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report it showed not only an inability to grasp the cause of the difficulty it had undertaken to investigate, but also its inability to suggest a remedy for it. The experience of New York and the proceedings of the Eastern roads ought apparently to have thrown some light on the course which events were inevitably taking. Apparently, however, they did

not. It was a lesson lost. But the subject is one possessing an unusual interest for the people, not only of Chicago and the West, but of the whole country. The views about to be advanced upon it in these pages will to most appear paradoxical in the extreme, nor can they be properly developed in the space allotted to the present article.

*Charles Francis Adams, Jr.*

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### A SHAKER VILLAGE.

It was our fortune to spend six weeks of last summer in the neighborhood of a community of the people called Shakers — who are chiefly known to the world-outside by their apple-sauce, by their garden seeds so punctual in coming up when planted, by their brooms so well made that they sweep clean long after the ordinary new broom of proverb has retired upon its reputation, by the quaintness of their dress, and by the fame of their religious dances. It is well to have one's name such a synonym for honesty that anything called by it may be bought and sold with perfect confidence, and it is surely no harm to be noted for dressing out of the present fashion, or for dancing before the Lord. But when our summer had come to an end, and we had learned to know the Shakers for so many other qualities, we grew almost to resent their superficial renown among men. We saw in them a sect simple, sincere, and fervently persuaded of the truth of their doctrine, striving for the realization of a heavenly ideal upon earth; and amidst the hard and often sordid commonplace of our ordinary country life, their practice of the austerities to which men and women have devoted themselves in storied times and picturesque lands clothed these Yankee Shakers in something of the pathetic interest which always clings to our thoughts of monks and nuns.

Their doctrine has been so often ex-

plained that I need not dwell upon it here, but the more curious reader may turn to the volumes of *The Atlantic Monthly* of 1867 for an authoritative statement of all its points in the autobiography of Elder Evans of Mt. Lebanon. Mainly, their faith is their life; a life of charity, of labor, of celibacy, which they call the angelic life. Theologically, it can be most succinctly presented in their formula, Christ Jesus and Christ Ann, their belief being that the order of special prophecy was completed by the inspiration of Mother Ann Lee, the wife of the English blacksmith, Stanley. She is their second Christ; their divine mother, whom some of their hymns invoke; and for whom they cherish a filial love. The families of Shirley and Harvard, Massachusetts, were formed in her time, near the close of the last century; at the latter place they show the room in which she lived, and whence she was once dragged by the foolish mob which helps to found every new religion.

In regard to other points their minds vary. Generally they do not believe in the miraculous birth or divinity of Christ; he was a divinely good and perfect man, and any of us may become divine by being godlike. Generally, also, I should say that they reject the Puritanic ideas of future rewards and punishments, and accept something like the Swedenborgian notion of the life hereafter. They

are all spiritualists, recognizing a succession of inspirations from the earliest times down to our own, when they claim to have been the first spiritual mediums. Five or six years before the spirits who have since animated so many table-legs, planchettes, phantom shapes, and what not began to knock at Rochester, the Shaker families in New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, and elsewhere were in full communion with the other world, and they were warned of the impending invasion of the world's parlor and dining-room sets. They feel by no means honored, however, by all the results. But they believe that the intercourse between the worlds can be rescued from the evil influences which have perverted it, and they have signs, they say, of an early renewal of the manifestations among themselves. In some ways these have in fact never ceased. Many of the Shaker hymns, words and music, are directly inspirational, coming to this brother or that sister without regard to his or her special genius; they are sung and written down, and are then brought into general use. The poetry is like that which the other world usually furnishes through its agents in this, — hardly up to our literary standard; but the music has always something strangely wild, sweet, and naïve.

The Shakers claim to be the purest and most Christian church, proceeding in a straight succession from the church which Christ's life of charity and celibacy established on earth; whereas, all the other churches are sprung from the first Gentile churches, to whose weakness and willfulness certain regrettable things, as slavery, war, private property, and marriage, were permitted. Acknowledging a measure of inspiration in all religions, they also recognize a kindred attraction to the angelic life in the celibate orders of every faith: the Roman vestals, the Peruvian virgins of the sun, and the Buddhist *bonzes*, as well as the monks and nuns of the Catholic Church. They complain that they have not been understood by such alien writers as have treated of them, and have represented them as chiefly useful in furnishing homes for

helpless and destitute people of all ages and sexes. In the words of Elder Fraser, of Shirley, the Shakers claim that their system is "based on the fact that each man has in himself a higher and a lower life," and that Shakerism "is a manifestation of the higher to the exclusion of the lower life. Its object is to gather into one fold all who have risen above their natural propensities," and they think with Paul that though those who marry do well, yet those who do not marry do better. Their preaching and teaching is largely to this effect; and yet I do not find it quite strange that friends from the world-outside regard rather the spectacle of the Shakers' peaceful life, and think mostly of their quiet homes as refuges for those disabled against fate, the poor, the bruised, the hopeless; after all, Christ himself is but this. As I recall their plain, quaint village at Shirley, a sense of its exceeding peace fills me; I see its long, straight street, with the severely simple edifices on either hand; the gardens up-hill on one side and down-hill on the other; its fragrant orchards and its levels of cloverly meadow-land stretching away to buckwheat fields, at the borders of whose milky bloom the bee paused, puzzled which sweet to choose; and it seems to me that one whom the world could flatter no more, one broken in hope, or health, or fortune, could not do better than come hither and meekly ask to be taken into that quiet fold, and kept forever from his sorrows and himself. But — such is the hardness of the natural heart — I cannot think of one's being a Shaker on any other terms, except, of course, a sincere conviction.

The first time that we saw the Shaker worship was on the occasion of Sister Julia's funeral, to which we were asked the day after her death. It was a hot afternoon at the end of July, and when we drove out of the woods, we were glad of the ash and maple trees that shade the village street in nearly its whole length. There were once three families at Shirley, but the South Family, so-called, has been absorbed by the Church Family, and its dwellings, barns, and

shops are occupied by tenants and work-people of the community. The village is built on each side of the road, under the flank of a long ridge, and the land still falls, from the buildings on the eastern side, into a broad, beautiful valley (where between its sycamores the Nashua runs unseen) with gardens, orchards, patches of corn and potatoes, green meadows, and soft clumps of pine woods; beyond rise the fertile hills in a fold of which the village of the Harvard Shakers lies hid from their brethren at Shirley.

Between the South Family and the Church Family were two wayside monuments that always won my admiration and homage. One was a vast apple-tree, whose trunk was some three feet through, and whose towering top was heavy, even in an off-year for apples, with a mass of young fruit; apparently this veteran, after supplying cider and "sass" for at least a century, was resolute to continue its benefactions for another hundred years to come. The other reverend monument on this road was the horse-trough: not one of the perishable horse-troughs that our civilization, conscious of its own evanescence, scoops from a log, and leaves to soak and rot year by year, but a great, generous bowl, four feet across, and nearly as many deep, which some forgotten Shaker brother had patiently hollowed out of a mass of granite. A spring, led in pipes from the hill-side, fills it to the brim, with a continual soft bubble in the centre and silent drip of the moisture over the edges to keep fresh the cool, sober green with which in many passing years it has painted the gray stone. Our horse was hired from the Shakers, and was, if one may say it without disrespect, so bigoted a brother himself that he could scarcely be got to drink any water at our farm, but kept his thirst for this fount, which, even when he was not thirsty, he would fondly stop to kiss and loll his great head over. The brother to whom he belonged by courtesy (for of course he was owned in common, like everything else Shaker) had let him form the habit of snatching birch leaves and bushy tops of all sorts along

the woodland roads, and we learned to indulge and even cherish this eccentricity. He was called Skip; apparently because he never skipped.

We stopped at the office of the Church Family, which is a large brick house, scrupulously plain, like all the rest, and appointed for the transaction of business and the entertainment of visitors. Here three sisters and one brother are in charge, and here are chambers for visitors staying overnight. The Shakers do not keep a public-house, and are far from inviting custom, but their theory of Christianity forbids them to turn any one unhoused or unfed from their doors; the rich pay a moderate charge, and the poor nothing — as that large and flourishing order of fellow-citizens, the tramps, very well know. These overripe fruits of our labor system lurk about in the woods and by-ways, and turn up at the Shakers' doors after dark, where they are secure of being fed and sheltered in the little dormitory set apart for them. "And some of them," said Elder Fraser, "really look as if the pit had vomited them up."

In the parlor of the office, we found our friends the office-sisters, and a number of Shakers and Shakeresses from Harvard, including two of the Harvard elders, who had come to the funeral, and who presently repaired to the plain, white-painted, hip-roofed church-building. Besides ourselves there were but few of the world-outside there, and these few were nearly all tenants from the South Family farm, so that the whole ceremony was unrestricted by reference to spectators, though I am bound to add that no Shaker ceremony that I have seen was embarrassed by the world's observation, however great the attendance of lookers-on. We were separated, the men from the women, as were the brethren and sisters, who sat facing each other on rows of long settees opposite the spectators. The sisters came in wearing their stiff gauze caps; the brothers with their broad straw-hats, which they took off and hung up on the wooden pegs set round the whole room.

There was silence for a little while,

in which the Shakers took from their pockets and laid across their knees white handkerchiefs as great and thick as napkins, and then placed their hands palm down on the handkerchiefs, and waited till some one began to sing, when they all joined in the hymn. There was none of their characteristic dancing — or marching, rather — that day, but as they sang they all softly beat time with their hands upon their knees, and they sang with a fervent rapture that the self-possessed worship of our world's congregations no longer knows. Their hymns were now wild and sad, and now jubilant, but the music was always strong and sweet, as it came from lips on which it had been breathed by angelic inspiration. There seemed to be no leader, but after each silence some brother or sister began to sing, and the rest followed, except in one case, when it was announced that the hymn was Sister Julia's favorite and would be sung in compliance with her request. There was no prayer, or any set discourse, but the elders and eldresses, and many others spoke in commemoration of Sister Julia's duteous and faithful life, and in expression of their love for her. Their voices trembled, and the younger sisters, who had been most about her at the last, freely gave way to their tears. Each one who spoke had some special tribute to pay to her faithfulness, or some tender little testimony to bear to her goodness of heart; several read verses which they had written in memory of her, and amongst these was the elder of the Church Family, who conducted the ceremonies. What was most observable in it all was the familiar character; it was as if these were brothers and sisters by the ties of nature, who spoke of the dead. The faces of nearly all but our old friend Elder Fraser were strange to us, but they were none the less interesting, from the many-wrinkled front of the nonagenarian who has spent half his century in Shirley, to the dimpled visage of the small boy or girl last adopted into

the family. They were peaceful faces, the older ones with the stamp of a strong discipline which sustained while it subdued. The women were in far the greater number, as they are in the world's assemblies in this quarter, and a good half were children or young girls who had not come to close question with themselves, and of whom it could not yet be finally affirmed that they were Shakeresses. The history which was not written could not be read, but it was not easy to believe of those who had passed their prime that they had devoted themselves to their ideal without regrets or misgivings, nor was it true of any. "We are women," one of them afterwards said, "and we have had our thoughts of homes and children of our own."

During our six weeks' stay near them we saw our Shaker friends nearly every day. Some of their fruit was now coming into season, and we were asked down to the village to see the first harvest of their new Wachuset blackberry, a recent discovery by Brother Leander, who noticed a vine one day by the wayside on which the berries hung ripe, while those on neighboring bushes were yet two weeks from their maturity. He observed also that the cane was almost free from thorns; he marked the vine, and when the leaves fell, transplanted it. In the garden we found a dozen brothers and sisters busy on either side of the rows of bushes which bowed beneath their weight of ripe berries in those first days of August.

In the afternoon we found the office-sisters in the basement of their dwelling, putting up the berries in boxes, which they did with Shaker scrupulosity as to ripeness and justness of measure. The Shakers are very diligent people, and yet seem always to have any desired leisure, as one may notice in large, old-fashioned families where people do their own work. The industries at Shirley are broom-making (at which the minister, Elder John Whiteley,<sup>1</sup> and several of the brothers work), raising blackberries,

<sup>1</sup> Elder Whiteley is an Englishman, who before coming to this country had heard the Shakers mentioned by Robert Owen as successful communists,

and shortly after his arrival, in 1843, heard the scrupulous honesty of the sect spoken of. He tried to learn something about their belief at this time, but

drying sweet corn, and making apple-sauce and jellies. In former times, before the wickedness of fermented drinks was clearly established, one brother made wine from the bacchanal grape as well as the self-righteous elderberry, and some bottles of his vintage yet linger in the office-cellar. But no wine has been made for many years, now; for the Shakers are very strictly abstemious. Yet if a brother's natural man insist upon a draught now and then, they consider all the circumstances, and do not forbid, while they deplore. A similar tolerance they use toward the Virginian weed, and I have seen a snuffing as well as a chewing brother. They generally avoid also tea and coffee, shortened biscuit, doughnuts, and the whole unwholesome line of country cookery, while they accept and practice the new gospel of oat-meal porridge and brown-bread gems in its fullness. Many of the younger people are averse from meat, following the example and precept of our good Elder Fraser, who for the last thirty-five years has kept his tough Scotch bloom fresh upon a diet that involves harm to no living creature, and at seventy looks as ruddy as few Americans at any time of life.

But after this testimony to their healthful regimen, shall I confess that the Shakers did not seem to me especially healthful-looking? They do not look so fresh nor so strong as the same number of well-to-do city people; and they are not, as a community, exempt in notable degree from the ills we are all heir to. Is it possibly true that our climate is healthful only in proportion as it is shut out by brick walls and plate-glass, and battened down under cobble and flag stones; that the less fresh air we have

it was not till five years later that he succeeded. Then a fellow-workman (he was a wool-sorter by trade) lent him some of the doctrinal books of the Shakers, which he read aloud with his wife in the winter evenings. They both "gathered faith" in the Shaker life, and shortly after they made the acquaintance of some Shakers visiting friends in Andover, where Elder Whiteley lived, and by their invitation returned with them to Shirley. Hither, two months later, they came again, bringing their children, and lived together nearly four years in the South Family. At the end of that time Elder Whiteley was asked to take charge of the temporal

the better, and that Nature here is at best only a step-mother to our race? But perhaps it is too much to expect a single generation, gathered from the common stock of an unwisely-feeding ancestry, to show the good effects of a more reasonable regimen. The Shakers labor under the disadvantage of not being able to transmit a cumulative force of good example in their descendants; they must always be dealing, even in their own body, with the sons of pie and the daughters of doughnut; and Elder Fraser, who one Sunday spoke outright against these abominations, addressing the strangers present, will have to preach long and often the better culinary faith, which the Shakers received from the spirits (as they claim), before he can reach the stomachs, at once poor and proud, of the dyspeptical world-outside.

We went regularly to the Shaker meeting, which in summer is held every Sunday in the church-building I have mentioned; in winter the meetings are privately held in the large room kept for that purpose in every Shaker dwelling, and used throughout the year for family gatherings, social and devotional. The seats for spectators in the church were filled, and sometimes to overflowing, by people from the country and the villages round about, as well as by summer-boarders from the neighboring town of Lancaster, whose modish silks and millinery distinguished them from the rural congregation; but all were respectful and attentive to the worship which they had come to look at, and which, in its most fantastic phase, I should think could move only a silly person to laughter. The meetings opened with singing, and then Elder Wetherbee, of the Church Family, briefly addressed the brethren

affairs of the North Family, and the test of their faith had come. The father and mother, who had known each other from childhood, parted, and gave up their children to the charge of the community. In a few years he became elder of the North Family, and about five years ago he was chosen to his present place in the ministry.

Elder Whiteley relates that on his voyage to America he had a dream or vision of his future home here, so vivid that he wrote down its particulars. When he first came to Shirley he recognized at once the scene prefigured in his dream

and sisters in terms which were commonly a grateful recognition of the beauty of their "gospel relation" to each other, and of their safety from sin in a world of evil. The words were not always ready, but the sincere affection and conviction which breathed from them were characteristic of all the addresses which followed. After the elder sat down, they sang again, and then the minister, John Whiteley, read a chapter of the Bible, and made a few remarks; then, with alternate singing and speaking (the speaking was mostly from the men, though now and then a sister rose and bore her testimony to her heartfelt happiness in Shakerism, or declared her intention to take up a cross against such or such a tendency of her nature), the services proceeded till the time for the marching came. Till this time the brothers and sisters had sat confronting each other on settees, which they now lifted and set out of the way against the wall. A group formed in an ellipse in the middle, with two lines of marchers outside of them, headed by Elder Wetherbee. Some one struck into one of their stirring march tunes, and those in the ellipse began to rock back and forth on their feet, and to sway their bodies to the music, while the marchers with a sort of rising motion began their round, all beating time with a quick outward gesture of the arms and an upward gesture of the open palms. It was always a thrilling sight, fantastic, as I said, but not ludicrous, and it never failed to tempt the nerves to so much Shakerism at least as lay in the march. To the worshipers this part of their rite was evidently that sort of joy which, if physical, is next to spiritual transport. Their faces were enraptured, they rose and rose in their march with a glad exultation; suddenly the singing ceased, the march instantly ended, and the arms of each sank slowly down to the side. Some brother now spoke again, and when he closed, another song was raised, and the march resumed, till in the course of the singing and speaking those forming the central ellipse had been relieved and enabled to join the march. When it ended, the settees were drawn

up again, and the brethren and sisters sat down as before. Generally, one or two of the younger sisters would at this point read some article or poem from *The Shaker and Shakeress*,—the organ of the sect published at Mt. Lebanon, New York, and made up of contributions by members of the different families throughout the country. If the extract was particularly to the minds of the listeners, one of them pronounced it "good," and there was a general testimony to this effect. When these were finished, Elder Fraser, of the North Family, came forward between the rows of Shakers, and addressed the world in the principal discourse of the day. I always liked his speaking, for, if I did not accept his Shakerism, I felt bound to accept his good sense; and besides, it is pleasant, after the generalizing of the pulpits, to have the sins of one's fellowmen frankly named and fully rebuked; in this sort of satisfaction I sometimes almost felt myself without reproach. I suppose that what Elder Fraser and Elder Wetherbee and Elder John Whiteley preached is what is called morality by those who make a distinction between that and religion; but there was constant reference to Christ in their praise of the virtues they wished us to practice. Elder Fraser's discourses took a wide range at times, and he enforced his faith in language which, while it was always simple, was seldom wanting in strength, clearness, and literary excellence. He and Minister Whiteley are readers of most of the late books of religious and scientific controversy, from the most hopeless of which they come back confirmed and refreshed in their Shaker belief.

It was very pleasant to hear Elder Fraser, not only in the church, but also among his raspberries and grape-vines, to the culture of which he brought a spirit by no means bowed to the clod. He was fond of drawing illustrations from nature in his most daring theories of the universe, and the sucker that his hoe lopped away, or the vine bud that his thumb and forefinger sacrificed to the prosperity of the clusters, furnished him argument as he worked and talked.

He is lately from Mt. Lebanon, where his years and services had justly retired him from all labors but those he chose to add to his literary pursuits; yet he came back to active life in Shirley at the intimation that his presence there would be to the advantage of the North Family, and he bears his little cross (as the Shakers call any trouble they would make light of) with the cheerfulest content.<sup>1</sup> The boys, the sweet corn, the tomatoes, the grapes, the pears, flourish equally in his care at the North Family, and I do not know where else one should find such clumps of cockscomb and prince's feather and beds of balsam as grow under his kindly smile and diligent hand.

I am not sure whether the different faces in the march had a greater or less fascination to us after we came to know their different owners personally. Each showed his or her transport in a different way, and each had some peculiarity of step or movement that took our idle minds and made us curious about their history and character. Among them, none was more striking than the non-agenarian, whose bent frame kept its place in the round, but whose nerveless hands beat time after a very fugitive and erratic fashion. Father Abraham is very deaf, and in the singing some final bit of belated melody always stuck in his throat, and came scratching and scrambling up after the others had ceased in a manner that was rather hard to bear. But it was wonderful that he should know what tunes they sang when they sang without book. He is the author of a system of musical notation which the Shakers used exclusively until very lately, and which many of them still prefer. At his great age he still works every day at basket-making, in which he is very skillful and conscientious. But it is superfluous to say this; Shaker work is always the best of its kind. He is rarely sick, and he takes part in all the details of the worship, as he did when he came, sixty years ago. He was then a young man, and it is said that

he visited the community from idle curiosity, with his betrothed. Its life and faith made an instant impression upon him, and he proposed to the young girl that they should both become Shakers; but after due thought she refused. She said that she would not be a hindrance to his wish in the matter; if he was called to this belief, she gave him back his promise. To the Shakers it seems right that he should have accepted her sacrifice; to some of the world-outside it will seem tragic. Who knows? He has never regretted his course; she took another mate, saw her children about her knee, and died long ago, after a life that was no doubt as happy as most. But perhaps in an affair like that, a girl's heart had supreme claims. Perhaps there are some things that one ought not to do even with the hope of winning heaven.

After this old man, some of the little ones, left by death or their parents' poverty or worthlessness to the care of the Shakers, were the most interesting figures in the march, through which they moved with such a pretty pleasure. The meeting must have been a delight to them, though their faces kept a soberness which was an edifying proof of their discipline. This is the effect of vigilance and moral suasion; I believe the Shakers never strike their little wards, or employ any harsh measures with them.

One has somehow the impression that the young people of the Shakers are held in compulsory allegiance, but of course this is not at all the fact. As soon as they are old enough to take care of themselves they are entirely free to go or to stay. Undoubtedly they are constantly taught the advantages of the community over the world, and the superior merit of the virgin life over the married state, which they may be inclined to think of as they grow to be men and women. Marriage is not held to be sinful or dishonorable. "Few things," said one of the elders, "are more pleasing to us than the sight of a

<sup>1</sup> Those who care to taste his theological quality, and get at the same time a potent draught of Shak-

erism, can send to Shirley for his characteristic little tract on *The Divine Afflatus in History*.



happy young couple, living rightly in their order," but marriage is earthly and human, and celibacy is divine; as the thoughts are turned to higher things, they forsake husband or wife. Nevertheless, if their young women will marry, the Shakers claim the satisfaction of thinking that they have received in the community the best possible training for wives and mothers, — that they have been taught diligence, economy, and all branches of domestic knowledge. More than once there have been secessions of young people, which are nearly always stealthy, not because there could be any constraint, but because they dreaded to face the disappointed hopes of their elders. In after years, these delinquents from the angelic condition sometimes return to thank their benefactors, and to declare that they owe most of their worldly prosperity to their unworldly precepts. The proportion of those reared in Shakerism whom the Shakers expect to keep is small; they count quite as much for their increase upon accessions of mature men and women from outside, whom the Shaker life and doctrine persuade. These they invite now, as always, very cordially to join them, and they look forward to a time when their dwindling communities shall be restored to more than their old numbers.

One bad effect of the present decrease, which all thoughtful Shakers deplore, is the employment of hired labor. This, as communists, they feel to be wrong; but they are loath either to alienate their land or to let it lie idle. A strange and sad state of things results: the most profitable crop that they can now raise is timber, which they harvest once in thirty years, and which it costs nothing to cultivate, whereas it costs more to plant and reap the ordinary farm-crops, at the present rate of farm labor, than the crops will sell for. This is the melancholy experience of shrewd managers and economical agriculturists. The farmer who can till his own fields and take care of his own stock can live by farming, but no other can. One might not regret this, for it tends to encour-

age the subdivision of land, but the farm which one man's labor can till is too small to support a family; and the farmer cannot count upon the help of his children, for these, as soon as they grow up, leave the homestead, the girls to be teachers, factory operatives, table-girls, shop-girls; the boys for the cities and the West.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay,"

and perhaps one ought to take heart from the fact that these rural districts are as poor as ever, though they have not half the population they had fifty years ago. Yet it was not easy to be cheerful when in our drives about the country we came from time to time upon some grass-grown cellar where a farm-house had once stood, or counted, within the circuit of a mile about the corners where we sojourned, a score of these monuments of adversity. It is not that the soil is so poor, but that it lacks the tilth of an owner's hands. How shall it be restored to prosperity? It is within thirty-five miles of Boston, where we all know to our sorrow that provisions are dearer than anywhere in the country, — not to specify the whole planet, — and where consequently the best market is; yet the land grows up to woods. Who shall inherit this legacy of the Puritans, won at such bitter cost from the wilderness? Other races and another religion, it appears; here and there the Irish have found foothold; a good part of the population is Canadian; the farm laborers are all either Irish or French.

The decay of numbers, then, which the Shakers confess with so great regret, is but their share of the common blight, and how to arrest it is their share of the common perplexity. I could not encourage Elder Fraser to indulge great hopes, when one day in a burst of zeal for Shakerism he said, "We want cultivated people — half the subscribers to *The Atlantic Monthly* — to come and fill up our vacant ranks." I represented to him that our readers, though perhaps well-meaning persons, were practically unregenerate, and were consoled in their unregeneracy by a degree of worldly

comfort not favorable to the acceptance of a life and a creed requiring so many sacrifices, pampered, as they were every month, with the most delightful literature the age produces. These were not the people, I said, among whom to make converts; the disappointed, the poor, the destitute, were the field from which to reap; and very probably the habitual readers of other magazines might find it a refuge and a relief to become Shakers. We often touched upon this subject of the decay of Shakerism, which they face bravely and not unhopefully, and yet with a care concerning it that was not less than touching. What could it matter to those childless men and women whether any like them should inherit them in this world, to which, while living, they had turned so cold a shoulder? Very little indeed, one would have said, and yet they were clearly anxious that Shakerism should flourish after them. Their anxiety was not so unnatural; none of us can bear to think of leaving the fruits of our long endeavor to chance and the stranger. But I may attribute the largest share of the Shaker reluctance to perish from the earth to zeal for the perpetuation of the true faith — faith which was founded, like all others, in persecution, built up amidst ridicule and obloquy, and now, when its practical expression is received with respect by all the neighboring world, is in some danger of ceasing among men, not through the indifference of believers, but through their inevitable mortal decay. There are several reasons for the present decrease, besides that decrease of the whole rural population which I have mentioned. The impulse of the age is towards a scientific, a sensuous, an æsthetic life. Men no longer remain on the lonely farms, or in the little towns where they were born, brooding upon the ways of God to man; if they think of God, it is too often to despair of knowing him; while the age calls upon them to learn this, that, and the other, to get gain and live at ease, to buy pianos and pictures, and take books out of the circulating library. The new condition is always vulgar, and amidst

the modern ferment we may look back upon the old stagnation and call it repose. Whatever it was, it was a time when men's minds turned fervidly from the hard work-days of this world to the Sabbaths of another; from the winter, the wilderness, the privation of New England, to the eternal summer and glory and fruition of the New Jerusalem. How to get there was their care; it was for this that wives and husbands rent themselves asunder, and shared their children with strangers; it was for this that the lover left his love, and the young girl forbade her heart's yearning; we may be sure that it was zeal for heaven, for the imagined service of God, that built up the Shaker communities.

Their peculiar dress remembers the now quaint days of their origin; it is not a costume invented or assumed by them; it is the American dress of a hundred years ago, as our rustic great-grandparents wore it, with such changes as convenience, not fashion, has suggested to the Shakers since. With all its quaintness it has a charm which equally appears whether it is worn by old or by young. To the old, the modest soberness of the colors, the white kerchief crossed upon the breast, the clean stiff cap, were singularly becoming; and the young had in their simple white Sunday dresses a look of maidenly purity which is after all the finest ornament. The colors we noticed at meeting were for the young mostly white, for the middle-aged and elderly the subdued tints of drab, bronze, and lead-color, which also prevailed with the men of all ages. Both sexes wear collars that cover the whole neck, and both eschew the vanity of neck-ties; some of the brothers suffered themselves the gayety of showing at the ends of their trousers-legs the brighter selvage of the cloth; if indeed this was a gayety, and not, as one clothed in the world's taste might have accounted it, an added mortification of the spirit.

The Shakers used to spin and weave all the stuff they wore, but to do this now would be a waste of time; they buy the alpaca and linen which both sexes wear in summer, and their substantial

woolens for the winter. Some relics of their former skill and taste remain in the handsome counterpanes in their guest-chambers at the office, which were dyed, spun, and woven in the family, and the sisters are still skilled in braiding palm-leaf hats and in the old-fashioned art of hooking rugs. But I would not persuade the reader that any Shaker family is otherwise a school of art; one painting I did indeed see, a vigorous sketch in oil of a Durham bull, but this was nailed to the side of a stall far up in the vast gray barn. It was the work of a boy who was in the family years ago; but he never became a Shaker. It would be interesting to know what he did become.

In a community it must be that the individual genius is largely sacrificed to the common purpose and tendency, and yet I believe that among the Shakers the sacrifice is compelled only by the private conscience. So it is with regard to everything. On joining the community the new member gives up nothing, and is cautioned against a too early surrender of his property. He wears, so long as he likes, the fashions of the world, but these make him look as odd in the family as the Shaker dress would outside of it, and he is commonly anxious to assume the garb of simplicity before his mundane clothing is worn out. After due time he may give his property to the family; if he ever leaves it, he receives back the principal of his contribution without interest; for his labor he has already received his support. There are no formalities observed when a new brother or sister comes among the Shakers. It is understood that they are to go as freely as they have come; and this provision is recalled, as a rule that works both ways, to the mind of any brother whose room is finally found to be better than his company. But this very rarely happens: in twenty-five years Minister Whiteley had been obliged to dismiss only one undesirable brother.

The whole polity of the family is very simple. Its affairs are conducted by trustees, who hold the property and handle the funds, and to whom any mem-

ber goes for money to purchase things not provided for the common use. Reasonable requests of this sort are readily allowed; but it is easy to understand how the indulgence of even very simple private tastes adds to the cost of the common living, already enhanced by the decrease of members, and the necessity of keeping in repair the buildings left only partially occupied. There are no longer carpenters, blacksmiths, and shoemakers among the Shakers at Shirley, because their work can be more cheaply performed by the world-outside, and the shops once devoted to these trades now stand empty. The community still has the advantage of buying all provisions and materials at wholesale prices, but I doubt whether the cost of living within it is much less than it is among its uncommunized neighbors. This, however, is an impression for which I have not the figures.

At the head of each family there is an elder and an eldress, to whom all complaints are first addressed, and by whom difficulties are settled. I believe there is also a species of confessional, in which those who desire can confide their repentance and good intentions to the elders. Disputes in which the decision of the elders is not satisfactory are appealed to the ministers, whose mind is final in such matters. Of these ministers there are three, two being sisters; they reside alternate months in Shirley and Harvard, and have completely appointed dwelling-houses in both communities. I could not see that they took a more prominent part in public worship than the elders, and I do not know in what their religious eminence consists, but they are held in peculiar regard by the community.

Of course, nothing like ceremony must be inferred concerning the expression of this regard. They, and all the other brothers and sisters, are addressed by their first names, and it is liked that strangers in addressing the Shakers should be simple and direct, eschewing the forms and titles which could not be accorded in return. The speech of the Shakers is *Yea, yea, and Nay, nay* (they

pronounce the former words *yee, yee*, for reasons of their own), but it does not otherwise vary from the surrounding Yankee. They are plain and homely in their phrase, but they are very courteous, and it is impossible to know them and not perceive how little politeness consists in the tedious palaver that commonly passes by that name. Their sincerity gives them dignity and repose; it appears that you have but to renounce the world, and you cannot be afraid of it.

I should be sorry to give the notion of a gloomy asceticism in the Shaker life. I saw nothing of this, though I saw self-restraint, discipline, quiet, and heard sober, considered, conscientious speech. They had their jesting, also; and those brothers and sisters who were of a humorous mind seemed all the better liked for their gift of laughing and making laugh. The sum of Shaker asceticism is this: they neither marry nor give in marriage; but this is a good deal. Certain things they would think indecorous rather than wicked, and I do not suppose a Shaker would go twice to the opera bouffe; but such an entertainment as a lecture by our right-hearted humorist, Mark Twain, had been attended by one of the brethren not only without self-reproach, but with great enjoyment. They had also some of them read Mr. Bret Harte's books without apparent fear of consequences. They are rather strict in the observance of the Sabbath, but not so much, I thought, from conscience as from custom.

Our Shaker friends are sometimes embarrassed by visitors who ask to be shown all over their buildings, forgetting that their houses are private houses; and I cannot promise the curious reader visiting Shirley a repetition of the favors done us, whom the Shakers were good enough to show all of their communal life that one could see. In each village is an edifice known as the Dwelling-House, which is separate from the office and the other buildings. In this are the rooms of the brothers and sisters, the kitchen and dining-room, and a large room for family meetings. The first impression of all is

cleanliness, with a suggestion of bareness which is not inconsistent, however, with comfort, and which comes chiefly from the aspect of the unpapered walls, the scrubbed floors hidden only by rugs and strips of carpeting, and the plain, flat finish of the wood-work. Each chamber accommodates two brothers or two sisters, and is appointed with two beds, two rocking-chairs, two wash-stands, and a wood-stove, with abundance of rugs. The rooms of the younger people are above, so that (as was explained to us) if the young sisters, especially, wish to talk after they go to bed, they need not disturb their elders. There were few tokens of personal taste in the arrangement of the rooms; the most decided expression of character was that of the nonagenarian, who required his bed to be made up with a hollow in the middle from top to bottom, which he called his trough, and which he strictly forbade any one to meddle with; that was all he asked of earth after ninety-six years, not to disturb his trough. It seemed right that the simple demand should be indulged.

The dining-room was provided with two large tables, at one of which the brothers sat, and at the other the sisters. The monastic rule of silence at meals is observed, because, as we were told, the confusion would be too great if all talked together. In the kitchen was an immense cook-stove, with every housekeeping convenience; and everywhere opened pantry and store-room doors, with capacious cellars underneath—all scoured and scrubbed to the last degree of neatness.

The family *ménage* is completed by a wash-house and a dairy-house; there is an infirmary, and a shop for women's work, and under the same roof with the latter, at Shirley, a large school-room, in which the children of the community are taught the usual English branches by Sister Rose. The Shaker village forms a school-district, and their school is under the control of the town committee.

One day, toward the end of our sojourn, the office-sisters asked us to spend

an afternoon and take tea with them. After tea we sat down in the office-parlor, and the best singers of the family came in with their music books, and sang those tunes which we had severally liked most. It was all done with the friendliest simplicity, and we could not but be charmed. Most of the singers were young girls, who looked their best in fresh white dresses and fresh gauze caps; and Elder William, Brother Lorenzo, and Brother Thomas were there in Sabbath trim. One song followed another till long after dark, and then there was a little commotion: the married sister of one of the young Shakeresses arrived with her baby to spend the night. She was young and pretty, and

was duly tied back, overskirted, and furbelowed, and her little one was arrayed in its finest, when by and by she came into the room where we sat. By some juggle the baby found himself on the knees of one of the brothers, and sat looking up into his weather-beaten face with a kindly embarrassment which the good brother plainly shared, while the white dresses and white caps of the sisters flocked round in worship of that deplorable heir of the Adamic order of life; his mother stood outside of the group with complacently folded hands. Somehow the sight was pathetic. If she were right and they wrong, how much of heaven they had lost in renouncing the supreme good of earth!

*W. D. Howells.*

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### PERPLEXED.

WHICH is the truth — the fierce, cold wind that wildly  
 Raves at my window in the storm's mad din,  
 Or the sweet voice ruling the red glow mildly  
 And merrily within?

Which is the truth — the poignant pangs and sorrows  
 That wring the soul and pierce the flesh of man,  
 Or the bright joys and dreams of rapturous morrows  
 That gild life's little span?

And shall my tears flow like a mimic river,  
 Or shall my face be lit with ceaseless smile?  
 Ah, heaven is full of happiness forever, —  
 Here let me weep awhile!

*Celeste M. A. Winslow.*