led by Father George Rapp, that had migrated from Southern Germany. They had established a community, called Harmonie, in southern Indiana, in 1814.

7 The Diary of William Owen, ed. by Joel W. Hiatt (Indianapolis, 1906), p. 130. Wright was interested, but with a very important change to be made from the New Harmony Preliminary Society, which admitted "persons of all ages and descriptions, exclusive of persons of color," according to the account given in the New Harmony Gazette, October 1, 1825.
The Wright sisters, for Camilla, as always, accompanied her sister, traveled on to New Orleans, where they met Lafayette in April. He apparently did not discourage Wright's budding scheme, and he may have introduced her to Andrew Jackson, who conducted Lafayette into Nashville during his tour north from New Orleans. According to Lafayette's secretary, Lavasseur, General Jackson was viewed as a friend to emancipation.

Every body told us that General Jackson's slaves were treated with the greatest humanity, and several persons assured us, that it would not surprise them if, in a short time, their master . . . should attempt to augment it still more by giving an example of gradual emancipation to Tenessee, which would be the more easily accomplished, as there are in this state but 19,000 slaves in a population of 423,000. 8

Lafayette, at least, mentioned to Jackson that Wright "means to consult you on a delicate But Very Interesting Subject, [and] Her confidence cannot be better placed," 9 implying that Jackson would help his "filial friend."

The apparent case with which emancipation might be effected in Tennessee, and the advice of Jackson, led Wright to purchase land in western Tennessee, in an area which Jackson, Judge John Overton, and the Winchesters (General James Winchester and his son Marcus) were attempting to develop. This unsettled area near Memphis also met another criterion which Wright's Southern advisers deemed important, that it "should avoid the neighborhood of

8 Lavasseur, Lafayette, II, 156.

9 Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, ed. by John Spencer Bassett, VII (Washington, D. C., 1928), 290-291.
settlements where there are slaves."10

The communal nature of Wright's proposal, which represented a departure from simple republican principles, was noted by Madison in his reply to her request for his thoughts on her "Plan."11 Madison, presuming man's "natural and habitual repugnance to labor," believed that united labor was not a sufficient stimulus to overcome such repugnance. For, why should a man labor voluntarily "where each individual would feel that the fruit of his exertions would be shared by others whether equally or unequally making them." Madison also warned Wright to remember that the voluntary cooperation of the Morovians, Harmonites, and Shakers was illusory, for there was "a religious authority in the head."12

Although the Rappite community at Harmonie was physically impressive, it is not clear why Wright was so immediately drawn to it as a model. While Lafayette, Madison, and Jefferson might view it with friendly interest as one more experiment perhaps leading to human progress, none of these mentors was ever convinced of the efficacy of its basic premise. In adopting the cooperative principle for her experiment, Wright was moving away from the liberal theorists who saw political reform as the critical factor in human improvement.

10James Madison to Frances Wright, September 1, 1825, in The Writings of James Madison, ed. by Gaillard Hunt, IX (New York, 1910), 225.

11See supra, n. 5, p. 86.

12James Madison to Frances Wright, September 1, 1825, in Hunt, ed., James Madison, IX, 226-227.
towards the more radical theorists, such as Robert Owen, who called for a reform of certain basic social institutions. Certainly, she did not recognize the implications of her scheme, as she expected Madison and Lafayette to approve of the "Plan" that might finally erase the one blemish on America's republican institutions--the system of slave labor.

The attraction which cooperative labor had for Wright seems to have been a result of her personal circumstances in 1825. Preparing for a break with her "father" of four years, Lafayette, she once again was without family (except for Camilla), without a home. The cooperative society, as seen in New Harmony, functioned as an extended family; the virtues of the system were more than efficient organization of labor. The picture of a close-knit community, which provided work and familial affections, appeared at just the moment when Wright was in need of both.

Lafayette sailed from the United States in September, 1825, and Wright proceeded to serious business, apparently buying the tract for her experiment (named Nashoba) in October, 1825, on a site just outside Memphis. The "Journal of the Plantation of Nashoba" records that she was in Memphis by the spring when she received the first complement of donated slaves, a mother and five children, from a Mr. Robert Wilson of South Carolina.  

\[13\] The Genius of Universal Emancipation, December 10, 1825.

\[14\] Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 145. The account is from the "Journal," which was part of the collection borrowed from Norman William Guthrie and never returned. Four journal articles have appeared on Nashoba,
From February until May, Wright remained at Nashoba, originally with George Flower, his family, and Camilla. By March, however, Camilla and Flower's family had returned to Albion to recover from the first of the illnesses which would plague the plantation. Wright and Flower remained, acquiring eight more slaves (five male, three female) and beginning the task of clearing the land and erecting rude cabins. In May, leaving Flower in charge, Wright set off to visit Camilla in Illinois and to pay a visit to the colony at New Harmony.

Robert Owen had arrived at the colony in February, 1826, with his son, Robert Dale Owen, his partner William Maclure, and Maclure's protégés, William Phiquepal and Mme. Marie Fretageot. The "boatload of knowledge" had also included Thomas Say and Charles Lesueur. New Harmony was, thus, alive with intellectual activity, and Wright was urged to join it.

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none of which use any sources not indicated in the following section on Nashoba. They are: Ann Brown, "A Dream of Emancipation," in New England Magazine, XXX (1904); Edd Winfield Parks, "Dreamer's Vision: Frances Wright at Nashoba (1825–1830)," in Tennessee Historical Magazine, 2nd ser., II (1932); Helen Elliott, "Frances Wright's Experiment with Negro Emancipation," in Tennessee Historical Quarterly, VI (1947); and O. B. Emerson, "Frances Wright and her Nashoba Experiment," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, VI (1947). In addition, Camilla Sylva Guthrie, Wright's great granddaughter, wrote "Frances Wright at Nashoba" (unpubl. master's essay, Columbia University, 1946), in which she criticized the Perkins and Wolfson biography but offered no new information about Nashoba.

Maclure was a Scotch emigré, who had made his fortune as a merchant, and then devoted himself to advancing education and science. He was president of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science from 1817–1840.
William Maclure was the first to recognize Wright's talent, and he sought to enlist her in his scheme for the improvement of education and the development of science. For Maclure, New Harmony was more than another experiment; it was to be "an example of what ought to exist in the social order." Maclure talked with Wright during the visit and tried to "convince her that she [could] be more beneficently employed . . . at Harmony than Memphis, that the scale of good [from activities at New Harmony was] much more extended and far better adapted to her talents, . . . For the smallness of her establishment, it [could] be managed without her, and at any time she [could] be there if required." 17

Wright, nevertheless, returned to Nashoba in August, although seemingly she had not decided whether to remain there, as the plantation was proving damaging to her health. She continued to suffer in the Memphis climate, for Maclure lamented the sickness which kept her from aiding Mme. Fretageot at New Harmony. 18 Some work must have proceeded under Flower's direction, however, because Maclure reported after his visit in December that Wright had established "excellent order, regularity, and economy . . . with her black

16 William Maclure to Mme. Fretageot, June 9, 1826, Library of the New Harmony Workingmen's Institute (hereafter cited as NHWI), Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

17 William Mclure to Mme. Fretageot, June 16, 1826, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

18 William Maclure to Mme. Fretageot, September 19, 1826, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.
population which would be a melancholy [sic] contrast with the contrary . . .

left at Harmony."\[19\]

Mme. Fretageot, miffed at the comparison between the disorder at New Harmony and the peace at Nashoba, correctly replied that:

She [Wright] is absolutely mistress of her slaves, can direct them without opposition. They are accustomed to obey and with her obedience is pleasant. There the task is not to be compared with the one at Harmony.\[20\]

Indeed, Wright was carrying on an effort in tutelage, not in coordination and compromise of many independent minds in a community founded on the principle of such independence. She could direct those who accepted her superiority, and she saw the slaves at Nashoba as children.

During the winter of 1826-1827, Wright remained ill, and she announced the creation of a board of trustees to direct Nashoba and to secure its continuance if she should be unable to carry on the effort. The statement of reorganization was a curious blend of public relations, model for utopia, appeal for support, and testimony of gratitude. In a trust deed drawn up in December, 1826, Wright turned over her lands and slaves to General Lafayette, William Maclure, Robert Owen, Cadwallader Colden, Richeson Whitby, Robert Jennings, Robert Dale Owen, George Flower, Camilla Wright, and James Richardson.\[21\] The

\[19\]William Maclure to Mme. Fretageot, December 22, 1826, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

\[20\]Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, January 17, 1827, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

\[21\]Cadwallader Colden was mayor of New York City (1818-1820), New York Representative in Congress (1821-1823), and New York state senator (1825-1827). Wright had probably met him during her first visit to America,
choice of the first four named people, who had virtually nothing to do with
Nashoba, seemed to be an attempt to gain repute and credibility for the
experiment, as well as to honor men who had been important in forming
Wright’s reform vision.

Her model for utopia, her vision of the good life, was included in
a brief justification of her action. The community was to be New Harmony
without the conflicts which had split the original. This was to be assured by
admitting only individuals (not spouses or children over fourteen) who under-
went a successful examination of convictions. They would then be allowed to
join an establishment

founded on the principle of community of property and labor; presenting
every advantage to those desirous, not of accumulating money, but of
enjoying life and rendering services to their fellow-creatures;--these
fellow-creatures, that is, the blacks here admitted, 22

Nashoba was not only to serve those who enjoyed residence. It was to
"open the way to a great national reform," to forward the improvement of man.

By this time, however, improvement extended beyond the original purpose of
freeing the country from slavery. Wright was moving towards a recognition of
deeper problems, the problem of the new interest in wealth and its impact on the

and he had proved his interest in antislavery by attacking the fugitive slave law
when a Congressman in 1822. Richeson Whitby, a former Shaker, had joined
the New Harmony community in 1826. Robert L. Jennings, a former Univer-
salist minister, had joined the New Harmony community in 1826. Robert Dale
Owen was Robert Owen's oldest son. He had arrived with his father in New
Harmony in January, 1826. James Richardson was a Scotch freethinker, who
contributed regularly to the New Harmony Gazette and whom Wright had met in
Memphis.

22 New Harmony Gazette, February 2, 1827.
society's valuation of honest labor. Asserting that "Labor is wealth," she called on men to "see that it needs not to be rich, in the now received sense of the word," to act for the betterment of all.²³ Certainly her principal concern remained a solution to the slave problem, but already she was finding fault with idle and unworked-for wealth.

The concern of the communitarians about America's values was reiterated in a letter by the resident trustees, also printed in the New Harmony Gazette. Making clear that Nashoba would not burden itself with debt to acquire more slaves, they renounced any intention of following

the leaning of the present generation of men, and perhaps more peculiarly of Americans, . . . towards speculation, adventure, and commercial gains . . . [which] spirit, as liable to be generated in a community as in private life, could only tend to demoralize the institution.²⁴

Thus, in slightly over one year after her removal from the republican influences of Lafayette, Jefferson, and Madison, Wright had developed a personal set of principles somewhat at odds with those of her principal mentors. She valued labor, but had come to see the danger of a single-minded attention to property and self-interest. Recognizing that Americans were moving from a simple society in which the primary value was hard work for a living to one where speculation and investment could bring riches, she saw a danger to republican virtue.

²³Ibid.
²⁴New Harmony Gazette, February 28, 1827.
Her sensitivity to the declining respect for labor, which she believed was spreading in America, may have been a result, also, of her fear that a refined society which undervalued labor would adopt the restrictions on women's activities which were apparent in the industrially advanced society of Britain. She had labored now, and must have retained her earlier sentiments of the Views, that it was "better to see a woman, as in Scotland, bent over the glebe, mingling the sweat of her brow with that of her churlish husband or more churlish son, than to see her gradually sinking into the childish dependence of a Spanish donna."25

Certainly, in America, the advance of industry was accompanied by a constriction of activities considered respectable for women. Barbara Welter has concluded, after a survey of the popular literature which was printed between 1820 and 1860, that women were told, increasingly, to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. While the nineteenth-century American man participated more and more in industry and work outside the home.

the religious values of his forebears were neglected in practice if not in intent, and he occasionally felt some guilt that he had turned this new land . . . into one vast countinghouse. But he could salve his conscience by reflecting that he had left behind a hostage, not only to fortune, but to all the values which he held so dear and treated so lightly. Woman . . . was the hostage in the home.26

25Wright, Views, pp. 219-220.

Also, convinced by her experience with the treatment given to free-
men that the majority would not always decide correctly (or morally), she
began to believe in the need for education on a broader scale than simply for
untutored slaves. And her interest in proper education was enhanced by her
sense that an upsurge was occurring in religious enthusiasm which misled
men and made them unreasonable fanatics. Her sensitivity to this was derived
also from the fact that churches were the major institution advocating and
supporting restrictions on women’s activities.

The primary place which Wright would later give to the baleful
influence of organized religion first appeared in her explanation, at this time,
of her reluctance to work with abolitionists motivated by a religiously inspired
doctrine of individualism and perfectability. She would not entrust her property
to emancipating societies for two reasons. First, they would offer the slave
physical freedom, only to deny him "liberty of the mind." Second, they ignored
the interests of slaveholders and engaged in unproductive denunciation. As she
said, 'Emancipation based on religion has hitherto affected but little; and
generally speaking, has by the tone and arguments employed, tended rather to
irritate than convince."27

Finally, her interest in utilizing a community form came from meeting
with the Owens and finding a congenial group of supporters in New Harmony.
Her project was seen partially as one to educate men in community virtue--

27New Harmony Gazette, February 2, 1827.
to teach them reasonable principles and consideration for other men. After the fragmented efforts of European politics, in the midst of a crisis about where she belonged, the sense of unity engendered by her friendships in the community was appealing. By spring, 1826, she was willing to accept organization of a community as her primary interest at Nashoba, and the concern of her republican advisers, the emancipation of slaves, became subsidiary to the larger purpose of presenting a model of an enlightened community to America.

Wright set off in May, 1827, with Robert Dale Owen, to recover her health and to find new recruits for Nashoba among her European acquaintances. She and Owen sailed directly from New Orleans for France, where, as Owen said, "the event of [the] visit was my introduction, by Frances Wright, to General Lafayette." After Wright introduced him to her French circle he departed for London, leaving her to recuperate with her American expatriate friends, the Garnetts.

Robert Dale Owen, bereft of activity at a collapsing New Harmony, had been captivated by the schemes of his elder (Wright was six years older than he) for a Nashoba which would combine antislavery activity with the ideal that had been undermined at New Harmony. Owen later described her influence over him as harmful, her ideas "even more immature and extravagant than my own."

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But he admired her "strong, logical mind, . . . courageous independence of thought, and . . . zealous wish to benefit her fellow-creatures,"\(^{29}\) and he was impressed with her European friends. Owen concluded that he had seen much to admire in her, but "nothing to love."\(^{30}\)

He treated her, however, like a charming friend, and their letters, filled with business and anecdote, show affection. Robert Dale Owen left Paris in late August and wrote to Wright, immediately after his arrival in London, describing his conversation with an over-pious priest and listing the contacts he had already made in London. He had also arranged for a letter from Wright to be delivered to Mrs. Mary Shelley,\(^{31}\) who had been selected for an invitation to the community.

Wright opened correspondence with Mary Shelley in August, 1827, noting that she wrote to her "as the daughter of your father and mother (known to me only by their works and opinions)."\(^ {32}\) Wright wrote the first long letter

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 296.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 299.

\(^{31}\)Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley was the daughter of the British radical, William Godwin, and the feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft. She had married the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley shortly before his death, and by 1826 was trying to support herself and her son by writing, having already had a precocious success with *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, in 1818.

as an introduction for Robert Dale Owen, making clear to Mary Shelley that she would not be able to see her in person, as she was returning to Nashoba from France in November or December. Mary Shelley's friendly reply made her hope for more, however, and Wright's second letter (in September) promised "most surely will I go to England, most surely to Brighton, to wheresoever you may be."  

Wright was in London in September, staying with the Trollopes, and pursuing Mary Shelley, on whom she pinned great hopes. As she wrote:

Our little circle has mind, heart, has just opinions, right feelings, co-operates in an experiment having in view human happiness, yet I do want one of my own sex to commune with, and sometimes to lean upon in all the confidence of equality of friendship.

Still recovering and worn from her role of constantly competent guide and mentor, Wright was seeking a companion of equal reputation and ability who could recognize her needs and not expect from her unlimited wisdom and ability. Of all those who knew her in this period, only Mary Shelley seemed

33 Frances Wright to Mary Shelley, September 15, 1827, in Marshall, ed., Mary Shelley, I, 173.

34 Frances and Thomas Anthony Trollope, best known as the parents of the novelist Anthony Trollope and the author Thomas Adolphus Trollope, were at this period, political liberals and entertained European republicans who had fled their own countries. Wright had apparently met them in 1821 or 1822 through her connections with Charles Wilkes and the Garnetts, old friends of the Trollopes.

35 Frances Wright to Mary Shelley, September 15, 1827, in Marshall, ed., Mary Shelley, I, 173.
to understand her insecurity and to offer her quiet release from her constant efforts.

In November, Mary Shelley wrote to Robert Dale Owen, Wright's closest companion and the only person close enough to be able to give the comfort which Mary Shelley saw was needed.

Take care of our Fanny, dear Dale—she is neither so independent or so fearless as you think—a thousand painful circumstances may surround her in which you may be useful to her, and which you will not discover, unless you arouse yourself to those minute cares for her, which will win her confidence. You will say perhaps that if she confides not in you, the secretiveness is hers.—not so—we must all be sure of sympathy before we confide at all—and a woman must very highly esteem and love a man before she can tell any of her heart's secrets to him.36

Indeed, Wright had reached something of a crisis point by the fall.

In June, James Richardson (a Nashoba resident and trustee) had sent "a few extracts from our proceedings, to which you are at liberty to give publicity," to Benjamin Lundy, editor of The Genius of Universal Emancipation. The account that followed mentioned Richardson's alliance with a quadroon and stated as a principle of the community that "the proper basis of sexual intercourse [is] the unconstrained and unrestrained choice of both parties."37

Although Robert Owen and Frances Wright had already begun to challenge the efficacy and morality of an institution which might bind couples with laws, but

36 Mary Shelley to Robert Dale Owen, November 9, 1827, in The Letters of Mary W. Shelley, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (Norman, Oklahoma, 1944), 1, 366-367.

37 The Genius of Universal Emancipation, July 28, 1827.
not love, Richardson's statement within the context of his inter-racial relationship, aroused a fury which threatened to place Nashoba totally outside the confines of respectable American society, completely destroying any possibility that it could be used as a model.

Wright was friendly in 1827 and 1828 to amalgamation of the races as an ultimate solution to the race problem in America. She was aided at Nashoba by Marcus Winchester, first mayor of Memphis and post-master and agent for freethought literature during the late 1820's. Winchester had a mulatto wife, and did not suffer because of such an alliance in a frontier town.\textsuperscript{38} Other examples of amalgamation were available in western Tennessee, the most notable case being that of "Old Ike" Rawlings, a Memphis merchant who "left a large amount of property to his mulatto son, whom he had 'always considered free,' and who was placed in charge of his father's store."\textsuperscript{39}

Wright, supporting the principle but horrified at the damaging publicity, felt herself alienated from the residents at Nashoba and wondered about the value of her exhausting efforts. From London she wrote Robert Dale Owen (in Lanark) to be careful in his choice of associates.

\textsuperscript{38}James B. Davis, \textit{The History of the City of Memphis} (Memphis, 1873) includes an account of Winchester's unusual marriage.

I do not shrink from responsibility and exertion, but I cannot risk the repetition [sic] of what I have sustained of both either morally or physically. . . . Like Pizarro I am tempted to draw a line on the land and say. Those who cannot answer for their fortitude let them pass over. . . . But when I see the best and boldest draw back at the suggestion of some ungratified passion as if no duty held them to the cause, and no feeling higher than the pursuit of some individual selfish enjoyment I cd for a moment say—it is a hopeless task to venture aught for suffering humanity. 40

There is some petulance in this, not to be explained completely by Richardson's rash publicity of affairs at Nashoba. Wright, at Nashoba, seeing the affectionate relations that could exist in a union between white and black was not the same as Wright having to face hostile criticism because such an alliance existed on her plantation. Faced with censure from those whose support and approval she expected, she blamed her associates for putting her principles into practice if it meant damaging her reputation.

Owen, meanwhile, left Wright alone to bear the burden of public scandal and continued his recruiting attempts in Lanark. He was interested in a young Irishman—skeptic, Edward Bell, who was active in the Owenite cooperative society at Orbiston. He could bring with him a number of Irish workmen, but Owen believed that, even though this might bring much-needed skilled workmen to Nashoba, "we must not take in inferior minds, even with

40 Frances Wright to Robert Dale Owen, October 2, 1827, HSP, Dreer Collection.
a prospect of much practical benefit from them too rashly and in too great number. "41 Owen, it seems, was hoping to recruit Shakers, whose priests "have carried their oppression so far as to disgust the most intelligent and force them to seek liberty and social happiness elsewhere."42

Wright was still staying with the Trollops in London, and Frances Trollope was the only one of her European acquaintances whom she could persuade to accompany her to America—an ill-fated choice, because Trollope undertook the venture to make money. Wright had been convinced of Frances Trollope's liberal sentiments during the early 1820's when the Trollopes entertained exiled liberals, especially General Gugliemo Pepe, whom Wright and Lafayette had also aided.43 But, as her son Anthony remembered:

She [Frances Trollope] . . . loved society, affecting a somewhat liberal rôle, and professing an emotional dislike to tyrants, which sprang from the wrongs of would-be regicides and the poverty of patriot exiles. An Italian marquis who had escaped from the clutches of some arch-duke he wished to exterminate . . . [was] always welcome. . . . In after years, when marquises of another caste has been gracious to her, she became a strong Tory, and thought that archduchesses were sweet.44

41 Robert Dale Owen to Frances Wright, September 21, 1827, UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.

42 Ibid.


Wright had secured few converts and little moral support by the time she embarked for America. Mary Shelley did not come, although she accompanied her to the dock. Lafayette was discouraging, and Frances Trollope was interested only in making her fortune. Only Robert Dale Owen was loyal. The departure from her earlier principles and associates was also symbolized by her failure to see Bentham during her stay in London. On the day she left London she sent him a hasty note to excuse "thus parting from my spiritual father without having met him." She begged him to see Robert Dale Owen, who was not sailing until November 10, and whom she had told to see Bentham. She also promised a lithograph of herself from a young artist and a printed copy of an address "to the liberal youth of France," which she intended to replicate in English shortly.45

The last attempt to interest her old mentors in her new endeavors had been made. She could not easily give up the comforting support and respectability she derived from being an intimate of Lafayette and Bentham, but she could no longer face their criticisms of her new schemes, such as Lafayette expressed to Bentham, saying that "her talents, indeed, part of which evaporate in theories, of the certainty and utility of which she has not a doubt might have been, I think more efficaciously employed, even to promote her

45 Frances Wright to Jeremy Bentham, November 3, 1827, British Museum, Bentham MSS.
own humane purpose.\textsuperscript{46} Lafayette was supported in this opinion by his American contacts, notably Madison, who reported, immediately after Wright's return that she created insuperable obstacles ... by her disregard or rather defiance of the most established opinion and vivid feelings. Besides her views of amalgamating the white and black population so universally, abnoxious, she gives an eclat to her notions on the subject of religion and of marriage, the effect of which your knowledge of this country can readily estimate.\textsuperscript{47}

The return to Nashoba was even more difficult because her sister and constant companion, Camilla, who had been left in Tennessee to supervise the plantation in Wright's absence, had succumbed first to loneliness, and then to the affection of Richeson Whitby. On December 15, 1827, Camilla had married Whitby, despite their supporting Richardson's statement on marriage, as published in \textit{The Genius of Universal Emancipation}. Camilla apologized, in the "Journal" of the plantation.

for this apparent dereliction. ... She [Camilla] continues to regard the marriage tie as in the highest degree irrational and in its nature calculated to produce a variety of evils, [but] she believes from the result of experience that by living in open violation of the civil institutions of the country, irritation and more frequently indignation will be produced in the minds of the greater portion of mankind and thus effectually indispose the public mind from listening to ... reason.\textsuperscript{48}


\textsuperscript{48}Perkins and Wolfson, \textit{Frances Wright}, p. 187, quoted the account from the "Journal." See \textsuperscript{ supra}, n. 14, p. 90.
No matter what her justification, Camilla had given her loyalty to someone else. Wright might attempt to build a community around the stable relationship formed by her sister and so maintain her connection with the only person of whose loyalty and support she had always been certain. Or, deprived of the respectable cover which the sister relationship had given to her independent activities, she might simply cease to be concerned about the problem of maintaining a facade of propriety. She needed Camilla's support, for it represented the only link with her childhood and her lost family, but her need for independence was perhaps greater. And Camilla's defection seemed to confirm Wright's belief that she could depend only upon herself.

Wright's first course was to attempt to rebuild the community at Nashoba. She was still enthusiastic in February when she sent off a conciliatory letter to Robert Dale Owen's mother, who was apparently concerned about her son's "plans of life, his pursuits, his associates, his future prospects and possible connexions." Wright envisioned Nashoba as "a small circle of... companions... from the morally cultivated, ... possessed of small but independent incomes." She recognized that "Nashoba [was] yet but a young and rough settlement, but if our hopes for the future are not disappointed perhaps it may ever after offer a suitable home for others themselves of your family whose tastes may be in union with those of Robert."49

49 Frances Wright to Mrs. Robert Owen, February 9, 1828, UC, Archives, Lafayette MSS.
For Wright the reality of Nashoba was rational companionship among equals; for Frances Trollope it was physical "desolation." As Trollope recorded:

I think that Miss Wright was aware of the painful impression the sight of her forest home produced on me, and I doubt not that the conviction reached us both at the same moment, that we had erred in thinking that a few months passed together at this spot could be productive of pleasure to either. [Only her fanaticism led her] not only to imagine that she herself could exist in this wilderness, but that her European friends could enter there, and not feel dismayed at the savage aspect of the scene.  

Trollope left quickly, and Wright both defended herself and began to admit some of the hardships in a long letter to Mary Shelley.

Yes, dear Mary, I do find the quiet of these forests and our ill-fenced cabins of rough logs more soothing to the spirit, and now no less suited to the body than the warm luxurious houses of European society. Yet that it would be so with you, or to any less broken in by enthusiastic devotion to human reform and mental liberty than our little knot of associates, I cannot judge. I now almost forget the extent of the change made in the last few years in my views and feelings; but when I recall it, I sometimes doubt if many could imitate it without feeling the sacrifices almost equal to the gains; to me sacrifices are nothing.

Wright had sacrificed physical comfort and European civilization, but it should be remembered, as she praised her own dedication, that she had done so to secure something of greater importance to herself, personal independence.

Facing the failure of a Nashoba which had received neither large

50 Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, ed. by Donald Smalley (New York, 1949), p. 27.

51 Frances Wright to Mary Shelley, March 20, 1828, in Marshall, ed., Mary Shelley, II, 181. [Italics in original.]
numbers of slaves nor liberated equals of the white race, Wright began publicly explaining the community as an experiment in total reform in a series of articles for the New Harmony Gazette. Once begun on this essentially polemical tack, she would quickly be led to the abandonment of Nashoba in favor of educating a public which ignored the example the community offered.

Wright's statements at this time indicate that between 1825 and 1828, her thought had undergone profound change. Her earlier belief that the United States needed only the eradication of slavery to make it perfect had been transformed into a general critique of American society in which slavery was only one aspect of a general set of false beliefs that restricted human liberty and equality. Having rejected the use of communitarianism as a model to lead the public to reform, she set out to discover the roots of prejudice and to eradicate the ignorance which restricted the vision of the majority and kept them from recognizing the virtues of a minority's program. Her evaluation of American society and of the means necessary to reform it appeared in a series of articles published under the general title of "Explanatory Notes, respecting the Nature and Objects of the Institution at Nashoba," and written during the winter after her return from Europe.

First, the concept of liberty was expanded from one of political freedom and freedom from bondage, to one of freedom to develop talents—a liberty which was dependent on equality in "enjoysments, exertions and advantages, intellectual and physical, of which [a] nature is capable."52

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52 The New Harmony Gazette, January 20, 1828.
Yet, neither equality nor liberty could be secured in a society dominated by values of economic liberalism. Like Wright the liberals wished to secure "happiness . . . and the necessities of man," but the liberals made a mistake in equating production with well-being and in pronouncing "a nation rich, not in proportion to the number of individuals who enjoyed, but to the mass of ideal wealth thrown into commercial circulation." Cooperative production, by clarifying the connection between production and distribution, would secure individual happiness, not some impersonal social good.

Furthermore, the liberal ideal of man as a specialized producer denied men "due and well-proportioned exercise of all . . . powers, physical, intellectual, and moral," which was necessary for happiness. On Wright's trip to England she had learned about the liberal economic and political doctrine used by political economists to explain and to justify the workings of the industrial system. She had also been exposed to the inchoate complaints of those who could not accept a theory that posited a distant social good to be derived from the immediate suffering of the working class. The second criticism she made of industrialization, however, could not derive simply from a view of early industrial conditions or from the contemporary British critics. Only Fourier, among the early socialists, pointed out the compartmentalizing of

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.
human activity and emotion which industrialization entailed. Wright's view may have derived from her experience of a pre-industrial condition, such as that she had seen in America in 1817 to 1819, as her concern with the deteriorating respect for the "husbandman" and "artisan" suggests. Her insight may also have risen out of her position as a woman who felt keenly the division of work from other parts of life—the problem of an active woman of her class and era.

In pursuing her attack on the theory which justified selfish economic activity, Wright denied that man had a basic nature (certainly it was not competitive). Man was a thinking animal, and by use of intelligence he could "change the education of youth, remould . . . institutions, correct . . . ideas of true and false, of right and wrong." 56

Just as theories of liberal economics obscured the damage done to individuals in the industrial system, so did laws and conventions which defined and upheld marriage unduly restrict and confine men and women in their relations with each other. Other conventions restricted women, but this was the most severe. Wright wanted a recognition that

No woman can forfeit her individual rights or independent existence, and no man assert over her any rights or power whatsoever, beyond what he may exercise over her free and voluntary affections; nor, on the other hand, may any woman assert claims to the society or peculiar protection of any individual of the other sex beyond what mutual inclination dictates and sanctions. 57

56Ibid.

57New Harmony Gazette, February 6, 1828.
The malevolence of the attempt to bind people in marriage was most vividly represented by the treatment given to illegitimate children, who were condemned to suffer simply because of legal and social conventions.

Her analysis of the effects of the artificial restraints convention set on sexual relations was similar to her analysis of the effects of slavery. Because women were to pretend they had no sexual desires, they were dependent on marriage to release them. Thus, women sank into "slavery, and generally the whole of the male sex to debasing licentiousness, if not to loathsome brutality." Given such a situation, a woman was forced into three choices, all equally bad: sexual abstinence; free sexual relations with ensuing public infamy; or marriage and legal submission to the husband. The "servitude of matrimony and . . . the opprobrium stamped upon legalized connections," left a woman like Wright, "cultivated, talented and independent," with the choice only of being one of the "victims to unnatural restraints."58

As Wright's plans for reforming humanity had broadened, her projects for enslaved blacks had narrowed, and the reasoning is curiously contradictory. Believing that slavery so benumbed men as to make real liberty and equality impossible for those who had been in bondage long, she renounced the hope of enlarging the number of slaves at Nashoba. Yet, free persons of color, American whites, and Europeans who were still young enough not to have been thoroughly enslaved by social conventions and prejudice were welcome.

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58 Ibid.
In essence Wright had given up freeing the slave in order to free herself and individuals like herself. Although she rationalized this desertion of the earlier project with the assertion that the falling price of cotton for the upland planter would soon destroy upland plantations and the attachment of these planters to slavery, the shift seems to have been undertaken to enable her to pursue interests more immediately relevant to the social order which restricted and enslaved her. If both, however, were based on prejudice and ill training, one set of enslaving institutions was no more likely to be reformed than another.

Having decided to abandon Nashoba's original purpose, she capped her statement by declaring that the ultimate solution to the race problem lay only in amalgamation of the races. Her reasoning was sound, but tactically, she realized the effect of such a statement on Nashoba's acceptance in Southern society, especially after the uproar over Richardson's letter to The Genius of Universal Emancipation the previous summer. She had decided to hold up the truth to men, and prudence was no longer to be considered.

Within two months after the appearance of the "Explanatory Notes," Nashoba's new character was even more clearly defined in another communication to the New Harmony Gazette. Recognizing that the present residents had been so poorly trained that they were not capable of forming a society based on cooperative labor, membership in the community was limited to those who had an annual income of $200 to cover living expenses in the community and who were capable of directing and supporting the school which would train the
next generation not to be dependent on someone else's labor. The new body would be only a "preliminary [sic] Social Community." 59

Wright had now withdrawn completely from the respectable company of republican reformers like Lafayette into a group of embattled social critics who seemed more interested in securing a reasonable existence for themselves than in reforming society. Given her own inclinations for activity and publicity and Robert Dale Owen's unwillingness to hide his talent in rural Tennessee, one could predict the experiment would end shortly, although Wright's attempt to find or to create a home for herself would be apparent for the remainder of her life.

By May, 1828, Wright had returned to writing; by June, she was in New Harmony, editing the New Harmony Gazette "during a temporary absence of Robert Dale Owen," 60 who had left Nashoba in February.

Wright's departure from Nashoba was an admission that the experiment, either for a social community or for a model for emancipation, had failed. Knowing the resistance of slaveholders to colonization during the late 1820's, one might have expected nothing else. Yet, for Wright its failure was personal as well as political, and it reflected her own confusion about what institutions and activities were necessary to satisfy her. Some of Nashoba's difficulties had resulted from a confusion of its goals, as Wright advanced from

59 New Harmony Gazette, March 26, 1828.

60 New Harmony Gazette, June 18, 1828.
a republican critique of American slavery to a more wide-ranging social critique. The social community that Wright proposed for Nashoba represented a contradiction also—in terms of policies and of Wright's personality. Desiring both independence and a supportive family for herself, she attempted to create a community that combined the two. Yet, Nashoba did not attract other reformers; she could not get others to endure the rough life of a frontier area. And, her independence resulted only in alienating her early supporters and removing her from the public's attention. She was forced to leave Nashoba, not only because she could not reform the United States from a remote community which no one noticed, but because she needed to find approval for her own values—by creating a community in a more attractive environment and by convincing the public that her emphasis on independence, for herself and others, was correct.

A new career was beginning for Wright, that of public educator. After a decade of seemingly unproductive activity, and the failure to form a communitarian model that could attract public attention and support, she was returning to her earlier mode of action—the education of the public through writing. She would remain editor of the Gazette in its New Harmony location through the remainder of the year, at the same time beginning a series of public lectures to spread the principles of "free enquiry." The goals of her education efforts had changed, however. Now she would attempt to convince the public that liberty meant freedom from prejudice and error, and that equality depended on the equal development of individual abilities. Only when the two were recognized
could men finally know the beneficent hedonism she had described in *A Few Days in Athens* and in her picture of America before its seduction by the prospect of immoderate wealth.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Public Person: Editor and Lecturer

Frances Wright's career as a public personality began in the summer of 1828, signalled by her announcement of intent to become a co-editor (with Robert Dale Owen) of the New Harmony Gazette\textsuperscript{1} and by her first public lecture, delivered in Cincinnati on August 10. Her new occupations would result, within the year, in a brief involvement with the fortunes of the New York City Workingmen's Party, and this has generally been seen as the central focus of her activity during this period of her life. The support which Wright gave to the workingmen's concerns, especially their desire for a system of public education, has been viewed as her most valuable and sensible attempt as a reformer. Similarly, studies of the workingmen's movement have accepted the estimate, made at the time by the conservative press, that she was an important figure in the movement. Walter Hugins' work on Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class accepts the evaluation given by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., that the workingmen, "increasingly conscious of their subordinate status in society, . . . listened avidly to the lectures of

\textsuperscript{1}New Harmony Gazette, June 30, 1828.
Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen.\footnote{Stanford, 1960, p. 11.} Seymour Savetsky's essay on "The New York Working Men's Party," implies her importance, and, certainly, her value, concluding:

What the movement urgently required was not less of Miss Wright but more of her or of a person of equal talents. Frances Wright was the only truly national figure associated with the New York Working Men's party. She was an eloquent and effective public debater. Her forceful and engaging personality captured the admiration of all those who came under her influence.\footnote{(Unpublished Master's Essay, Columbia University, 1948), p. 128.}

The most recent biographical blurb on Wright accepts the earlier assessments and states that she "became a central figure in the working-class political movement which . . . emerged in New York."\footnote{Paul C. Boyer, "Frances Wright," in Notable American Women, 1607–1950. A Biographical Dictionary, ed. by Edward T. James, et al. (Cambridge, 1971), III, 678.}

Wright's desire to be a public lecturer would lead her to address herself to "mechanics" who attended her lectures, to respond to the audience in order to hold their attention. The conjunction of her new interest in education with the workingmen's demand for a system of public schools gave her hope that the workingmen would provide more than an audience--would become supporters of her interests and goals. She was not, however, interested in organizing a party or in supporting the workingmen's other goals. The party never became her central interest, and she was not so powerful an orator as to be able to persuade the workingmen that her concerns.
should be their goals.

Her reasons for developing the new skills that would make her a public figure are not completely clear. The decision to devote her energies to a newspaper combined her interest in writing and her present desire to undertake public persuasion through the most direct medium available, the newspaper. Her new tactic of speaking publicly before mixed audiences of men and women is more difficult to understand. The role of public speaker was not one which a respectable woman might consider, and Wright might not have attempted it had she not been asked to deliver the annual July Fourth oration in New Harmony. She performed creditably and, once again, as with her first literary efforts, was probably praised excessively, simply because no one expected a woman to do so well.

The content of the New Harmony speech was not remarkable, except as a summation of the development in her own analysis of American institutions. As she said:

In so far as the republican principle shall have proved more conducive to the general good than the monarchical, and the democratic than the aristocratic—in so far [are American institutions better than those of other countries]. But there is another . . . principle which, had they [American institutions] no other excellence, would secure to them the preference over those of all other countries. I mean—and some devout patriots will start; I mean, the principle of change. . . .

While in Europe men have still to fight, we have only to learn.5

She was correct. Many devout patriots would "start," especially when she

5 New Harmony Gazette, July 9, 1828.
herself initiated one change by overstepping the bounds of propriety and presenting the example of an intelligent and poised woman speaking in public.

After her success at New Harmony, Wright's first chance for a test of her newly discovered talent outside the community of her friends and supporters came when she decided she must challenge the revivalists' influence in Cincinnati. She undertook, in August, to "wake up the city [of Cincinnati], at the time depressed and alarmed by the machinations of the clergy of the different sects." Her lectures were necessary particularly because the revivalists preyed on women, whom they reduced to superstition and ignorance. Wright was not only trying to save her own sex, but recognizing that women were being formed to be the conservators and support of existing institutions and values.

The immediate result of the August lecture, which became a series, was to convince Wright that such work was as useful and practical as writing. Apparently she was a sensation. The loquacious Mrs. Trollope, at the moment running an unsuccessful store in Cincinnati, recorded:

It is impossible to imagine anything more striking than her appearance. Her tall and majestic figure, the deep and almost solemn expression of her eyes, the simple contour of her finely formed head, unadorned, excepting by its own natural ringlets; her garment of plain white muslin, which hung around her in folds that recalled the drapery of a

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Grecian statue, all contributed to produce an effect, unlike anything I had ever seen before, or ever expect to see again. 7

More importantly for some of the frustrated reformers at New Harmony, and for the small group of freethinkers in America who became her supporters as a result of her attack on the clergy, she attracted audiences that could not be reached otherwise. In December, when Robert Dale Owen announced the completion of a series of lectures in the area around New Harmony and the beginning of a tour that would take her East, he said:

The most respectable citizens, almost without exception of class or sect, crowded to hear her: and in neither town [Louisville and St. Louis] could a public building be found large enough to contain those, whom a love of truth, or of novelty, or of both, collected on the occasion. 8

Owen, convinced that the reformers had only to gain the public’s attention to let them hear the truth, was quite willing to let Wright become a public curiosity if she attracted an audience which the New Harmony Gazette could not reach.

It was not long, of course, before the initial surprise and adulatory astonishment gave way to criticism, of Wright’s values and of her example of

7. Trollope, Domestic Manners, p. 73.

8. The Free Enquirer, December 10, 1828; New York edition of February 18, 1829. When Wright, traveling with Robert Jennings, arrived in New York City at the end of the winter lecture tour from New Harmony to Eastern cities, she decided that the Gazette must be moved to a location from which it could reach a larger audience. She and Jennings, therefore, began to publish under a different banner, The Free Enquirer, in New York on January 21, 1829. They reprinted, however, all of the issues of the New Harmony
unwomanly behavior. One critic, signed himself "Oliver Oldschool," admonished Wright for the arrogance of her pride which "would have us believe that the torch of truth was never lighted until she blew her breath upon it."

Oldschool also reminded Wright that if she really wanted to serve men, she should remember Napoleon's apocryphal reply to Mme. de Stael's question about "who he thought was the greatest woman that ever lived; [to which] he replied: 'She that has had the most children.'"9

By October, 1828, having faced the first round of criticism, Wright's resolve on the necessity of her speaking in public was strengthened. Bringing together the strands of her earlier concerns: on happiness as moderate virtue and intelligence; on marriage; on raising children; and on her particular function, she replied to the Oldschool complaint with a clear statement of purpose.

I, who see in my fellow creatures, beings capable of happiness, and susceptible of misery, consider her "the greatest woman," who will best assist in justly educating children; and I further conceive that the "taking care of one family," would be doing a less good, in the present generation, than the encouraging the heads of all families to enquire how they may best take care of theirs.10

Safely aligned with Robert Dale Owen at New Harmony and enjoying the effect of her public appearances, Wright could now begin to see herself in

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10Cincinnati Daily Gazette, September 1, 1828, reprinted in the New Harmony Gazette, October 1, 1828.
heroic terms, as one who "had every worldly interest to lose and nothing to
gain, but the satisfaction of fighting the battles of truth against all the odds of
numbers and all the force of opinion." 11 This conformed to the image of her-
self that she had presented to Mary Shelley in the spring. But now she was
away from the unhealthy environment of Nashoba and flattered by public atten-
tion, even if some of it was hostile. It did require courage to violate society's
conventions. On the other hand, Wright had already shown that she could not
live within the bounds of strict propriety, and she was not threatening any
"worldly interest," but that which she herself did not want--society's image
of her as a respectable woman.

Wright lectured from mid-August to mid-September, traveling from
Cincinnati through Hamilton, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and Vincennes,
Indiana, to give her series of lectures. In the October 15, 1828, issue of
the Gazette, she announced that, hereafter, "all our views, not hitherto
developed, will be so in the course of our duties as Editor, or in the popular
lectures to which I am now desirous of devoting all the leisure permitted by
my other avocations." 12 Wright was now ready for a sphere of activity more
influential than that offered by New Harmony.

Although the last issue of the third volume of the Gazette stated that
Wright and Owen would be publishing a fourth volume at New Harmony, it was

11 The New Harmony Gazette, October 8, 1828.

12 The New Harmony Gazette, October 15, 1828.
clear that her horizons had expanded. Before she could embark on a full tour, however, she had to deal with a final crisis at Nashoba.

Mme. Fretageot reported to Maclure that "Whitby has written that the whole is in a miserable situation; that the Overseer has made use of the store in such a manner that nothing remain[s]; that the slaves have not produced corn for three months for their food." 13 Mme. Fretageot continued her report by noting that a clique composed of Wright, William and Robert Dale Owen, Robert Jennings, and William Phiquepal had formed and that the five were "in a dreadful confusion." Devoting themselves to projects and publicity and public agitation, they seemed unable, to the practical Mme. Fretageot, to work at anything steadily. Her advice to Wright, which would prove correct, was "to sell her plantation, as she cannot manage it herself [and] she cannot expect to find one that would do it with the same interest." 14 Much has changed since Mme. Fretageot praised Wright's "good sense that enables her to calculate every means proper for her undertaking." 15

Wright made a hurried trip to Nashoba, and left Tennessee at the beginning of November to begin the course of lectures. Mme. Fretageot

13 Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, October 10, 1828, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

14 Ibid.

15 Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, January 17, 1827, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.
informed Maclure by mid-November, "Robert Dale told me yesterday that Frances Wright had intention to go up the Ohio and give lecture[s] on her way to New York, Philadelphia, &c."\(^{16}\) Apparently willing to let Nashoba run on however it might. She left behind Camilla, who was expecting her first child, and Camilla's husband, Richeson Whitby. For the first time she traveled in America without the respectable form of touring with her sister. Instead, she and Robert Jennings toured as a lecture team.

Showing how little she yet understood of the consequences of her new role, Wright corresponded with William Maclure (whom she thought to be in New Harmony by November) about securing a mortgage on a brewery, the mortgages and insurance policies (collateral) for same to be sent on to Charles Wilkes, who was apparently still handling her finances.\(^{17}\)

Within the month, the stir she created was troubling some friends. Mme. Fretageot, a not unbiased observer, reported to Maclure that:

Frances Wright is going on at such a rate that I fear much her boldness will injure her and the cause. Robert showed me several pieces sent by her to be printed for the Gazette but we decided to put them aside and Robert to write to her to warn her against the effects which can be produced in the East, by such plain explanations of her principles amongst a crowd of prejudices.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{16}\) Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, November 14, 1828, NHWI, Maclure–Fretageot MSS.

\(^{17}\) Frances Wright to William Maclure, November, 1828, NHWI, Maclure–Fretageot MSS.

\(^{18}\) Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, December 19, 1828, NHWI, Maclure–Fretageot MSS.
Wright must have sent young Owen some inflammatory writings, for he had but recently spoken to her in the adulatory and affectionate tone that more normally characterized their relationship. Indeed, Owen seemed to see her as the moving spirit of the group.

They [readers] must be satisfied to receive what I can furnish, unaided by the brilliant fancy [Wright] that dictated alike philosophy and fable, metaphysics and poesy, for our pages. . . . Would that Truth could send forth more labourers to the harvest [of souls], as zealous, as disinterested, and as talented as she! 19

It is not surprising that Wright's tone, if not her line of argument, became sharper over the next few months. While Owen might sympathize with the criticisms heaped on his friend, it was she who was being held up to public scorn, not he. No matter what her class or personal character,

Miss Wright, considered as a lady, agreeable to the conventional proprieties of civilized society, has with ruthless violence, broken loose from the restraints of decorum, which draw a circle around the life of woman; and with a contemptuous disregard for the rules of society, she has leaped over the boundary of feminine modesty, and laid hold on the avocations of man, claiming a participation in them for herself and her sex. 20

Wright's response to such public ridicule, indeed, seems, at first glance, to follow the pattern of abolitionist commitment described by Silvan Tomkins.

Having risked her reputation and social acceptability, she found herself attacked


and ridiculed, and the result was an increased belief in the importance of her goals and an increased intolerance for the enemy. 21

Wright's situation, however, does not seem to fit with Tomkin's model. She had created an identity for herself as public teacher—taking one of the roles considered acceptable for women, but enlarging it to fulfill her own need for attention. The choice of the role derived from her belief that change could be effected in the United States simply by educating men, by freeing their minds from superstition. She had only to win their attention to begin this process, and it had quickly become clear that the novelty of listening to a female speaker attracted many who would not otherwise listen to freethought ideas. The attacks on her respectability might serve either to keep audiences away or to expand them by drawing attention to her speeches. Whichever result might occur, a strong response to criticism was necessary. She had to attack those who questioned her right to speak, and she could only argue that they had hidden motives, interests to protect from an awakened public mind. As quickly became clear, her own strong language created even more publicity and enlarged her audiences. The intensity of the debate, in this case, may have been a result of Wright's desire to attract audiences, for, as she believed, "could truth only be heard, the conversion of the ignorant were easy." 22


22 Frances Wright, Course of Popular Lectures, As delivered by Frances Wright, in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Louisville, and other Cities, Towns, and Districts of the United States, I (New York, 1829), 39.
Mme. Fretageot's regular reports to Maclure record Wright's itinerary and the increasing hope held by freethought reformers as she drew large audiences.

Frances Wright delivered several lectures at Wheeling which appear of having been well received.\(^{23}\)

Frances Wright has made wonders in her preaching at Baltimore [,] Philadelphia and specially New York. It is decided that they will transport their establishment [the Gazette] in that last town.\(^{24}\)

By mid-January, 1829, Wright had decided to establish headquarters in New York City, not only a metropolis able to support another newspaper but also the center for direction of reform activities carried on by more conservative groups—the American Home Missionary Society, American Tract Society, The American Bible Society, and The New York State Temperance Society.

In New York Wright hoped, finally, to accomplish all her purposes. First, she would write for the education of the public, which had seemed her task in life since 1819. Second, she would seek reformation of American society through creation in its all-powerful citizens of a more intelligent sense of good. Finally, she would create for herself and her friends a comfortable home in which the sense of family so necessary to her could be achieved.

Wright and Jennings were joined in New York, in April, by Robert

\(^{23}\)Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, January 2, 1829, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

\(^{24}\)Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, January 30, 1829, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.
Dale Owen, and William Phiquepal. Camilla, with her new-born child, joined them in May. She was still weak, but eager to be with her sister. Marcus Winchester escorted her to New Harmony, and Dale Owen accompanied her to New York.

Wright, meanwhile, had begun printing in New York in late January with the aid of her lecture companion, Robert L. Jennings. George Henry Evans was the printer, and it was Wright's first contact with one of the men who would direct her attention to the audiences of mechanics and workingmen.

Wright's concern during the first months of lecturing and editing the New York paper, was the power of those who taught and maintained superstition and ignorance, the clergy who fed on the "neglected state of the female mind," and were supported by the "ineptness and corruption of the public press." She criticized all clerics and sects, and was unable to distinguish

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25 Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, March 15, 1829, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

26 Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, May 1, 1829, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

27 Evans was a British emigrant, whose family had settled in upstate New York during his childhood. He had been trained as a printer, became a freethinker and supporter of the workingmen in 1829. He was editor of his own paper, the New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate by 1830. He became a believer in land reform and redistribution of property after the failure of the workers' political movement in the 1830's.

28 Wright, Popular Lectures, I, v.
differences among various religious or religiously-motivated reformers.

The perfectionist evangelicals, such as Charles Grandison Finney, with whom Wright seemed most congenial in theory, she rejected as allies, primarily because of their emphasis on conversion as the method by which men's souls and hearts, and then the society, would be reformed. The evangelical's belief in conversion implied a lack of interest in reforming the institutions that provided the framework for men's actions and interactions. After her long association with Lafayette and Bentham, Wright believed in the necessity of changing institutions if one wished to change how people behaved. Moreover, the belief that responsibility for evil lay with the individual who closed his heart against conversion and knowledge of God's will, led to a condemnatory style which Wright found offensive and unproductive. Her main criticism of the "religious physician" was that he:

irritates. . . . Instead of weighing circumstances, tracing causes, allowing for the bias of early example, the constraining fear of implanted prejudice, the absence of every judicious stimulus, and the presence of every bad one, he arraigns, tries, convicts, condemns. 29

Ignoring her own inability to persuade Southern slaveholders to reform their institutions by the gentler tactics she had used, she, nevertheless, could not accept placing blame on individuals. She herself did not want to be judged and indicted for her actions, so she could not believe that others should be. She promised in her lecturing not to "treat with levity one honest error, or make

29 Ibid., p. 34.
truth a cause of offense to our conscientious bosom," and she expected to be treated in the same fashion.

Finally, the issue of a woman's being allowed to speak in public had not yet been raised, even among the evangelicals; when the question arose eight years later, in disagreements over the propriety of the Grimke sisters' lectures, the argument split antislavery groups and led to a denunciation of the sisters even by the antislavery Congregationalist clergy of Massachusetts. Wright was correct, at least for the purpose of defending her right to speak in public, in perceiving little difference between the principles of the conservative and liberal wings of American Protestantism on the issue of a woman's right to speak in public. 31

30 Ibid., p. 95.

31 Thomas, "Romantic Reform," argues, of course, that one must distinguish between the "initial thrust of religious reform, [which] was moral rather than social, preventive rather than curative," and the second wave of evangelical perfectionism, which contained "a latent revolutionary force . . . in its demand for immediate reform and its promise to release the new American from the restraints of institutions and precedent." What he does not recognize is that neither the conservative, nor the revolutionary impulse condoned a change in women's roles and activities. This may be the reason he omits the Seneca Falls meeting from his account of humanitarian reforms spawned by perfectionism, and why he perceives the split in the American Anti-slavery Society in 1840 as a result of the anti-institutional and exclusivist tendencies within perfectionist groups. Such an account ignores the major issue on which the society split--the question of what role women would play in the movement. The Garrisonians, who upheld women's right to speak in public and to serve on committees, were anathema to conservatives and many perfectionists for whom the scope of reform did not encompass women's position. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism, Chapter 3, "The Woman Question," describes the divisiveness of the issue, even among perfectionists.
Wright had to attack clerical influence in order to defend her right to live and work as she wished. She justified her own actions, however, in terms of an acceptable social role—that of teacher—and she did not advocate new roles for women in her lectures. She denounced clerical influence because it deranged "mothers and daughters [who were] carried lifeless from the presence of the ghostly expounders of damnation,"\(^{32}\) during the excitement of revivals. "Well do they know [the hired supporters of error, the clergy], that if the daughters of the present, and mothers of the future generation, were to drink of the living waters of knowledge, their reign would be ended." At the present, society was in ignorance, because "in the mental bondage of . . . wives and fair companions," fathers, husbands, and children were also bound.\(^{33}\)

Returned to the center of public attention, Wright implicitly challenged the narrow definition of woman's role by her own actions, but she would not threaten her popularity by a repetition of the more radical demands she had made while living at Nashoba.\(^{34}\) The tack now taken accepted marriage as an institution and advocated, instead, legal equality for the wife within marriage. As Owen said, implying that equality might be gained, except for the ignorant state in which religious teachings bound women:


\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 39.

\(^{34}\)See supra, p. 94.
Money, unfortunately, is the passport to power, to influence, even to independence of body and of mind. When we debarred you, as wives, from the right to acquire and possess it, we struck at the root of your social and political rights. . . . You can do much, if you will but think and speak and act for yourselves; and if you will be content to labor for yourselves, to make your own fortunes, and to keep them after they are made [by use of pre-nuptial contracts settling the wife's property on herself].

Wright lectured in New York City in early January, 1829, and she and Jennings began issuing The Free Enquirer, the Eastern version of the New Harmony Gazette on January 21, 1829. At the same time Wright continued to lecture in the city, and it became clear to her opponents that she had come to stay. The result of the announcement of her lecture series to begin on January 29, at the Park Theatre, printed in her own paper, was an outburst of denunciation.

The reaction of the New York Evening Post may have been the most violent, because it was the one Wright chose to reprint in The Free Enquirer as proof of "the unseemly abuse levelled, equally against my auditors as myself, by the pulpit and press of the city of New York." The Evening Post hinted at the dangerous response her lecture might evoke.

Suppose the singular spectacle of a female, publicly and ostentatiously proclaiming doctrines of atheistical fanaticism, and even the most abandoned lewdness, should draw a crowd from prurient curiosity, and that a riot should ensue, which should end in the demolition of the interior of the building, or even in burning it down, . . . We shall merely put these base questions for the present, and let those answer

them on whom the awful responsibility would devolve if any fright-
ful consequence should happen to the city or its inhabitants.36

Three days later the Post tried to intimidate part of the audience, not only
by forecasting trouble, but by raising the issue of respectability, saying,
"We hope nothing will happen of a dangerous or even of an unpleasant nature.
We presume no modest woman will be seen there."37

Disruption was attempted at the second lecture. As Wright described
it, the lights in the hall were dimmed by turning off the gas supply, and a
barrel of rags and turpentine was burned in the basement to fill the Masonic
Hall with smoke.38 As reported by a correspondent of Owen, the fear of
ridicule also had some effect, for "many . . . females . . . feared that their
morality might be impeached if they should even listen to one of [the lectures]."

The same letter reported that she had large audiences, nevertheless, because
the attack in the press served to keep alive public attention and curiosity,
which induced many to attend one lecture "that they might hear and judge for
themselves."39

Wright's appearance as a female lecturer was a spectacle, and crowds

36. New York Evening Post, January 26, 1829, quoted in The Free
Enquirer, March 4, 1829.

37. New York Evening Post, January 29, 1829, quoted in The Free
Enquirer, March 4, 1829.

38. The Free Enquirer, March 4, 1829.

39."W, to the Editor," February 2, 1829, in The Free Enquirer,
February 25, 1829.
were bound to gather. She herself emphasized, at least indirectly, the sen-
sational character of her lectures.

Truly, the sight and the sound is alike novel, of privilege and
pretension arraying all the forces of a would be hierarchy and
a would be aristocracy, to assassinate the liberties of a free
state in the person of a single individual, and to outrage public
order and public decency, by ribald slanders and incendiary
threats, against the reputation and person of a woman.\textsuperscript{40}

Neatly turning the tables, Wright blamed the press for exactly that with which
she was charged--outraging public opinion by engaging in immodest and
uncivilized behavior--in their case, attacking a woman. At the same time,
she sought to charge the press with denying a person, even a female person,
the right of speech such as were protected for all persons. She was attempt-
ing to enlarge the sphere of woman by claiming for herself equal rights as a
citizen to do that which social convention had previously restricted to men.\textsuperscript{41}
The press, clergy, and public were offered only two alternatives--to accept
the expanded limits of women's proper roles or to condemn Wright as being
unwomanly. They chose the latter.

As the New York paper spread her reputation, Wright was invited to
lecture elsewhere. A notice in The Free Enquirer announced that she had
been lecturing in Paterson, New Jersey, during the past week, and a letter
from "a free enquirer on the Passaic," printed in the March 4, issue,

\textsuperscript{40}“Introductory Address as Delivered in the Park Theatre on January

\textsuperscript{41}Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood." See supra, p. 82.
indicated that she had been invited by the citizens because they could not reconcile the impression she had created in her first lecture in Paterson "with the idea left on their minds by the narratives of the New York journals." 42

Faced for the first time with an organized opposition, Wright began to believe it spring more from the protection of selfish interests then from forgivable ignorance. Initially, however, she charged only the clergy "whose worldly interests . . . stand in peculiar opposition to those of the community," with attempting to obscure the truth necessary to eradicate "violence, injustice, vice, poverty, and misery." 43

On March 18, 1829, she began a series of articles on "The Causes of Existing Evils." For the first time she connected the existence of widespread ignorance with specific inequities of power and influence. As she said, "A little more knowledge, [and] they [men] will discover the influence of monied wealth to be as supreme as armed authority; the privileges of professional occupation to be as antirepublican as those of the noble or prince." She still, however, did not seem to connect economic with political influence, for the inequalities resulting from the "unequal distribution of wealth" were "instructional and occupational." 44


The shift occurring in Wright's thought during the spring of 1828 may have resulted from a recognition that the newspapers and clerics attacking her were supported by wealthy merchants. This might have passed unnoticed, however, had her lecturing not cut her off from men of influence and economic power who had previously befriended her. The break with Charles Wilkes, which she had not anticipated in November, came quickly. The account she gave in the Biography of his defection, muted, after fifteen years, the pain she must have felt in 1829. It still reflected her unwillingness to believe that she had been a cause of his alienation, and stressed her own respectable behavior and origins. As she recalled (writing in the third person):

In that city [New York] were some heart affections, which dated from her first landing in the country.--These, the course prescribed to her by duty, was perhaps about to sever... Some she knew would understand her course and in silence appreciate her motives. Others might feel embarrassed. Among the latter her heart recalled the amiable, kind, polished and cultivated Charles Wilkes, late president of the New York Bank... Imbued, as by inheritance from a fond aristocratic mother, with other political views [from Wright's], this difference of opinion and even feeling had never been allowed to check [Wright's and Wilkes'] intimacy, nor to chill their friendship. [She left] it to himself to regulate their future relations. That whatever might be his decision, she should never do injustice to what she knew would always be his secret sentiments of respect for a devotion [to duty] whose object he would probably regret, and for exertions, the nature of which he would condemn... In a few lines, ... he accepted, as she thought wisely her suggestion of dissolved or suspended intimacy.45

She believed for a short time, also, that Cadwallader Colden would not disapprove her activities. Writing to Camilla with an account of her first

45 Wright, Biography, p. 43.
lecture in New York City, she noted that "Cadwallader Colden was among the audience . . . which convinces me that I had not been mistaken respecting the secret liberality of his opinions." The desire to maintain her old connections could at times influence her political positions. Although Colden did not support her, when he helped to organize the New York City Temperance Society, she announced its appearance with enthusiasm. Despite her attacks on professionals, including physicians, she rationalized her support in this case, because the Society was composed so largely of physicians, who were men of science, not superstition.

Similarly, when Wright printed a description of the crowds in Washington for Andrew Jackson's inauguration, she defended Jackson against the charge that he approved of men who came "in the vain hope of reward for services which they believe themselves to have rendered during the campaign," concluding:

Is the spirit of traffic . . . grown so unprincipled, that freemen, in giving their free voices, will calculate chances of preferment to "petty offices?" Fie on it! And if we read the feelings of an American president aright, he too must cry, "Fie on it."

Men of influence held two mistaken views which were spread throughout the society by the clergy and the system of education. The first was that

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46 Frances Wright to Camilla Wright Whitby, January 5, 1829, quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 229.

47 The Free Enquirer, March 25, 1829.

48 The Free Enquirer, March 18, 1829.
men were sinful and vicious. Admitting that man has, "up to this hour,"
acted in such a way as to justify those who believe that "he is a vicious
animal, in need of control," Wright saw the cause in man's natural response
to external restraint, to the existence of government.

This tendency to reject power from without is, under proper guidance,
the source of all moral excellence in man; and, the running counter
to this tendency--the attempting to effect by violence or ipse dixit
command, the consent of the mind and obedience of the will, is to
stimulate to all moral evil. 49

Man was naturally good, but he ruled himself nowhere, not even in America
where laws were "enacted by legislating lawyers, for lawyers ad infinitum
legislatively to amend." 50

A hope still existed in America, because "to convince the people is
to mould the laws." But the only change in laws that could effect the sort of
reformation ultimately necessary was one which would organize "a system
of equal, universal, national, and rational instruction." For not only must
the coercion of law and religion be removed, but the child must be trained
in virtue. Then there would clearly be no need for coercive law or religion. 51

49 The Free Enquirer, March 18, 1829.

50 Ibid.

The second mistaken belief that damaged American society was the low esteem in which manual labor was held, which led the wealthy to support the inequalities in education that freed them and their children from labor. Only a few could afford the expensive education necessary to become members of the ruling class in America, composed of the lawyer, physician, merchant, legislator, and priest. The successful set an example of "satisfying artificial wants supplying vain luxuries, and feeding vice, idleness, and intemperance," and led others to desire the same. Inequality in education and in wealth, inspired "every parent, ambitious for his offspring, or every youth ambitious for himself, with a thirst after some nonproducing profession, and, invariably, every female with the desire of sitting down for life in genteel idleness."  

Wright, however, could not admit that parasitism was the necessary corollary of having wealth. Moral corruption did not depend on a man's income, but on his ability to avoid honest labor. Marvin Meyers has described this ambivalence towards wealth as characteristic of the Jacksonian period as a whole. Wright's situation suggests tangible reasons for such feelings. Her independent income had allowed her to establish Nashoba, to edit a newspaper, to write and to publish. Given the expectations for women of her class to marry and to forfeit independence, her income was what had given her the

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53 Ibid.

freedom to labor rather than to live in "gentcel idleness." Moreover, at Nashoba, Wright had learned to live without luxuries, without comforts. With integrity and honest purpose, one did not have to fall prey to the "artificial wants" that a large income encouraged. Education in virtue, leading to a respect for honest labor was a permanent solution for society's ills in a way that redistribution of income could not be.

To establish a system of education was also feasible within the existing system, for, "through a judicious exercise of the elective franchise," the people could "send men to their legislative assemblies, who shall represent [their real] interests," and who would "devote the people's fund to the people's benefit." 55

Until such a movement could be organized, the free enquirers would do what they could to enlighten some men. The April 12, 1829, New York edition announced the purchase of the Ebenezer Church, in Broome Street, for a hall of science where "popular instruction [would] be imparted by means of familiar lectures," and where "competent persons [would] lecture on scientific and moral subjects at least once every Sunday." A second notice advertised a "Sunday School, for Instruction in Knowledge," that would offer to "male or female, . . . lectures on arithmetic and other branches of mathematics, anatomy, natural history, reading, writing, composing, and public speaking."

at no charge. In addition to establishing an alternative Sunday School, Wright and Jennings adopted another tactic of their religious opponents and issued freethought tracts, "the first 7 numbers of a series of Tracts, entitled 'Messengers of Truth,'" having been announced on February 22, 1829.

After Robert Dale Owen arrived in New York to share the editorial duties, Wright was free to begin lecturing outside the city. She made a final speech in New York, on the occasion of formally opening the Hall of Science on April 26, and then set off for Philadelphia on May 6, with Owen as escort.

The final speech announced the goal of her lectures. It was to arouse the people to seek true knowledge, and to do so they must "throw aside the distinctions of class; the names and feelings of sect or party; to recognize . . . in each other, the single character of human beings and fellow creatures." She would not be contentious, condemnatory, for that was to divide; her purpose was to unify. She would advocate, as a program, a system of national schools, "for the training together as one family all the children of the country in national or state institutions."

Wright delivered four lectures in Philadelphia from May 11 to May 15,

58 The Free Enquirer, May 13, 1829.
59 Ibid.
and the only disappointment was that the local papers would not print notices
of the meetings. She moved to Wilmington at the end of the month, where she
made a strong impression on those who heard her. There was still an
element of excitement in hearing a woman speak clearly and on political and
social issues. As one admirer said:

She [seemed] like a flower towering above the rubbish of ignorance
and brutal superstition; and would, in past ages, like a Socrates
or a Jesus, have been cut down in the morning of her day. 60

Wright returned to Philadelphia to give a lecture on existing evils on
June 2, and then arrived in New York City just as a scandal broke around her.
Wright had written to Robert Jennings, then with his family in New York, dur-
ing the disastrous spring of 1828, that she and Camilla wanted him to be
director of the school at Nashoba, but that living arrangements were not com-
fortable. They recommended that he

fix Mrs. Jennings with her father or elsewhere and . . . she may
gradually become desirous of joining her father [in New York]. . . .
Stay where you are till you can disburden yourself of your present
ties. You can do nothing with your arms working on the land,
nothing with a family in bringing them westward. 61

The letter had been addressed to Jennings in care of George Houston,
editor of the Correspondent, a New York freethought paper that lost its audi-
ence completely when The Free Enquirer began circulating in New York. As

60 "B.W. to The Free Enquirer," Wilmington, May 30, 1829, in The
Free Enquirer, June 3, 1829.

61 Frances Wright to Robert Jennings, February 24, 1828, quoted by
Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 201.
Jennings had already left when Houston received the letter, Houston kept the letter, and in June, 1829, it was anonymously printed in a circular titled "Exposition." Wright and Jennings both protested Houston's dishonesty and his "unprincipled foolery." The imputation of Wright's immorality given by the circular was typical of the attempts made to silence her. Instead of arguing with her principles, her opponents dismissed her as a lewd, immoral female. Given the standards for respectable female behavior, her public speeches were almost sufficient proof that she was capable of violating any social conventions.

Wright's desire not to offend, her adolescent training in proper manners, and the necessity of proving by her public appearances that she was respectable, let her to be very ladylike when engaged in the most unladylike of pursuits—speaking in public. As one of her detractors admitted, in reporting on her July 4, 1829, oration in Philadelphia, "It is probable that a more finished and elegant composition . . . was not uttered on Saturday, than that which came from the lips of this reviled, applauded, and notorious female."

But, as he continued, this facade of propriety should not mislead the public about her desire to overthrow convention and restraints.

We have never seen it contradicted, that Miss Wright is for blending both the white and black population into one community, so that they shall live in common, enjoying one with the other the same immunities and privileges. We can scarcely believe her the advocate of so revolting . . . a measure, especially after listening to her intelligent and beautiful address.  

62 The Free Enquirer, June 24, 1829.

The resurrection of her views of spring, 1828, on amalgamation, so offensive to the public she now sought to persuade on the more basic issue of establishing a system of free, equal public education, let Wright to disavow her earlier statements; the critic had, as she said, "an undefined apprehension of some exaggerated liberality in [her], with respect to our colored brethren." 64

Wright lectured in the seacoast cities from Baltimore to New York throughout the summer, extending her travels to Boston in August. She would begin a series in each city with the lectures on knowledge, which were printed in The Course of Popular Lectures, and then return later to deliver a series "On Existing Evils," which concluded with the plea for a system of national education that would isolate children from their parents and educate them equally in equality and virtue.

She rejected a system of common schools because children of the poorest were not able to attend, worked as they were in some manufacturing districts for twelve hours a day. Since working class families needed the labor of their children, children, for their protection, must be taken from the parents and placed in public institutions at the age of two. Parents could visit the children, "but, in no case, interfere with, or interrupt the rules of the institution." All children would be enrolled, and it would be an "open asylum" for orphans. The children would not only be trained to value equality, but would experience it.

64. The Free Enquirer, July 22, 1829.
Fed at a common board; clothed in a common garb, uniting neatness with simplicity and convenience; raised in the exercise of common duties, in the acquirement of the same knowledge and practice of the same industry . . . in the exercise of the same virtues, in the enjoyment of the same pleasures; in pursuit of the same object—their own and each other's happiness, [they would] when arrived at manhood and womanhood, work out the reform of society. 65

The schools would be financed by the labor of the older pupils, a head tax on the parents of every child (a measure also to encourage forethought" in having children), and a progressive tax on property. 66

The emphasis on education, on what a future generation could accomplish, removed the burden of having to advocate particular reforms, which might be unpopular and arouse opposition, in the present. Wright justified the course she pursued in 1829–1830, of advocating only educational reforms, in her Biography, when describing her abandonment of Nashoba.

She [Wright] was now aware that, in her practical efforts at reform, she had begun at the wrong end, although, with a view to the accurate comprehension of the interests of the country, . . . she had begun at the right end. She distinguished . . . that if she had envisaged a practical experiment when she might have been more usefully employed in preparing the popular mind for the exercise, with knowledge, of popular power, without that practical experiment and without the extended and varied observation which preceded it, she could never have acquired the information and the experience at all times requisite to guide the efforts of a really efficient leader of the popular mind. 67

65"Lecture on Existing Evils," in The Free Enquirer, August 26, 1829.

66Ibid.

67Wright, Biography, p. 32.
What she had learned was that the public must be educated, and to avoid any unpopular particular reforms that might dissuade it from listening to her advocacy of a general system of education for the children.

Besides offering a way to avoid disruptive issues, the emphasis on education as a remedy for the ills of society resulted from a faith in the human capacities which had been demonstrated in America and from an inability to discern the economic and institutional impact of industrialization. As Wright said in one lecture, "Where his [man's] care and judicious cultivation extend, winter recedes, and its rigors diminish; fogs and miasmata disappear, and the drained morass, now a smiling champaign, yields its rich produce, under a pure sky, to tribes of intelligent beings." The oppression of the working class and the small capitalist was a result of the misuse of this intelligence in "the novel and excessive impetus given to commercial and manufactural enterprise by the improvements in machinery, in navigation, roads, canals, & c., and, yet, more, by the principle of competition." Wright and Owen found, in the summer and fall of 1829, that their support came primarily from the working-class, and, as a result they framed their appeals in terms of working-class interests. When the freethought movement revived in the United States in the mid-1820's, it was due primarily to an

68 Frances Wright, Address on the State of the Public Mind, and the Measures which it Calls for as Delivered in New York and Philadelphia in the Autumn of 1829 (New York, 1829).

69 Ibid.
influx of British-born laborers who brought deistic principles with them.70

It was, thus, an urban phenomenon, and one which appealed neither to an
upper class intent on using religion to maintain social order nor to a middle
class that sympathized with the optimistic assessment of human potential
for perfection that had appeared in American Protestant thought. Thus,
Wright's supporters were mainly urban workingmen of British origin.

Wright's emphasis on education also coincided with the rising cry of
urban mechanics for a public school system to educate their children without
stigma so that "the working classes [could] mix with and converse with the
more cultivated, polished, and refined." Then different manners could not
be made a

pretex for distinction of ranks. ... And the barriers of separation
[would] be broken down by the omnipotent lever of intellect, at least
so far as congenial knowledge spreads her influence over the mind
of the community and assimilates in a bond of brotherhood those now
repellent prejudices which sunder man from man.71

The first meeting of New York mechanics which contained the
potential for organized political action, was held on April 23, 1829, in the
midst of business stagnation and widespread unemployment, to protest a
move by employers to lengthen the work day from ten to eleven hours. The

70 Albert Post, Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850 (London,
1943), pp. 32-33.

Political Economy, on the Principle of Production the Source of Wealth
(Philadelphia, 1832), abridged in Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy,
Free Enquirer gave an account of this meeting,\textsuperscript{72} with no greater emphasis than it had earlier carried notices for meetings to relieve prisoners in debtors' jails,\textsuperscript{73} or to receive subscriptions for the Mechanics Free Press of Philadelphia.

The interest of the free enquirers in the condition of the workingmen was strengthened, however, by a report made by a citizens' committee on the state of Philadelphia seamstresses.\textsuperscript{74} As the introduction in The Free Enquirer said, the report was another example of how popularly believed truths taught by the press and clergy were deceptions. For the report showed that "the curse of penury falls not at all times on the idle and dissolute alone,"\textsuperscript{75} but also on hard-working women who simply were not paid adequately for their labor.

The awakening of the workingmen, and the apparent similarity of their goals with hers, led Wright to hope for their support in effecting a trial of the system of equal, republican education. She delivered two lectures in New York in early September, that resulted in the formation of an "Association for the Protection of Industry, and for the Promotion of Popular

\textsuperscript{72}The Free Enquirer, April 29, 1829. Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class, p. 12. Hugins says that the Workingmen's Party was born at this meeting.

\textsuperscript{73}The Free Enquirer, December 3, 1828; New York edition of February 15, 1829.

\textsuperscript{74}The Free Enquirer, May 6, 1829.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.
Instruction." The creation of the Association was an attempt to cement the alliance which had been forming between some working men and the free enquirers. The free enquirers now coupled an interest in the present state of the working class with their scheme for national education. The Association was organized "because industry is at present unprotected, oppressed, despised and indirectly deprived of its just reward; and because there is in this republic no system of education befitting a republic." The Association would "exclude no honest man." While the "true friends of equal justice [were found] chiefly among the industrious classes, "no man, whatever his class, would be excluded."

A committee of the Association, chaired by George Henry Evans, reported in less than two weeks that "the distress among mechanics, in this city, is almost universal." The problem resulted from lack of a public education system, which led to "a large and disproportionate number of apprentices; in consequence of the inability of parents to support their children at schools, and their being thereby compelled to bind them, at a very early age, apprentices to some business which will take the burthen of their mainte-
nance and education off their hands." The result was a glut on the labor market and depression of wages.

76 The Free Enquirer, September 23, 1829. [Italics mine.]

77 Ibid.

The report concluded with a recommendation that ward committees 
be organized to "select and nominate suitable persons for all the offices"
up for decision in the November elections, persons who would pledge them-
selves to secure a "national, republican education" for all children.79

The Association was formed to dissuade workers from more radical,
and, as Owen and Wright thought, less productive programs. They feared
that the workers would be led to support a scheme for equalizing property,
which, as Owen told them, would offer

no security that in a single year from the date of that equalization,
there would not be rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, as at the
present. Yet this partial and ineffective reform would create a
hundred enemies and oppressors, for one that is created against a
universal reform by means of education.80

Almost immediately after the free enquirers had organized the
Association to protect industry and advance education reform, the New York
mechanics resumed meeting for the purpose of influencing the fall elections.
Indeed, they may have resumed meeting in response to this attempt to steal
direction of the movement. The mechanics assembled on October 19, to hear
a report from Thomas Skidmore and adopted a series of resolutions which
Robert Dale Owen disapproved. The resolutions said nothing about educa-
tion, but, instead, said that "the unequal distribution of landed property is
the chief source of the calamities of the poor," and advocated destruction of

79 Ibid.

80 The Free Enquirer, September 9, 1828.
banks, a change in the auction system, an end to tax exemptions on church
property, passage of a lien law, and election of mechanics to public office
to carry out the program. In reporting this, Owen took the freethinkers'
line, reminding the mechanics that "the only security for the enjoyment of
equal rights is, not agrarian laws or any law whatever, but equal, national,
republican education."\textsuperscript{82}

Wright did not remain in New York for the conclusion of the debate
over the workingmen's program, or for the elections. She left the city on
October 21, to deliver a series of lectures in the course of a trip to Nashoba
where the operation was finally to be ended with the removal of the remaining
slaves to Haiti. Her farewell lecture, delivered on October 18, in the midst
of the debate over the workingmen's proper objectives, was an apology for
her failure at Nashoba, a justification of her leaving the city before the
campaign, and a reaffirmation that only a crusade against the ignorance
spawned and maintained by clerical influence could save the nation's virtue.
She admitted that Nashoba had failed, but attributed the failure to her youth-
ful enthusiasm which had led her to "see in the absence of bayonets and one
privileged church, the absence of all governmental injustice and clerical
assumptions."\textsuperscript{83} She still denied that the problems might be economic and

\textsuperscript{81}The Free Enquirer, October 31, 1829.

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83}"Address Delivered at the New York Hall of Science," in The
Free Enquirer, October 31, 1829.
institutional, for the true remedies were "the rational training of youth . . . and the instructional improvement of the present generation." 84 She still believed the clergy to be the villain and identified her primary object—"to hasten the downfall of the clergy, to empty their coffers, to sap their influence, to annihilate their trade and calling, and to render the odiousness of their profession apparent to all eyes—even, if possible, to their own." 85 Once again, trying to disarm her opponents within and without the party, she warned her New York auditors to remember, in the midst of the coming battle: "In your zeal be candid, in your boldness be gentle, and let the bond of your union be—charity," 86 not self interest.

Wright's departure left Owen alone to undertake the task of redirecting the energies of the mechanics. The Association set up in the Hall of Science called a meeting for mechanics and proceeded to recast Skidmore's resolution on unequal distribution of property into a more congenial mold.

3. Resolved that hitherto, in this republic, professing the principles of equality, there has been in practice, a most unequal division of wealth, power and privileges.

4. Resolved, that the most grievous species of inequality is that produced by unequal education; . . .

6 Resolved, . . . that in the opinion of this meeting, it is unwise

84 ibid.

85 ibid.

86 ibid.
hastily to press on important innovations; and that it behoves us, before attempting any minor reforms, to unite our efforts and our votes to carry through our state Legislature, the great, regenerating measure of a National Education. 87

Robert Dale Owen served as secretary at this meeting, which adjourned, after adopting its resolutions, to attend another meeting held the same evening, where the Association resolutions were also carried. The free enquirers, clearly, were attempting to steal Skidmore's support, and Owen defended the Association's action as an adequate reply to a criticism from The Commercial Advertiser that "the crude, immaturely digested, and hastily passed resolutions [of the October 19 meeting] sufficiently proves [sic] that they require enlightened friends to aid them by prudent suggestions." 88

Orestes Brownson, whom Wright met in Auburn and enlisted for the education effort, described the free enquirers' hope that they could use the workingmen's movement for the advancement of their own interests. As he remembered, "We hoped, by linking our cause with the ultra-democratic sentiment of the country, ... by professing ourselves the bold and uncompromising champions of equality, ... to enlist the majority of the American people under the banner of the Working-Men's Party." 89 As Wright herself

87 The Free Enquirer, November 7, 1829.
88 Ibid.
89 The Works of Orestes Brownson, ed. by Henry F. Brownson (New York, 1966), V, 62-63. Brownson was a Universalist minister editing the Gospel Advocate when Wright met him. He became a freethinker and associate editor of The Free Enquirer until its demise in 1832. He then edited the Boston
said, in reply to Owen's information about the meetings in New York City, the measures of reform must be taken "in order of their practicability as well as of their utility." This procedure would be overthrown if one demanded an "Equal amount of property . . . at the age of maturity," instead of "equal food, clothing and instruction at the public expense." She felt sure the workingmen would accept criticism from her, one whose "democratic philanthropy," and "courage to dare all things that may be dared," had long been proved.90

The mechanics polled 6,000 out of 21,000 votes in the November elections, which encouraged Robert Dale Owen. He attributed their failure to win an even larger portion of the vote to "the lack of prudence in framing of some of the resolutions and of judgment in the selection of some of the candidates."91

In the meantime, Wright was lecturing her way across New York state; at Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo, she spoke on the need for knowledge and republican education. She found some friends at every town,

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Quarterly Review (1838-1842), the Democratic Review (1842-43), and Brownson's Quarterly Review (1844-1765). He converted to Roman Catholicism in 1844.


91 The Free Enquirer, November 14, 1829.
the most notable being Orestes Brownson, who described her as having, at the age of thirty-four, "feminine sweetness and grace and ... masculine intellect, a woman who followed out with logical consistency the principle of private judgment in faith and morals."  

She traveled south to Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Nashoba, and was in New Orleans by January 6, 1830. She wrote from there that she would be embarking for Port-au-Prince with her little colony, numbering thirty, in a few days. She excused her desertion of her editorial duties in New York with the plea that the slaves were "helpless beings who looked to my countenance and lean upon my protection." She was tired, she said, from the "continued claims upon [her] time and strength which often weighed down with fatigue ... mind and body."  

At the same time as she wrote excuses to Owen, she congratulated herself in a letter to William Maclure.

My discourse on Existing Evils ... first united the people of the Northern cities on the great measure of republican education as there explained. ... This is the question wch in one day polled 5,600 votes in New York, and wch wd have carried the whole city ticket had it been properly chosen or had time permitted its revision. 

Wright stayed away much longer than she had indicated she would, not returning to the East until her arrival in Philadelphia on April 25, 1830. At 

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93 The Free Enquirer, February 13, 1830.

94 Frances Wright to William Maclure, January 3, 1830, NHWI, Maclure–Fretageot MSS.
the same moment as she announced her return, she promised a public lecture on May 9.95 She had contributed nothing to The Free Enquirer since January, and apparently was not satisfied with Owen's conduct of the paper in her absence, especially his concentration on political issues. A notice in the same number that announced her return apologized for having filled the paper "with somewhat long and serious documents, to the comparative exclusion of lighter, miscellaneous matter." Wright like to educate, but she also believed in entertaining.

Owen, indeed, had been busy trying to keep the mechanics on the proper track after their hopeful win of 6,000 votes in the November elections. The critical meeting, as Owen saw it, had been held on December 29, 1829.

At that meeting, with about 3,000 in attendance, the mechanics resolved:

That we explicitly disavow all intentions to intermeddle with the rights of individuals, either as to property or religion; . . .
That we hold these rights as sacred as life, not to be approached by ruthless despots, or visionary fanatics. . . .

That next to life and liberty, we consider education the greatest blessing bestowed upon mankind.96

The meeting, with thanks for its work, disbanded the Committee of Fifty which had reported Skidmore's proposal for redistribution of property at the October 19 meeting, and established a General Executive Committee to

95. The Free Enquirer, May 1, 1830.

96. The Free Enquirer, March 20, 1830.
be composed of five representatives elected in each ward of the city. Skidmore protested, later charging that the Executive Committee had too many rich men on it, and called a meeting some days later for "those and those only who live by the labor of their hands." Owen, in reporting all this, accused Skidmore of willfully "splitting and distracting the mechanics' party," as his "influence... [was] very small and confined chiefly to the idle and unemployed."  

Wright's lecture of May 9, occurred in the midst of this argument over what program the workingmen should advance in the next election, and with the memory that their party had been attacked the past November as "Fanny Wright men," supporters of infidelity and irreligion. She undertook to prove that she stood simply at the end of a long line of deist patriots, to remind her audience "that the cry of infidelity preceded the administration of Jefferson, and that, if doubters in miraculous revelations and biblical theology, are to be styled infidels, they can only wear the name in common with all the wisest and boldest patriots of America's revolution."  

She still sought to maintain decorum, to stifle rancorous attacks. In approving the appearance of the New York *Daily Sentinel*, which supported the system of equal and public education, she reminded its editors that "petulant gibing and vulgar retort are unworthy of this noble first-born of America's...

97 Ibid.

98 Frances Wright, *Address Containing a Review of the Times, as first Delivered to the Hall of Science, New York on Sunday, May 9, 1830* (New York, 1830), p. 18.
reformed daily press. "99

Under pressure to compete with other groups that might divert the
workingmen from the issue of public education, Wright and The Free Enquirer
joined the attack on banking monopolies. She now connected clerical influence
and monopoly of knowledge with the influence of monied men who manipulated
credit.

By withdrawing all paper money and reducing the operations of bankers
to those of private citizens. . . . a fair useful, and simple business
would gradually arise to facilitate honest trade, to furnish the community
with convenient means of transfer, exchange, discount and deposit, while
at the same time speculation, gambling, extortion, false credit, . . .
would decline . . . , industry recover from its oppression and dependence,
the number of idlers and non-producers rapidly diminish, and the whole
face of society assume a more healthy appearance. 100

No matter how they might try to remove considerations of personality
from political debate and try to draw into line with popular interests, Wright
and Owen could do nothing to stop opponents of the workingmen from charging
that the free enquirers were a major influence in the party, and that they led
the workingmen to support foreign notions of atheism, infidelity, and destruc-
tion of the family.

The issue of Owen's and Wright's influence came to a head in May,
resulting in a further split of the movement and clarification of the differences
between the educational system desired by the free enquirers and that acceptable

99  The Free Enquirer, May 22, 1830.

100 Ibid.
to the workingmen. On May 21, 1830, the General Executive Committee re-
jected a minority report on education, taken as it said, "from the pen of Robert
Dale Owen, and published editorially in the Daily Sentinel." The Committee
concluded that the republican education advocated by Owen and the minority
report was "a specious attempt insidiously to palm upon the Committee and the
great body of the working classes the doctrine of infidelity." 101

A meeting of mechanics was called by the minority for May 26, at
which the General Executive Committee was denounced and a resolution adopted

That we consider any individual who introduces the subject of religion
or irreligion in our political meetings, or makes any attempt to
stigmatize a fellow laborer on account of his speculative opinion, as
an enemy to the equal rights of consciences, and consequently inimical
to our cause. 102

At the same time the meeting backed down some on the education scheme,
"expressly disclaim[ing] the idea of advocating any system of education which
shall force children from their parents, against their consent." 103

The meeting charged that the General Executive Committee had been
taken over by men who opposed the mechanics at the last election, friends of
the Tammany supported New York Evening Journal. This may have been an
accurate charge, but even here Wright called for moderation and expressed the
wish that the members of the denounced General Executive Committee might

101 The Free Enquirer, June 5, 1830.
102 Ibid.
"come out from among the traitors to our cause, and again join with the great body of the working men." 104

A number of ward meetings were held during the first weeks of June to settle the conflict between the General Executive Committee and the minority that had controlled the May 26 meeting and had protested the Committee's treatment of Owen and the Sentinel. The Free Enquirer printed accounts of the meetings in four wards and saw them as a victory for itself. The wards did recall and replace some of their representatives to the General Executive Committee and denounce the Committee for "endeavor[ing] to make the profession of a particular belief, whether orthodox or heterodox, the passport to public confidence or favor." The resolutions passed by the wards supported the ideal of a system of public education, but with a subtle shift from the terms in which Owen and the Sentinel had advocated it. The meeting of the third ward resolved "that we consider the only system of education befitting a republic, is one which shall be free for all at the expense of all, and shall afford the poorest child in the land the same advantages with the richest." 105

Wright and Owen had misread the willingness of the working class to support their education scheme. The workingmen were not interested in a reformation of society or its basic values; rather,

104 The Free Enquirer, June 5, 1830.

105 The Free Enquirer, June 19, 1830.
the workingmen visualized education in its social and economic aspects as a major instrument of public policy. ... They proposed to employ education to destroy adventitious social distinctions and to ensure every man an equal opportunity for prosperity. 106

The workingmen were concerned with social mobility at a time when it seemed threatened, and, realistically was declining for the artisan-mechanic group.

Stuart Blumin has concluded from a study of occupational and residential patterns in Philadelphia in the period from 1820 to 1860 that "In purely quantitative terms, upward occupational mobility appears to have been fairly stable ... whereas downward mobility seems to have gradually increased." 107

On her return from Haiti Wright had found herself on the edges of the campaign to mobilize the workingmen. Her interests and Owen's diverged, as she continued to worry about clerical influence, while he became more concerned with the impact of machinery on the laborer and questions arising from Malthus' theory of population growth. The one point that held them together was the belief that a national education system would solve society's basic problems. Wright did not enjoy being removed from the center of activity, however, and on June 13, she delivered an "Address to Young Mechanics," apparently in an attempt to reunite the separating interests.


In addressing myself this evening to the young mechanics of our city, I would not be understood as considering their interests distinct from those of other classes of the community.

The interests of the whole human family, in nature and in reason are ever present to my mind as one and the same. 108

She also wanted the mechanics to appear more respectable, more like those who normally sought political office, to speak well, as

a harsh and ungoverned voice, a forced and imperfect articulation, unseemly expressions, unsightly gestures, tedious repetitions, a hurried, a violent, or . . . a studied and affected delivery . . . might suffice to stop the ears of an audience to the wisdom of a Franklin.

Most of all, "there must be a love of truth, and a desire to prove ourselves worthy disciples, as well as skilful advocates." 109

Wright did not enjoy contention and disagreement, especially if she was not leading a band of like-minded supporters. She was, moreover, being called a burden to the workingmen's cause, as her identification with the movement allowed it to be criticized on extraneous issues. Her solution was simply to leave for Europe. She pleaded fatigue and the fact that she would be continually pressed for invitations for lectures if she stayed. 110

In her parting address she once again stressed the moderation which must guide reformers, who too often hurried "forward in argument ahead of the popular judgment, impel[led] to measures before their motives [were] duly

108 Frances Wright, An Address to Young Mechanics (New York, 1830), p. 3.

109 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

110 The Free Enquirer, July 3, 1830.
weighed, and their results duly calculated—thus producing change rather than reform."\(^{111}\) The people would not be deluded by fantastic schemes, but would adopt ultimately the sensible goal of


Such a goal could be effected constitutionally, through the work of the voters to establish a system of equal education.

She, however, felt it was time to retire for a season. The people were now awake and capable of directing themselves. She had become a liability, and I wish not my name to be made a scarecrow to the timid, or a stumbling-block to the innocently prejudiced, at a season when all should unite round the altar of their country, with its name only in their mouths, and its love only in their hearts.\(^{113}\)

Accompanied by the faithful Camilla, Wright set off for France, promising to return after the autumn elections. She did not know that she would not return to the United States until 1835.

\(^{111}\) *The Free Enquirer*, August 22, 1830.

\(^{112}\) *Ibid.* [Capitals in the original.]

\(^{113}\) *Ibid.*
CHAPTER SIX

The Marriage Relationship

When Wright and her sister, Camilla Whitby, left New York for France in July, 1830, they were resuming the close relationship which had been interrupted for three years--by Wright's constant travels and by Camilla's marriage. That the two were traveling together again marked Wright's failure, after three years of frantic activity, to create a home for her sister or for herself. Camilla had not made a separate life for herself and once more fulfilled her sister's need for companionship and approval.

The two sisters had been separated for most of the period after Wright left Camilla to supervise Nashoba and embarked for Europe with Robert Dale Owen in 1827. They had been reunited briefly during the spring of 1828 when Wright made her last attempt to publicize Nashoba and to form a community. After the failure to attract attention or recruits Wright had moved to New Harmony in search of a larger audience, leaving Camilla with Whitby in Nashoba. After Camilla left Nashoba to join the free enquirers in New York, her sister was almost constantly away on lecture trips.

The years that they had been apart had been especially difficult ones for Camilla. When she arrived in New York in May, 1829, she was
weak from bearing her first child and no longer able, even had Wright wished it, to accompany her sister on tour. Moreover, her child died sometime during the summer of 1829, and she no longer had the spirit or energy for Wright's enterprises.

A letter from Mary Carroll, a New Orleans milliner and dispenser of radical literature for the New Harmony group who saw the sisters in New York during the summer, described the toll the past two years had taken on both.

She [Frances] is in her proper element [lecturing], and will aid greatly the universal impulse towards inquiry... Her susceptibility to much enjoyment and highly excitable temperament unite in supporting her under the utmost fatigue, but mental and physical [sic] she has become quite fleshy. Not so poor Camilla... prevented by her more enterprising sister from forming a suitable union, abandoned to her own foolishness in the midst of slavery and savagery [at Nashoba]... She is now in New York where she had just lost her child... and was the picture of despair.1

Beginning with her European trip in 1827, when Robert Dale Owen accompanied her, Wright had traveled with men, without female companionship. She had made the first trip to New York in 1828 with Robert Jennings. Jennings or Owen escorted her on her lecture trips during the spring and summer of 1829. When she left New York for the trip to Nashoba and Haiti in the fall of 1829, neither of these friends would travel with her--Jennings having family obligations and Robert Dale Owen being absorbed in his interest

1 Mary Carroll to William Maclure, November 7, 1829, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.
in the workingmen's campaign. She found a supporter on this occasion in William Phiquepal, the teacher from New Harmony who had come to New York with three of his pupils to become the printers for the free enquirers.²

Having no clear plans about his own future activities, Phiquepal had made the trip to Nashoba and Haiti with Wright.

Although Wright had been buoyed by the public attention and activity of her lecturing, her return to Europe, traveling once again with her sister, was an admission that she had no one else so loyal to her. Owen, her closest associate of the last two years, had developed interests which diverged from hers and was creating a reputation and career of his own. The workingmen, her chosen audience, had found her a burden. Wright's only home was with Camilla.

The July Revolution occurred just before the sisters' arrival, and Wright was delighted both with the renewal of popular action in France and with the prominent part played by her friend Lafayette, although he supported the settlement which ended in making Louis Philippe a constitutional monarch instead of forcing a republic.

Although she wanted to be at the center of action, Wright no longer had the same claims to Lafayette's affection; she would not submerge her own sense of importance in his; and she had to consider Camilla, whose

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²The Free Enquirer, July 22, 1829, noted a change in printer, from George Henry Evans to"William Phiquepal and his pupils."
health and affection she could no longer ignore. To Lafayette she wrote,

I say not how I long to reach you, and yet perhaps it is as well
that I should not be seen at your side just at this crisis. . . .
I have done what I could to make myself forgotten at this time in
America and the public motives which decided me to this have
made me less regret that private ones should have led me just
now into retirement. I could wish however that these had been
unconnected with the health and spirits of our Camilla.3

It was clear that Wright had not been happy about giving up her public place,
and she might attach herself again to Lafayette, if he could be won over by
a memory of the time when "our Camilla" had been one of the bonds of
affection between them.

Camilla's health and spirits did not recover. She had followed her
sister into every adventure, including the disorder of Nashoba, but she did
not have Wright's sustaining energy or compelling sense of self-importance.
In February, 1831, she died in Paris, and left Wright bereft.

Camilla, in a real sense, had proved herself indispensable; no one
else had offered Wright comparable loyalty. She had found no one else who
would sacrifice all their interests to hers as Camilla had done, who would
devote herself completely to her. Wright could not accept friendships which
offered less than the loyalty she had found in Camilla. She destroyed
friendships, as in the cases of Charles Wilkes and Frances Trollope, or she
let them lapse in her search for relationships that might offer greater

3Frances Wright to Lafayette, October 30, 1830, quoted by Perkins
and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 229. [My italics.]
security, as she had done with Bentham and then Mary Shelley.

Left in 1831 without her sister and without even the public applause that might have provided partial compensation, she turned to the one relationship that might secure her loyal companionship. Despite her unfavorable assessment of the institution, she married, choosing her colleague and escort on the trip to Haiti, William Phiquepal, who reassumed his family name of D'Arusmont at the time they were married.

William Phiquepal was fifty-two when he married Wright. An enthusiast in education and reform, he might hope to be Wright's mentor, as well as a supporter of her activities. He had trained in the Pestalozzian system of education and in 1821 had conducted a school in Paris.4

In 1824 Phiquepal had moved to Philadelphia, where he and Mme. Fretageot conducted a Pestalozzian school sponsored by William Maclure. Mme. Fretageot's opinion of Phiquepal's ability was high, as her entreaty to him, while he was still in Paris and she had already met the students in Philadelphia, made clear. She wrote, "You will have much to observe and much to correct. [The American students] become accustomed, from an early age, to taking no advice from their parents, . . . [and] as a result, they are little inclined to submit to any regulation at all."5

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4William Phiquepal to Mme. Fretageot, July 10, 1821, NHIW, New Harmony MSS.

5Mme. Fretageot to William Phiquepal, October 22, 1824, NHIW, New Harmony MSS. [My translation from the French.]
In 1826, Phiquepal traveled with the party going to New Harmony to found a school which Maclure was establishing in the new community, and his relations with Maclure and Mme. Fretageot were still cordial. He was dependent upon Maclure's patronage, and he treated his patron with deference. In one letter, he said,

I thank you heartily for the kind advices you are willing to give me. I am so conscious of the importance it would be to one to follow them exactly that I have written them down on a piece of paper that stands always on my chimney where I read ten times a day.

Maclure, however, was passionately interested in natural science, and Phiquepal's inattention to this soon led to Maclure's being disappointed with him. Maclure wrote to Mme. Fretageot,

The general opinion is that Natural Philosophy, Chymistry [sic], Natural History, etc. are perfectly useless and waste of money to the communities [at New Harmony] and I am not certain if P[phiquepal] is not at the bottom of that idea as all of them are rather out of his road having never paid much attention to any of them. [He] cannot value any quality in another he doesn't possess himself.

Later, he added a warning, so that she might protect the scientific equipment.

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6To Holland and to New Harmony, Robert Dale Owen's Travel Journal, 1825-1826, ed. by Josephine M. Elliott (Indianapolis, 1969). The journal recounts the trip from New York City to New Harmony with the scientists and teachers, including Phiquepal and Mme. Fretageot, with which Owen and Maclure would staff their model school at New Harmony.

7Phiquepal to William Maclure, January 27, 1825, NHWI, New Harmony MSS.

8William Maclure to Mme. Fretageot, June 9, 1826, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.
I have a hint, ... for wishing so few of the materials lent to Phiquepal or bought with my money going under his name as his individual property, that the schools might not be deprived of them by the whim or caprice of one so full of extravagant fancies [sic].

Mme. Fretageot defended her long-time colleague, at least viewing his foibles as harmless, for Maclure had to disabuse her of the belief that he was "too severe on Phiquepal's foibles," by reporting how Phiquepal had failed to teach anything of value to her son Achilles, who was traveling with Maclure.

Achile[sic] can neither write [,] read [n]or spell a word of English [,] has not the least idea of geography but a confused idea of the squares and paral[l]ograms . . . [He] did not know the pole from the equator [,] cannot calculate any practical question.

But Phiquepal was charming, or at least exhibited so much dedicated energy that it was difficult to abandon him. His carelessness, which led Maclure to exclaim that he was "the first Frenchman I ever found totally devoid of care or economy," was exciting to reformers chafing under the restraints and narrowness that so often seemed a result of obstinacy and bias. Mme. Fretageot, even after being disabused of some of her confidence, maintained that "if he was directed he would be of some utility."
Maclure's dissatisfaction with Phiquepal coincided with his alienation from his partner, Robert Owen, and the rift allowed Phiquepal to switch patrons. Maclure dismissed both Phiquepal and Owen, saying,

In this [destroying what he cannot understand] he is similar to his protector [Owen], who won't encourage anything but what he supposes he was the first to practice. Being totally ignorant of the natural sciences, [he] would obstruct education and destroy it entirely by depriving it of everything useful and natural. 13

When Wright returned to New Harmony in the summer of 1828, the Owenite faction, including Phiquepal, Robert Jennings, and Robert Dale Owen, were living at community house No. 1. Mme. Fretageot, her sense of order and organization appalled, reported to Maclure: "Every one of the No. 1 do not possess altogether reunited that portion of good sense so necessary in every undertaking." She advised them to attend diligently to their separate interests, but, as she saw it, they were too captivated by Phiquepal and his schemes to heed her.

This advice that I gave them came from their complaint about Phiquepal. They cannot manage him and he means to manage them. In fact they are in a dreadful confusion. I do not expect they will understand my advice. They laugh[ed] heartily at it and said it would be good for me, but they had higher views than that. 14

Needing a new source of patronage and desiring to retain his influence with the younger reformers at New Harmony, Phiquepal became printer

13 William Maclure to Mme. Fretageot, February 8, 1827, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

14 Mme Fretageot to William Maclure, October 10, 1828, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.
for the Gazette and then followed it to New York. Before the trip to Haiti,

Wright had been no more influenced by him than had the rest of the group.

Even after he had proved loyal on that occasion, it is not clear that he was

in France in 1831 to be near her. Mme. Fretageot offered one explanation

for his presence there. As she wrote Maclure,

He [Phiquepal] is . . . going to France where he is to learn
Lit[h]ography with Dale Owen and return to New York to
establish there a Lit[h]ographic press for the joint society of
Miss Wright [,] Robert Dale and Jennings.15

Whatever the reason for his presence, Phiquepal was the one

support Wright had when Camilla died.16 Finding herself alone, Wright

turned to the aid of the visionary who had been so helpful, constructing for

herself a picture of him as a dedicated follower after knowledge and reform.

The decision to marry came quickly thereafter. Phiquepal returned to the

United States in May to settle Wright's affairs in New York and to apply for

citizenship in Philadelphia.

Wright desired calm, order and acceptance. She wrote to Phiquepal's

family, the D'Arusmonts, as they had to be consulted to obtain the parental

15Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, December 18, 1829, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

16Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 306, mentioned that Phiquepal was a witness for the acte de décès of Camilla Wright Whitby.
permission required by law for a French citizen's marriage. She attempted to ingratiate herself and to defend Phiquepal, who had not pursued the respectable career expected by his family. A letter from his brother, calming her fears that the family might be put off by her notoriety, assured her that he shared her opinion of his brother's superior qualities, of his character as a man who "loves good solely for the pleasure of it, and not because he seeks praise." The family recognized that Phiquepal was "attached to work that can be useful to others, rather than to that which brings honor or profit to himself." 17 Wright said a few years after the marriage that she had married, because of "the similarity of our researches." 18

She was captivated by a man old enough to be her father, who offered not only the companionship, but the same identity with her purpose and activities that she had found in Camilla. The marriage relation, however, carried with it social expectations and legal restrictions that a sibling relationship did not. When Wright had traveled without Camilla, she had been seen as reckless, but she had not been criticized for deserting her duties to her sister. Even a pregnant sister could be left to others' care if service to the public, to a larger cause, required it. Besides the legal restrictions on her ownership of property, the social expectation that a wife did not act independently of

17 D'Arusmont to Frances Wright, June 6, 1831, UC, Lafayette MSS.
her husband, confined the married woman's activities. Wright had recognized all the disadvantages of marriage in 1828. Only the loss of all her supports, coupled with the belief that her relationship with Phiquepal would replicate the one she had had with Camilla, led her to become Madame D'Arusmont.

Frances Wright and William Phiquepal D'Arusmont were married in July 1831, with General Lafayette standing as one of the witnesses for the bride. The couple remained in Paris during the fall and winter, and Wright was subdued during the period. She wrote in the fall to Robert Owen, "We have all sacrificed too much of our worldly ease in attempts to better human society."  

Her marriage to Phiquepal chastened her, made her question her past work. He was not so impressed as she by fine oratory, as an article she contributed to The Free Enquirer indicated. A wise friend, Phiquepal, dismissed a Saint-Simonian lecturer whom they had both heard, telling her that he once "gave credit to men for more sense than they judged it safe to show, ... but so often discovered [the] error that now ... men [were taken] at their word."  


20 The Free Enquirer, June 4, 1831.
values by speeches and tracts. To persuade people to change, the reformer must offer a practical exhibit, and the most effective was "juvenile schools of industry, based upon agriculture and independent by their own labor, of money, monied men and the monied world." Words were liable to misuse, and Wright admitted that even she might have erred.

I have perhaps too frequently emphasized old terms while attempting to convey to the mind new ideas ... and have pressed the words, true wealth and true money into my service, while engaged in showing that all to which these words ["wealth" and "money"] have been hither-to applied are void of real value and in opposition to utility.

Wright apparently was not anxious to publicize the marriage, and she withdrew from her former connections at the same time as she turned her attention from America. When Mme. Fretageot visited Paris in the winter of 1831, she discovered the couple and wrote to Maclure to tell him of the marriage. She had secured an address for "Miss Wright" from Lafayette's secretary, who had not told her that Wright was married. On arriving at a fourth floor apartment, she found Phiquepal and Wright, who "asked who gave ... her directions." Mme. Fretageot painted a rather morose picture of their living quarters, which were cramped and dark. Wright was uncommunicative and said she never went anywhere. Mme. Fretageot also reported that Wright was caring for an infant that looked sickly and cried throughout.

21 The Free Enquirer, June 11, 1831.

22 Ibid.
her visit. She finally stumbled downstairs in the dark, as Wright did not show her to the door. 23

Mme. Fretageot may have exaggerated the depression she saw in Wright in late 1831. By the time Robert Dale Owen and his new bride Mary Robinson Owen visited the D'Arusmonts in 1832, they found the couple living happily at Passy. The infant mentioned by Mme. Fretageot, a mysterious child that Camilla may have been carrying when Wright took her sister away from New York, had disappeared. Phiquepal and Wright had had a daughter, Sylva Camilla, who has been born in April, 1832.

Robert Dale Owen left his new wife to spend the winter with his friends, and Mary's letters to him described a couple devoted to each other and to their child. Mary tried to please them for the sake of her husband, for, as she said, "you [Robert Dale Owen] love them and they are good people and they shall love me." 24 She found it difficult to win them, however, for they always converse in French and so much in enigmas (which is one of their foibles) that I do not understand and of course cannot speak, especially as they always address each other. . . . One may just as well inhabit a house alone as with a couple who are so much attached to each other and who love other people so little. 25

23 Mme. Fretageot to William Maclure, December 25, 1831, NHWI, Maclure-Fretageot MSS.

24 Mary Owen to Robert Dale Owen, September 25, 1832, NHWI, Branigan Collection.

25 Mary Owen to Robert Dale Owen, October 16, 1832, NHWI, Branigan Collection.
The twenty year old Mary may have been overly harsh. She also disapproved of the way they were raising Sylva. She wrote, "Frances [,,]

Phiquepal and Sylva are playing in the big chair, at this moment an enviable group, but not always." As she concluded, "I make careful observations of their child the faults and good parts of its training." 26 Mary had stayed with the couple, ostensibly to help Wright with the housework, for she and Philiquepal were often ill. The arrangement was not successful, and Mary was annoyed by its failure.

Frances [Wright] told me that she did not think I knew how to keep house, and that she would have made me a good cook in three months, if I had liked. This latter remark made me smile. Sorry should I be, if I could not do both better than herself. 27

There apparently had been some planning that the five (including Sylva Camilla) would return to New Harmony to live together, but Wright rejected this idea in the fall, telling Mary that she was afraid "of subjecting Sylva to that climate." 28 Wright and Phiquepal remained in Paris, working on a manuscript which would present a complete plan for reform. As Wright wrote John Minter Morgan, the Owenite publicist,

26 Mary Owen to Robert Dale Owen, October 13, 1832, NHWI, Branigan Collection.

27 Ibid.

28 Mary Owen to Robert Dale Owen, September 14, 1832, NHWI, Branigan Collection.
The public mind looks and waits for something...for practical truth presenting with clearness and simplicity, a general order of practice and specifying the principles out of which must naturally arise all its details; speaking at once to the comprehension and conviction of all, as satisfying the wants and calming the anxieties of each and every individual; assisting no class, disputing with no prejudices, forcing no habits, sacrificing no interests but fencing with new securities the peace of society and the independence and enjoyments of individuals. The presentation of this work, so imperiously demanded by the growing embarrassments of society, has occupied my mind as that of my husband for years. 29

Wright had a great deal of her capital invested in property, especially in city lots in Cincinnati, and the necessity of tending to mortages on these was an excuse for her returning to America in late 1835. Once in Cincinnati, in the midst of public debate on the bank issue and abolitionism, she resumed the temporarily interrupted career of lecturer. It was necessary for her to resume lecturing because there were so many speaking with "more zeal than knowledge." The public was looking for those who spoke "on the side of wise reform, effected with order and reason, without injury to any and good to all, not on the side of mere change effected with disorder and varying only the forms of suffering and the persons of the sufferers." 30

Since Wright's name had become a political epithet in 1829-1830, it was well known; hence she was asked to speak when she returned to America. Even on the steamboat carrying her up the Mississippi from New

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30 Ibid. [Italics in original.]
Orleans to Cincinnati, a committee requested that she give a talk. Unprepared, she replied,

Whenever I have addressed the public it has been and only been under the deep and grave conviction of a public service to be rendered. . . . Desirous in all that I can to meet the wishes of my fellow passengers I will seek tomorrow in my baggage for a volume of my printed discourses and if such should be agreeable to you will read one after supper tomorrow. 31

Wright’s decision to enter the debate indicated at least a partial defection from her husband’s work. Her desire to continue her work, rather than to help him with the manuscript on general principles, was supported by the deterioration in American manners which had occurred since her first visit in 1817. Now she found, not only political invective, but also mob action, public disorder, and increasing acrimony which seemed to threaten the very existence of the nation.

Wright was distressed by the disorder the debate over abolition created in Cincinnati, and, returning to the theme of her first lectures, she entered the lists to combat the clerical influence which she saw behind the disturbance of the public mind. She stressed her peculiar qualification to join the debate. First, she had given to the problem "time, health, and fortune," 32 during her experiment at Nashoba. Second, she did not have any

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31 Frances Wright D’Arusmont to the Gentlemen of the Committee, on the Steamboat Mississippi, January 24, 1836, UC, Lafayette MSS.

32 Frances Wright D’Arusmont, Course of Popular Lectures, II (Philadelphia, 1836), viii.
special interest to protect, and could speak objectively. As she said,

True principles will never be developed, nor true remedies
applied by Politicians—that is, by men who, while attending
to public affairs, are looking to place or profit for them-
selves. My sex removes me from the one, my pursuits and
habits from the other. 33

She responded with alacrity to a situation that seemed to demand her
talents. It must have been clear, by 1835, that she was not a success, by
traditional standards, as a wife and mother. She had not been trained to
clean or cook, and apparently never did either well. She enjoyed her
daughter, but was never active in her education, because Phiquepal, the
pedagogical expert, took charge of Sylva. Phiquepal, also aging and ill, was
content to enjoy his daughter and the calm society of a home supported by
his wife's income. He continued to work on his treatise, but Wright could
not devote herself to applauding his work. Her only success as a worker had
been in lecturing, and to that she returned.

In the course of lectures Wright attacked abolitionists and the force
that she believed lay behind them—the banking power—that her one-time
acquaintance, Andrew Jackson, and his party had identified as the basic
source of evil in American society. Connecting the religiously motivated
abolitionists, many of whom were Whigs, with the Whig support of the Second
Bank of the United States, she asserted that public disorder was being fomented
to turn the public's mind from the real issue—"the Bank of the United States

33 Ibid., p. xxi
States' Chartered Monopolies." 34

Reviving her theme of the value of labor, she argued that the North should not condemn the Southern slaveowner until it offered a better example. When the North gave:

Equal rights to equal chances [;] To manhood and to womanhood free choice of occupation; credit to his or her industry and reward proportioned to his or her works . . . [then] we may say to the planter, "Come and see," and seeing, doubt not that he will go and do likewise. 35

Wright delivered the series of lectures on abolitionism first in Cincinnati, and then in Philadelphia, where an order from the mayor forced her to find a platform outside the city limits. A group of Philadelphia free-thinkers, loyal to her, supported the lectures, and she joined them to form a National Association for the Protection and Development of American Principles. At the same time, she approached Abner Kneeland, an old friend of the 1829–1830 campaign against clerical influence and now editor of the freethought Boston Investigator, to request that he allow her "to share the labors of its [Investigator's] Editor." 36 Seeing Philadelphia as the seat of the greatest evil, however, she returned in 1837 to issue her writings from the Investigator as a separate publication. The Association in Philadelphia agreed to support a monthly journal, A Manual of American Principles, which Wright

34 Ibid., p. 47.

35 Ibid., p. 83.

would edit.

Once again Wright justified her appearance in a public position as a
dutiful response to great public need.

Many are the struggles it has required to break, again and again,
through the quiet habits of a student's life—to lay aside personal
feeling and affections, in order to wrestle with public errors
for the averting of public dangers, and many also have been the
secret misgivings and heart faintings. 37

Having deserted her family, she could not admit that she worked for herself.
She had justified her first lecture tour by perceiving herself as a public
teacher; it was more difficult to see herself in this light now that she had a
child of her own whose education she was ignoring. She was approaching the
point at which only radical reform in public values could excuse the activities
that kept her away from her duties as wife and mother to her own family.

She edited the Manual until June 1, 1837, the issues consisting of
one sustained diatribe on the rise and influence of Whig principles. As she
analyzed the developments that had led to the present state of society, England
had succumbed to the Whigs after the "transaction" of 1888, 38 and England
had been spreading Whig influence over the civilized world since that time.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid. Wright said that the term "revolution" was a misnomer for
what had occurred in Britain in 1688. The people had not triumphed; rather,
one group of parasites, landed aristocrats, had made a bargain with a new
group, the bankers and capitalists.
The Manual, established to furnish a "Text Book of American Principles," warned American Democrats about how British Whiggery threatened to subdue America through the use of subtle and insidious influences. Unable to use force to conquer America after the failure to defeat the American Revolution, the Whigs now sought to use fraud and to persuade the American people that credit had real value and that the rights of capital were superior to all others. Extending credit and collecting interest, bankers had always defrauded workers, but industrialization had exacerbated this fraud by multiplying the powers of production without a corresponding change in commerce and government. Thus, as always,

The mass of human wealth, was, and is, so placed at the mercy of a class of men [who live by the labor of others], who, under plea of supplying the wants of a society, and keeping its affairs in order, have and do, consume, waste, embezzle, destroy, and put all in confusion. 39

Bankers, "capitalists," and speculators were the agents of Whiggery. Wright attacked those who would borrow from Great Britain to build roads, railroads, and canals, rather than securing resources within the community. She also attacked the immorality of an inheritance for which the heir had not labored. America had been blessed at its inception with an "independent agricultural population, [which] is of all the most inconsistent with the Whig reign." 40 As cities and manufactures flourished, America was


40 Ibid.
in danger of being seduced by British capital and the mania after improvement, speculation, and wealth gained without labor. Wright praised Andrew Jackson's veto of the recharter of the Second Bank of the United States and his issuance of the specie circular. She opposed the Whig party in America, partially, perhaps, because they attacked Jackson, but also because they opposed his fiscal policies, which seemed necessary for the salvation of America's moral character.

Wright, the non-contentious advocate of reform through gradual change, maintained that human happiness was the goal of political and social institutions, and that happiness consisted in the temperate virtue of Epicureanism. Labor for oneself and for the society was essential for happiness, and labor should be rewarded and protected. All should be allowed to labor, including women. She asserted that adequate resources existed to fulfill the needs of all moderate men, and maintained that a society which was not motivated by competitive pursuit of wealth could effect "the perfect according of all interests." American institutions seemed especially designed to protect human virtue and labor, for they gave no group a political advantage with which to enrich itself at the expense of others. America's institutions were calculated "not for parties, not for classes, not even for the existing mass of working people, but for the whole body politic; for the American

nation; nay, more, for Humankind herself."^42

Although Wright presented her arguments in the millenial style of

"The Spirit of the Prophet," she was guided by:

Not the cheating spirit of dream, nor of enthusiasm; but of that
foreseeing knowledge, which, from perusal of the past, study of
the present, and by reflection on first principles and righteous
institutions, can impart to the mental sight, perception of the
future.^43

Wright's style had become more flamboyant, but her ideas had not greatly
changed. She reaffirmed, in her theory of development, the importance of
labor and of the laborer; advocated improvement of women's position; asserted
the superiority of American institutions to effect human improvement; and
returned to the threat presented by the clergy, who inculcated a belief in
the rights of capital. These positions she had pursued since her experiment
at Nashoba and her earliest lectures on monopoly during the workingmen's
campaign of 1839-1830.

With no explanation, the Manual was discontinued after June 1, 1837.

Perhaps the panic of 1837 affected Wright's property and income so that she
could not afford the venture. Her next public appearance was in the fall of

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^42 Ibid. [Italics in original.]

^43 A Manual of American Principles, April 1, 1837. J. F. C. Harrison,
Quest for the New Moral World (New York, 1969), pp. 99-102, attributes the
millenial elements within Owenite thought and rhetoric to the necessity of
appealing to communities which had strong millenial tendencies due to the
"dislocation caused by social and political changes." The tone evolved "through
the logic of the need to communicate."
1838, in New York, when she spoke in support of the Democratic-Loco Foco candidates for Congress and of the Independent Treasury Plan which the Loco Focos advocated. She could not attract audiences for the lectures. The workingmen had turned to trade union activity, and the freethinkers were in rapid decline. She now recognized that,

I invited the attention of a steady and select audience imagining I was doing so to meet the wishes of a large portion of the more staid and enquiring friends of American Independence, human liberty and happiness, among the peoples of this city. . . . Mere curiosity [was] the only motive which drew them in the first place. 44

After the failure, Wright returned to France, Phiquepal remained in Cincinnati, while Sylva sailed with her mother. They returned to Paris, where they stayed with Madame de Bainville, a friend from the happier days of 1833-1834. In the midst of separation from her husband, Wright lost another friend, Monsieur Turpin, by death. Turpin, a noted biologist had taken care of Sylva during her parents' absences in the early 1830's, and Wright had become close to him. By the end of spring, 1840, Wright was disheartened and tired, ready, for the first time in five years to consider restricting herself to wifely duties. She wrote Phiquepal that "all these misfortunes make me apprehensive. May we soon meet again, cher ami, and after that no more separations: I give my

word. From henceforth my life shall be devoted to you and our child."45
Apparently she had promised such devotion previously. She would fulfill
her promise, given after a series of disappointments, no better this time
than before.

Wright expected to stay in Paris, attend to her daughter's needs,
and continue her studies. Phiquepal stayed in Cincinnati in 1840 to care for
their property, which needed overseeing if it was to continue to provide the
income which freed them for writing. He was also at work on a book "for
teaching Arithmetic [sic], Geometry, which he had been to work on [sic] for
20 years," to demonstrate basic principles of mathematics.46 Phiquepal
finally rejoined Wright in Paris in late 1840 and was plagued, almost
immediately, with a lawsuit for failure to educate one of the French pupils
who had accompanied him to the United States in 1824 under terms of a
contract he had made with the youth's guardian. A trial occurred in which,
although Phiquepal was charged with not teaching reading, writing, language,
and science, the major issue became the "public course pursued by his wife
in the United States."47 Phiquepal lost the suit, which damaged his reputa-
tion. Most of the blame for this public disgrace was attributed to his wife, who,

45Frances Wright D'Arusmont to William Phiquepal D'Arusmont,
May 7, 1840, quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 354.
46Joel Brown, "Memoir."
47Wright, Biography, p. 35.
meanwhile, "returned to America, ... and remained there one and a half years arranging property and money" to cover the damages the plaintiff had obtained in the suit. Phiquepal encouraged her to be the family's representative in Cincinnati in order that he might remain with Sylva to supervise her education.\(^48\)

During her stay in Cincinnati, Wright received notice that she had inherited property in Dundee, for which she departed, asking Phiquepal and Sylva to join her there. She was in Dundee by August, 1844, as the Biography attests, but only briefly, as she had to return to America immediately to conclude her business there.

Wright had such a reputation that her Dundee visit elicited the interview that resulted in her writing the Biography. As the young reporter whose questions encouraged her to write the article said, "Many and various surmises have ... run current relative to the life and character of that distinguished and eloquent lady; and, singular to relate, few, if any of these surmises have had any foundation in fact."\(^49\) Wright herself, feeling unusually alienated

\(^{48}\)"Petition for Divorce," Memphis Public Library, Lucille Webbs Bank Collection. This is a copy of the petition of Frances Wright D'Arusmont to secure divorce from William Phiquepal D'Arusmont, originally recorded in the Shelby County Court Records, 1852. Lucille Banks made a transcript of the petition as it was quoted in The Memphis Public Ledger of April 26, 1874, in an article on Sylva Camilla D'Arusmont Guthrie, who still owned her mother's land at Nashoba. The Shelby County record of the petition was lost or destroyed after 1874, and the only information about its contents is that cited by the Ledger.

\(^{49}\)Wright, Biography, p. 45.
from friends and family, stated in the preface that "I have always avoided speaking about myself; and, of course, no one knows from whence I originally came, nor any thing about me." As a consistent reformer, she had exposed herself to public censure and exclusion, removed herself "from the sympathy of society, for whose sake [she] consent[ed] to be crucified."

Wright had been reworking her political views, for she quickly took the opportunity offered by the Dundee encounter to publish the Biography and a companion volume of Notes and Political Letters in the same year. She said that she must be allowed to correct her earlier works, which had contained an "admixture of error . . . in counsel presented to the public." Especially in "A Few Days in Athens," she had been concerned with "cutting through the root of superstition," although fearful that there might not as yet be enough knowledge in the public's mind to make such a course safe. Her emphasis on the dangers of organized religion and clerical influence had not allowed for the necessary distinction between religion and theology. She still railed against the clergy and the theological system they taught, but the term religion, she now realized, simply designated the principle of any epoch which

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., p. 44.

52 Biography, Notes, and Political Letters of Frances Wright
D'Arusmont, II (New York, 1844), 4.

53 Ibid., p. 5.
"tied the slave to his master, the subject to his king, the citizen to his brother citizen, the patriot to liberty; and—even under the most erroneous system of government and defective form of civilization—all classes of society and all sects of opinion to the ark of public safety." She concluded, disavowing some of her earlier mistakes, "Woe be the hand which rashly seeks to sever... bonds [of society], loose as they are rotten, which still hold a diseased society together, without applying stronger and better ties." 54

In the Letters, the value Wright had previously awarded to equality and its corollary—political and social freedom—and to independence and its corollary—the freedom from ignorance and superstition—she now gave to union and cooperation. Somehow, new principles had to be found which could effect change without the conflict of political contests and public debate. Even in the United States, justice could not triumph, for out of political conflict "democracy moves not." A majority wins, but a majority of what? "The experienced? The intelligent? The virtuous? The industrious? No: A majority as of brute force counted by numbers, and of the male sex." 55

The force that might effect change peacefully lay in woman. Under the influence of her disintegrating relations with Phiquepal, Wright's estimation of woman's peculiar civilizing power had risen. For the first time, she

54 Ibid., pp. 13-14.

55 Ibid., p. 27.
accepted the dominant social view that women were the humane influence in
society, and coupled the recognition of that moral superiority with an explana-
tion for the past failure of true reform effected without conflict.

The first master means employed for the more certain enslavement
of the species [man] was the subjugation of woman in her body and soul.
She—the intellect, the soul, the providence of society—being made
the tool of that sex who represent the selfish instinct of animal life—
that which looks to individual conservation and selfish gratification—
was necessarily made subservient to the basest. 56

Wright secluded herself in 1844, either by her choice or by Phiguepal's.
She had wanted to begin lecturing again in England, but Phiguepal objected,
partially annoyed at her spending their money to publish the two volumes of
Biography, Notes, and Political Letters. Wright returned to Paris where
he and Sylva were living, and, at her husband's insistence, spent the next two
years living in a separate apartment. She charged later that her husband
forced this arrangement to retain his control over their daughter, as "she was
refused admittance to her daughter's rooms, . . . and could only communicate
with her child through" Phiguepal. 57 Her own interest in developing the means
by which change could be effected peacefully may, however, have led her simply
to have no interest in her family during this period.

From 1844 to 1846 Wright was preoccupied with her great work,
England, The Civilizer, which she published in 1848. The book, her longest

56 Ibid., p. 16.

57 "Petition for Divorce," Memphis Public Library, Lucille Webb
Banks Collection.
work, was signed "by a woman," and in it Wright revealed the perception she had of her work, her character, over the past thirty years. The progress of civilization and moral truth had

for its basis the two great instincts common to all animality. The one prompting to the propagation, the conservation, and the enjoyment of the individual. The other to the conservation, care and happiness of the species. Of these, the one hath its source in the physical passions of the male. The other in the maternal instinct and moral sympathies of the female.58

She had identified herself clearly as woman, whose interest lay in human, not self, improvement.

She also justified her public speaking career and its result, her seeming failure to give maternal care to her own child. She had lived in an epoch when the world needed a reformer who cared about the happiness of the species, and could not confine herself to the home. For when woman's activities were confined to the home, her instinct was too narrowly channelled, and she became "the stringent conservative sustainer of the established order of society."59

The historical developments she traced in the work, which she hoped would be "an opening page in the science of history," were confused, as she

59 *ibid.*, p. 13.
attempted to reconcile dialectical conflict, Comteian relativism, and Saint-Simonian technocracy with her earlier liberal political values. The result was a curious pastiche in which she posited that the motive principle of historical development was polarity, which was

The two-fold energy exerted by all brute bodies ... to hold its own, absolutely in place, and relatively in the sum of things. To preserve intact its own independent existence, and, simultaneously, to play its part in the great theatre of universal life.60

In society, man represented one pole, that of liberty and independence, and woman represented the other, that of union and order. Only when the two acted in harmony, not in contention or neutralization, could true progress occur.61

Change had occurred previously, when one of the basic elements of society, of its social, political, economic, or intellectual arrangements had changed. Change had occurred peacefully if the society's mind was properly prepared to accept change. Any change in one element of the society's basic institutions, nevertheless, necessitated change in the others, and could be violent, but not unpredictable, for "the revolutionary phenomenon is continuous; only, at such epochs [of violence] marked by accelerated velocity, with accompanying perturbation."62 All change until the present, however,

60bid., p. 19.
61bid., p. 22.
62bid., p. 147.
had been incomplete; it was only in light of the development of knowledge and
of woman's influence that the final harmony could be reached.

The changes that had occurred in the nineteenth century were a result
of the expansion of the human mind by science. In the two most notable
examples of political revolution, the revolutions of 1688 and 1789, political
change had occurred as a result of changes in the productive system, from
economies based on agriculture to ones using machinery and commerce. The
earlier revolutions released man's "locomotive and progressive" nature.
They released man from the unreal restraints of "the Feudal system--as
devised to change him from a wandering, destroying savage to a labouring
occupant of the soil--[which] drove a nail ... into his feet; and pinned him
down both in the individual and in his generations. 63

Now that industry and science had released man he was prepared for
a further advance in political and social arrangements. Money, the curse of
commercial society, must lose its power, and labor be rewarded under a
political system which could dispense with government and coercion and rely
solely on administration. 64

The new polarity created as a result would be one of union and order
balanced against liberty and independence. Men would be bound together by a
principle of justice which would secure for all "freedom, to be their own, to
earn their own, and to exchange their own in its surplus, value for value with

63 Ibid., p. 231.

64 Ibid., p. 62.
the positive well ascertained surplus of others." 65 Most importantly, woman, she herself, must be allowed to work independently, to enjoy the fruits of her own work, without subjection to male dominance. People must care for each other, but not as masters and dependents. The Nashoba ideal of 1828, of independent men and women living in harmony with no obligation but that of mutual affection, must be established for the whole society. A woman's independence should no longer deprive her of social affection and approval.

The identification with heroic figures which Wright often exhibited, is seen in her description of Cromwell. She presents his development as similar to the one she thought she had followed. He was:

Neglectful of collegiate learning, and prone to the study of men, and of the laws which regulate the res publicae of nations. Holding from nature strong passions, but also a will equal to their conquest. Familiar with the history . . . of his country; and equally with the past and living history and politics of Europe. Wonderfully sagacious in distinguishing the suitable and the possible in time, and equally so what threatened as what might be attainable in the future. 66

She had studied men and history, and had never advocated what seemed impossible of fulfillment at the present stage of development. She had recognized that the human mind must advance in line with technological advance, and it was to this she had devoted herself, first by educating slaves, then the general white public. Surely, she ought to be able to effect a

65 Ibid., p. 382.

66 Ibid., p. 159.
change as great as that wrought by Cromwell.

England might effect the next transition. If so, the directors, adminis-
trators of the new society, would be drawn from the creditors of society, these
who rendered service in excess of their rate of expenditure. Some of these
might be drawn from the presently rich, because, of course, they must be
partially compensated for the loss of their wealth. But the first generation
born under the new compact would not inherit the wealth or offices of their
parents. Her scheme, very much like compensated emancipation, could be
used to free the entire society. Finally, she herself would be a pledge of
faith to all classes. She would renounce her property, which already stood
"in the names of her family," and determine her place in the new society on
the basis of her work, just as those who entered the new system with no
credit must do. At the same time, her reasonableness should convince the
socially conservative that those without credit were "equally pledged to order
as to liberty."67

During the period of preparing her own manuscript, Wright was not
interested in Phiquepal's projects, and it is unclear whether she concerned
herself about Sylva and if she really cared that Phiquepal kept sole care of
their daughter. Sylva later described her mother as having "relapses"
during these years,68 and Wright's writings indicated that at the time the

67 Ibid., p. 469.
68 Sylva D'Arusmont Guthrie to Dr. Ruschenberger, March 13, 1894, NHIWI, New Harmony MSS.
work assumed a paramount importance for her she felt abused and emotionally destitute.

Philquepal broke off relations with his wife in April, 1847, and she returned to Nashoba in July, 1848, after putting her book into the hands of a London publisher. Wright returned to Nashoba to prepare herself to be a worker. She began to purchase farm implements and hired slaves, apparently gaining assurance of the accuracy of her prophecy of a revolution in social institutions from the revolutions of 1848. She also continued to work on a new manuscript to supplement the arguments presented in *England, The Civilizer*. Phiquepal, worried about the safety of the estate and financial security for his daughter and himself, returned to America in 1848, and tried to persuade Wright to sign a trust agreement giving him complete control of all her property.

Wright responded to Phiquepal's alienation angrily. She had failed to fulfill the socially defined duties of a wife. She had never learned to keep house, "could not sweep a room and do it correctly, could not pack a trunk properly," and she would not devote herself to her husband's work. But she had justified herself on the grounds that lecturing and writing were the only

69 Joel Brown, "Memoir."

70 Sylva D'Arusmont Guthrie to Dr. Ruschenberger, August 23, 1894, NHWI, New Harmony MSS.
skills she had been taught and that she performed work just as valuable for
the society by using them.

Her laments about her lack of "practicable education" probably hid a
real dislike for housework and offered an excuse for devoting herself to work
which she enjoyed and which brought her recognition and applause. She had
taught herself to be a lecturer. Joel Brown described how she worked at
learning to be effective on the podium:

She would write a few sentences, then get up and walk whispering to
her self, repeating what she had written [sic]--... F.W. was the
most entertaining controversialist I ever saw, every word left her
toung [sic] finished, no repeating after it was spoken.71

Wright could certainly have taught herself to be a housekeeper, had she wished
to learn. She would not do household chores, but her constant apologies
indicated her feeling that one must be productive.

When Phiquepal attempted to cut her off from her home and to
restrict her freedom to write, she decided that she could not resign her inde-
pendence. She believed that he was acquisitive and, moreover, had deprived
her of Sylva's affection. In July, 1851, at Raleigh, in Shelby County
Tennessee, she filed a suit for divorce on the grounds of "abandonment and
failure to provide for her support."

Phiquepal wrote to her after receiving notice of the proceedings that
she loved "grandeur and glory," and

could not conceive that my daughter and myself should be anything
but satellites revolving in your orbit, and ... since an epoch

71 Joel Brown, "Memoir."
closely corresponding with your Scotch inheritance, your simple and austere disposition seemed suddenly to expand into desires of luxury, and at the same time your character underwent a complete transformation. Frances Wright, the Champion of democracy became the warm defender of aristocracy: . . . Your last publication, . . . offers a most striking contrast to your earlier writing.72

Wright had changed, but not into a defender of aristocracy. Distressed by the failure of her career as a reformer to effect change in social organization, she sought to effect reform quickly by holding out to the wealthy a promise of being the leaders of the new society, at least in the present generation.

Failing in strength, unsupported by the public in her program, and unwilling to reconcile herself to Phiquepal's wishes, she had to reclaim her independence and make one last, great effort to secure that transformation in society with which she could justify the course of her life. So she demanded a control of her money which she had been willing to forego earlier.

After the Tennessee court granted her petition for divorce, Wright brought suit in Hamilton County, Ohio, for recovery of all, or at least half, of her property under the terms of French law covering separation, charging that it was only just since "he [Phiquepal] never . . . brought to the marriage, or since earned, a single dollar."73 The sum in contest was substantial, as,

72William Phiquepal D'Arusmont to Frances Wright D'Arusmont, n.d., quoted by Perkins and Wolfson, Frances Wright, p. 379.

73D'Arusmont v. D'Arusmont, Western Law Journal, VIII (October, 1850-October, 1851), 549.
even without Nashoba, the estate amounted to $80,000, consisting of "loans on bond and mortgage, and of real estate purchased in forclosing mort-
gages,"\textsuperscript{74} mostly in Hamilton County. Phiquepal defended his control of the property, denying that he had abandoned her or that the Tennessee decision could constitute evidence for that charge. Given the Tennessee grant of divorce, however, "she [his former wife] was not now a wife, so as to be entitled on principle or authority, to apply for alimony."\textsuperscript{75}

The judge did not rule on a settlement of the property, but influenced apparently by Wright's "aged and infirm" appearance, ordered payments to be made for her support. At fifty-six Wright was a broken woman. Her public career had led to none of the reforms that might have justified it. Her private career in marriage had ended in disaster compounded by the alienation of her daughter Sylva, who supported her father throughout the legal proceedings.

Wright's suffering ended quickly. In January, 1852, she fell and broke her hip. She did not recover, and was bedridden until December 13, 1852, when she died. There simply had been no reason to live any longer, and at fifty-seven the vigor and energy that had always upheld her under a heavy schedule of lecturing and writing, failed her. She had survived so long as she felt she had important work to do. At the end, she was deprived of the belief that her talents and energy were needed.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., pp. 548-549.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 553.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The method of psychological inquiry described in the first chapter has not provided the language for analysis of Wright's development and career, but it has guided the selection of data and allowed for the construction of a coherent explanation of her behavior and for the apparent contradictions between her behavior and rhetoric.

The portrait of Frances Wright that emerges from looking at her behavior and her indirect self-revelations is different from the image she consciously projected of herself and from the evaluation given by most contemporaries and historians. She did not make a simple decision in youth "to aid in all that she could in redressing the grievous wrongs which seemed to prevail in society,"¹ and then straightforwardly pursue that goal with a dedication solely to others' interests. She herself never examined her motivation more clearly, and her biographers have bypassed the issue. The adolescent girl may, indeed, have been moved by the empathic response she felt "on witnessing the painful labor of the aged among the English peasantry,"² but her unexplained capacity for empathy cannot be attributed solely to her being "too much

¹Wright, Biography, p. 9.
²Ibid.
the product of her age and generation to submit easily . . . the inconsistencies and absurdities of the world about her." Nor is it adequate to treat her motivation as an inheritance of "the liberal . . . and independent spirit" of her father, transmitted in some mysterious way to his daughter who was three when he died.

Wright's career reveals a greater complexity than she or her biographers have been willing to admit. She stressed her interest in helping others, but her own financial interests never suffered. She talked about helping the poor, but the evidence indicates that even on her last lecture tour, she hoped to appeal to respectable, well-bred members of the social class into which she had been born. She protayed herself as a recluse and student, who appeared in public "only, but always, when impelled by the hope of achieving any real good to the cause of human liberty and improvement." But the evidence indicates that once she discovered her ability as a public speaker, she was absent from the platform only when she could not find an audience or during the brief periods when she was trying to please her husband. Wright's daughter, Sylva, with some anger at her mother for not helping her "ever more blind father to write out his idea," said that her mother had always had a penchant for the stage, and one suspects that if Altorf had been successful in 1817,

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3 Perkins and Wolfson, *Frances Wright*, p. 8.

4 Waterman, *Frances Wright*, p. 16.


6 Sylva Camilla Guthrie to Dr. Ruschenberger, August 23, 1894, NHWI, New Harmony MSS.
Wright might eventually have justified herself for acting on "a well managed stage that could do more for progress in the true, the beautiful, and the good, than any pulpit."  

Wright was timid about presenting her political analysis for public evaluation, but she avoided admitting her fears and doubts about her intellectual capacity in clever ways. She may have learned some science during her stays at New Harmony or during the one period in her adult life devoted to study, the domestic years from 1831 to 1835, but she had not studied science before her first visit to the United States. She had not, as she claimed in her Biography, "applied herself... to various branches of science." Besides overstating or overestimating the length of her training, she also presented her own work as incomplete or partial. She was always promising to write a finished, complete treatise, but she always excused herself for not doing so on the ground that she had too many obligations and too little time to work out her thoughts completely. Even in England, The Civilizer, her last work and the one to which she devoted the most time, she begged indulgence and promised a more thorough sequel.  

Bertram Wyatt-Brown has recently offered an intelligent reminder that any historian should look at the behavior of his subject as carefully as he studies the rhetoric. Making a reappraisal of William Lloyd Garrison,

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7Amos Gilbert, Memoir of Frances Wright, The Pioneer Woman in the Cause of Human Rights (Cincinnati, 1855), p. 45.  

8Wright, Biography, p. 8.
Wyatt-Brown asserts that it is more reasonable to consider the "moderation by which the antislavery movement preserved a unity of agitational method," than to stress Garrison's exclusiveness and divisiveness. In evaluating Garrison's impact, it is wise to remember that "Garrison's opposition to slavery was religious, not political; he required only a theoretical refusal to obey the law." 9 Garrison's language may have been extreme, but his actions and consistent pacifism were not. It was the subject "to which he applied his rhetoric" that made him seem fanatical." 10

Apart from the problem of reconciling a public person's rhetoric with his behavior, which, as Wyatt-Brown had demonstrated, may be solved simply by looking at the evidence with greater sensibility, there remains the problem, in Wright's case, of finding some coherence in her principles and political commitments. The diversity of her activities and associates has obscured the unity of her own principles. The groups with which she was involved did not all have complementary and reconcilable premises and goals, and certainly did not recognize common points of interest. The seemingly erratic nature of her activities, however, is a result of using a traditional standard of consistency, of seeking order in the logical structure of ideas and interests—usually defined as class interests, or, recently, status interests. Wright's career does not have coherence if judged by these schemes and has been described recently as

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10 Ibid., p. 20.
"brilliant and erratic, . . . [She] appear[ed] to lose interest in problems which did not readily yield to the panaceas she devised."[11]

The coherence of Wright's career, which cannot be dismissed as "erratic," is personal; her actions and principles were unified if one recognizes the personal preoccupations (some of which were general for other women of her class and culture) that linked her political interests and reconciled her political principles with her private actions.

It is a truth which all historians accept, but rarely apply, that adult character is formed in the critical childhood and adolescent years. Wright's personality was well defined by the time she was eighteen, and probably even before she left her aunt's house for the greater freedom of Glasgow. Orphaned at three, she never recovered from the fear of desertion and her need to win approval, so that she demanded unquestioning, and unreasonable, loyalty and support for all that she did. At the same time, since she could not find the affection she needed within the limits of her family or culture, she treasured her sense of independence and singularity, built on the solitude and loneliness of an unhappy childhood and enhance by her physical and mental energy.

The failure of the society to provide a possibility for meaningful work, coupled with the lack, in Wright's case, of a family in which the upper middle-class wife might be seen as an important figure, led her to seek work which would win her recognition, and to value labor. Her physical appearance, her

height (five feet, ten inches), also made marriage an unlikely hope for her. Her sex and class, which set severe limits on the work that could be considered acceptable for her, led her to chafe at the social restrictions placed on women, and, ultimately, to challenge some of the barriers.

Wright's energies were channelled into activities which required intellectual training and which brought her into intellectual circles. She had to educate herself, and she displayed the insecurity of an auto-didact. A plodding and conscientious student, she, nevertheless, gained recognition with her first efforts, and she valued education as does one for whom it has come as a revelation. She saw education as both her liberation and her downfall, as it made her unfit to perform domestic duties.

Finally, Wright's need for companionship and approval would lead her to commit herself to causes whose leaders showed an interest in her and offered her affection and a position within some community. She had discovered Epicureanism on her own, as a cure for her adolescent passions and as a result of her residence in Glasgow, where utilitarianism had brought a renewed interest in Epicurus among her philosopher acquaintances. Her meeting with Bentham, however, enlarged her quietistic, personal definition of "happiness" into a critique of society, which had the duty to promote and to protect happiness for the mass of men. It is only in light of Wright's personal need that her decision to marry, at the same time, that she still rejected the duties considered normal for a wife, seems reasonable.
The coherence that exists in Wright's career, the logical development of her psychological needs within a particular social environment, elucidates, somewhat, the differences between, and selective attraction of, the various reform positions she held. Analysis of the attitudes of one person can offer only hints about the concerns of groups that supported or opposed her, but these insights may be useful in future analysis of the responses of various groups to particular reform positions during the early nineteenth century.

The first, and simplest, political position Wright supported in her public career was republicanism, which she defined as political freedom and voting rights for male adults. When she left Britain for America in 1817, she had some vague idea that a more liberal legal system would guarantee equality and impose fewer restrictions on women's activities. She praised the institution of marriage as it existed in America, and was critical only of slavery, which violated political freedom. She herself enjoyed much greater freedom in America than she had in Britain, but she saw tendencies in the frivolous education given to women in America and the consequent dependence that such an education encouraged, which disturbed her. In 1818, however, she saw no tension between Americans' optimistic assessment of their institutions and her desire for personal independence.

After the failure of the liberal republicans in France in 1824 and of Lafayette to provide her the home she wanted, she sought independent activity and engaged in the one reform that seemed to be necessitated by her commitment to political freedom—the abolition of slavery. She was supported in the
plan by Lafayette, Jefferson, and Madison, all of whom agreed that slavery was
the sole blemish on America's virtue.

At the very moment she conceived of Nashoba, however, Wright was
being drawn away from her simple republicanism by two forces. The first was
the discovery of new associates at New Harmony; the second was the problem of
explaining to herself why her Southern friends did not simply emancipate their
slaves if they were persuaded of the institution's evils. Unable to believe ill of
a man like Jefferson, she attributed the planters' failure to act justly to the in-
efficiency of slave production, which did not make large enough profits to colo-
nize the slaves and leave the planter with his capital intact. The idea of coop-
erative production, offered by a group that would aid her, led her to the solu-
tion of making slave production profitable enough to allow compensated emancipa-
tion.

Wright's naive faith in her ability to effect a transformation in Southern
society, predicated as it was on a belief that Southerners themselves desired
to reform the society, led to disappointment. Desiring to be approved, unable
to break completely with Lafayette and his friends, she did not attribute her
failure to the planters' recalcitrance, but enlarged her conception of freedom
and equality and criticized America's general failure, which was only more ap-
parent in the South, to realize the country's stated goals.

The years 1827-1828 were the most satisfying and productive of Wright's
career. She enjoyed work, even in an environment that horrified a European
urbanite like Frances Trollope. The communitarian scheme that she finally
announced had a personal attraction. It created an enlarged family, but a family based on voluntary giving of affection, not maintained by the legal restriction and social conventions that hedged the normal family. As a model for the larger society, it implied that political freedom was illusory if individuals were restrained by social conventions and obligations (such as those of husband and wife to each other). The community also gave all individuals the right and duty to labor, to develop "all that is good and great in man."\textsuperscript{12}

The critique of American society that Wright presented in the "Explanatory Notes on Nashoba," the assertion that political freedom was only half of what man needed if he was to have equality and, thereby, liberty, derived from her experience at Nashoba. She recognized that, as she discovered the pleasure of labor and work, productive activities were being removed from the home and family, leaving the mother alone with her children while the husband engaged both in work and in a competition for income outside the home. Her concern was not so much with individualist competitiveness as with the loss of labor in the home; she was not so much disturbed with anti-social individualism as with the fact that the unit for competition was the family. People who worked were men, and a woman was subsumed, so far as work was expected, under her husband. In 1819 Wright had seen America as better off than England, where "the retrograde movement of the national morals\textsuperscript{12} was clearly marked by the

\textsuperscript{12}Wright, \textit{Biography}, p. 23.
shackles now being forged for the rising generation of women."

She had concluded, as early as 1819, that

Of the two extremes — the woman as worker or dependent — it is better to see a woman, as in Scotland, bent over the glebe, mingling the sweat of her brow with that of her churlish husband or more churlish son, than to see her gradually sinking into the childish dependence of a Spanish donna.\(^{13}\)

By 1827 the family structure was being tightened in America, and the restrictions that confined women's activities to the home were increasing. The impetus for Wright's communitarianism was a recognition that a conjugal family organization in a society with specialized work carried on outside the home was turning the wife into a dependent.

When Nashoba failed to win attention or converts and Wright turned to lecturing to educate the public, her primary interest was no longer Southern slavery, but the enslavement of women in dependence and of laborers to specialized production. The education system which she and Robert Dale Owen proposed—of public supported boarding schools in which all children would be taught manual and intellectual skills—was designed to halt the trend toward specialization in training and social functions, not to limit the use of machines.

Wright's criticisms of industrial society and her brief defense of the Eastern mechanics, were motivated by concerns different from those which gave impetus to other early critics of industrialization. Even the similarity between

\(^{13}\) Wright, Views, pp. 219-220.
her positions and those of her closest associates, the Owens, was not indicative of basic agreement on the primary defects of society.

Like Robert Owen, Wright had, by 1828, come to view marriage and the conjugal family as restricting institutions, which encouraged competitiveness and placed unnatural restraints on human desire. J.F.C. Harrison concludes that Owen's concern with women's rights indicated his commitment to eighteenth-century principles of liberty and was clearly related to Owen's concern about the rise of competition, which he attributed to the divisive influence of the private family. In fact, Owen's concern about women's position was derived from his criticism of the family, was a corollary of his more basic interest in the reduction of competition. He argued that communal responsibility for domestic tasks would have the advantage of freeing women, for

By the domestic arrangements proposed, one female will with great ease and comfort perform as much as twenty menial servants can do at present; and, instead of being the drudge and slave which the wife of a working man with a family has hitherto been, she will be engaged only in healthy and cleanly employments, and possess sufficient leisure for mental improvement and the rational enjoyment of life.\(^\text{14}\)

But Owen's primary concern was to break down the family and the competition it encouraged, so that machines might serve their obvious purpose for men—to free them from labor rather than increasing their exertion. He was concerned primarily with eradicating the evil effects industrialization had had on the working class.

Although Wright's 1828 program sounded very similar to Owen's, she was more worried about the problem of those who were neither trained for nor offered work than about those who were degraded by having to work too much. In the "Explanatory Notes on Nashoba," she lamented that those at the highest stage of moral development, she and her friends, lacked the "physical strength and the practical skill necessary to render their labor equivalent for that which the community extends to support them." The goal of the community, which would have to be formed primarily of persons with independent incomes, would be to "train their children to be physically independent of money; and... in the next generation to dispense altogether with an artificial aid which their weakness and want of skill alone render necessary to them."

Wright's failure to enlist the support of the workingmen for her plan of education, with its implications of a classless society, may have been due, as Hugins concludes, to a basic difference in goals—the workingmen desiring a public education system in order to recover equality of opportunity in the competitive struggle for wealth. Certainly, the loss of their children, often essential contributors to the family's economic well-being, may have disturbed the workingmen. The critical difference in perception, however, may have been Wright's belief that education should train boys and girls to labor, physically as well as intellectually, while, to others, the greatest promise of machine pro-

15 New Harmony Gazette, March 26, 1828.
duction was to spare men from the necessity to labor.

That Wright focused her wrath on the clergy in 1828 indicated that her concern was not primarily with workmen. She entered the fray in Cincinnati because of the hold religious influences had on women and women's freedom to develop their minds and to expand their activities. Even in 1828, she felt constrained to attack the clergy on the issue of republicanism. She denounced the hold of clerical influence on women's beliefs, and through them on the values of husbands and sons, an influence which contained a threat to the republican principle of separation of church and state. Her fear, however, was for the increasing dependence of women.

When she found an audience among urban mechanics, she did not stress economic issues, except for her belated connection of anti-clericalism with an anti-bank, anti-monopoly position. For Wright, whatever the case may have been for her audience, the evil that banks did was not to give some an unfair advantage over others, but to hold out a promise and a model of great wealth to be won without honest labor. She was not worried so much about immoral enrichment of a few as about the general decline in the status of the laborer and of labor.

After Wright's failure to persuade her audience to use its political power to effect the change she sought in the educational system, she returned to France, which, in the early 1830's, was alive with republican promise and socialist theories. When she next spoke publicly, in 1835, she had already formulated some of the theory of history which appeared in the Manual in 1837; at
least, she connected abolitionist schemes with the Whig support of banking and the influence of English capital in America. But she adopted the prevailing political rhetoric and limited her speeches to support of the Jacksonian attack on banks.

It was not until she failed to attract an audience in 1838 that she came to believe that reform in the United States was impossible and gave up the attempt to clothe her theories in the terms of contemporary political debate. She then presented her social critique of America and revived the direct complaints about women's position that she had presented fifteen years earlier in publicizing Nashoba.

Wright had been influenced, but only on certain points, by 1844, by Saint-Simon and Comte, whom she may have known. She drew her sense of women's primary importance from the Parisian socialist milieu, where "the Saint-Simonians, Fourier, and Auguste Comte had made a momentous discovery. They had come to realize that women, one half of humanity, with their unique capacity for feeling, tenderness and passion, had been suppressed for centuries . . . For the Saint-Simonians and Fourier the emancipation of women became the symbol of the liberation of bodily desires."

Yet, if Wright welcomed, and used, this recognition of women's superiority, she was not willing to accept some of its implications or the specific application proposed by Comte. The ideal society which would be formed by freeing men

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from labor and turning human energies to emotional and intellectual development, would dispense with any activity "but the perfection of our special means for expressing affection, \( \sqrt{\text{and}} \) shall cultivate no other science but the gaie science naively preferred by our chivalrous ancestors."\(^{17}\) Women, in Comte's view, had great importance as the origin and conservator of man's capacity to love and to feel, but they were not to have an independent existence. Rather, as devoted wives, they would elevate their husbands and children.

Wright argued, in *England, the Civilizer*, that transitions to the final stage of harmony would come only when "the principles of morals \( \sqrt{\text{were taken}} \) from under the cover of the supremacy of the male sex," but the ensuing society would see neither a freedom from labor nor a restriction on women's activities. Indeed, the advantages owed by the society to the individual, the advantages to be secured by the ideal organization of society were:

1. Employment at all times, according to his or her choice and capacity, and the public necessities....

7. Every privilege and enjoyment, ... proportioned to his or her rate of credit \( \sqrt{\text{earnings}} \), and consequent standing in society.\(^{18}\)

In her use of a dialectic, the concept of polarity, Wright also borrowed selectively, taking the method and even some stages from Comte and Saint-Simon, but she described the final stage of historical development in terms of


\(^{19}\)*Ibid.*, p. 455.
her earlier values. The writings of 1844-1846 indicate that she had accepted the importance of social order, of periods which contained a unity based on the congruence of the level of knowledge, moral values, and economic organization—periods in which a prevailing "religious" system tied men to each other in a perception of some common interest. These ties were broken by advances in knowledge, which led to changes in economic and political organization; the transition from one stage to another was necessary and followed an order, but it could also be chaotic and destructive. Wright believed that the educator of the public mind had a responsibility to prepare men for change, so as to avoid violence and destruction, which were not necessary components of change. Like Comte, she came, by 1844, to see the dialectic as a process of the human mind, a conflict between states of knowledge. She thus avoided the social implications of a Marxist dialectic, which located the conflict in society, and premised change in the development "of historical consciousness and class action."  

Wright could not accept either violent revolution or class action as the mode for change. Her belief in republicanism and in education, focused her attention on the development of knowledge and the use of persuasion to effect change. Moreover, she could not distinguish and define that group with which her interests lay, women, as a class. Women might have a common interest in freedom and the right to labor, but they could not effect a revolution against the male half of humanity. Thus, Wright was forced into the position of advocating

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an increase in knowledge as the only mode by which women might assume a place as free individuals and workers within society.

The issues that are raised by Wright's perception of the problems of women in early nineteenth-century industrial society indicate that the attitude towards work and workers, and woman's role as producer, might be useful focuses for research into some reform efforts and social conflicts of the period. Wright was unwilling to recognize that, in terms of access to work and control of economic resources, women's interests may have been taking on the character of class interests in the early nineteenth century; but the possibility raises new questions about the motivation, concerns, and goals of the early women's movement. In this light, one of the positions adopted at Seneca Falls in 1848 takes on a new importance. As the women asserted:

He [the male sex] has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He [the male sex] closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. ... He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own power, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

To which Frances Wright, with all her anti-clericalism, would have said,

"Amen."

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