

What Evidence Do We Have That Frances Wright Personally Was An Epicurean?

Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2020 at 4:07 PM

I doubt it is wise or helpful to go too far into discussion of Frances Wright's political opinions, but I do want to save people some time so they don't have to read the full books without some guidance or markers ahead of time. I will LIST a few choice excerpts to show her views, which seem to have been intended to promote a very radical and very sweeping overthrow of almost every aspect of existing society:

(1) Starting around page 166, in the chapter "Existing Evils." Not just universal public schools as we might think of them today, but very strongly regimented public schools for children in which parents are allowed minimal interference, and apparently minimal contact with their children:

But, as our time is short, and myself somewhat fatigued by continued exertions, I must hasten to the rapid development of the system of instruction and protection which has occurred to me as capable, and above capable, of opening the door to universal reform.

In lieu of all common schools, high schools, colleges, seminaries, houses of refuge, or any other juvenile institutions, instructional or protective, I would suggest that the state legislatures be directed (after laying off the whole in townships or parishes) to organize, at suitable distances, and in convenient and healthy situations, establishments for the general reception of all the children resident within the said school districts. These establishments to be devoted, generally, to children between a certain age. Say, the first, infants between two and four, or two and six, according to the density of the population, and such other local circumstances as might render a greater or less number of establishments necessary or practicable. The next to receive children from four to eight, or six to twelve years. The next from twelve to sixteen, or to an older age if found desirable. Each establishment to be furnished with instructors in every branch of knowledge, intellectual and operative, with all the apparatus, land, and conveniences necessary for the best development of all knowledge; the same, whether operative or intellectual, being always calculated to the age and strength of the pupils.

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To obviate, in the commencement, every evil result possible from the first mixture of a young population, so variously raised in error or neglect, a due separation should be made in each establishment; by which means those entering with bad habits would be kept apart from the others until corrected. How rapidly reform may be effected on the plastic disposition of childhood, has been sufficiently proved in your houses of refuge, more especially when such establishments have been under liberal superintendance, as was formerly the case in New-York. Under their orthodox directors, those aryltums of youth have been converted into jails.

It will be understood that, in the proposed establishments, the children would pass from one to the other in regular succession, and that the parents, who would necessarily be resident in their close neighborhood, could visit the children at suitable hours, but in no case interfere with or interrupt the rules of the institution.

In the older establishments, the well directed and well protected labor of the pupil would, in time, suffice for, and then, exceed their own support; when the surplus might be devoted to the maintenance of the infant establishments.

(In these territories of a free nation, no inequality must be allowed to enter.) And at a common board: closed is

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a common work, making restlessness with simplicity and convenience; raised in the exercise of common duties, in the acquisition of the same knowledge and practice of the same industry, raised only according to individual taste and capabilities; in the exercise of the same virtues, in the enjoyment of the same pleasure; in the study of the same nature; in pursuit of the same object—their own and each other's happiness—say I would not such a race, when arrived at manhood and womanhood, work out the reform of society—perfect the free institutions of America?

(2) The following is not a political opinion, but it is so pointed an indictment of speculation about the nature and origin of the universe that I have to include it as significant to her perspective:

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these walls what we see is as all realities, and will yield to us all useful truths. The field of nature is before us to explore; the world of the human heart is within us to examine. It does lie for us all that is certain, and all that is important.

What matter is to be by what, by whom, for how long, how, it comes in what forms of space, through what times of time, the vast elements, to which our senses alone perform by sensations, is peopled with sentient creatures.

How may we decide whether good, or demerit, or beings concerned and unconcerned, live, and breathe, and exist in life through all the bright worlds which surround our earth (heaven)? Nay, or could we decide, how should the knowledge profit us in this our moment, but, in an all sufficient sphere? Were our human attainments, indeed, concerned with human observation, and our human wisdom all sufficient for our human exigencies, their might there be necessary for our borrowing the habitations of heaven, and gazing, through it, into the moon and beyond the stars. Were all our human duties understood and fulfilled, all the joys of earth developed, and its woes removed, then might those speculations be more exorable, which now meet our attention and our sympathies from the sphere we occupy, and the fellow creatures, whose wants, interests, joys and sorrows should be all our care.

But how far we are from this felicity of human knowledge and human happiness, let nature with all her unexplained phenomena—in earth, with all her wrongs and all her miseries—in our own hearts with all their blindness—our own minds with all their propensities, her witness and attest. Oh, then, let us, in this place at least, by calm discussion and apply to observing! Not that I would presumptuously dispute, or vainly reason, with the dreams of any fellow creature: I would simply lead all to

(3) And she carries that forward to advocate a kind of tolerance, that it does not matter if we disagree so long as we keep our opinions about speculations to ourselves (?)

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it is our object to conciliate, and divide where we are assembled to unite.

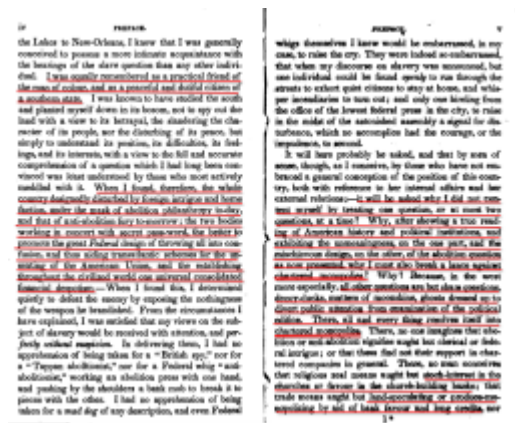
Permit me here to reiterate an observation which I have already had frequent occasion to prefer, that the only sure way to correct erroneous opinions is to present facts to the mind. The more we know, the less, in the popular sense of the word, do we believe. The better we understand the phenomena of nature in the visible and tangible world without us, and in the mental, moral, and physical world within us, the more just and perspicuous must be all our ideas.

It is possible, indeed, to subvert, by process of reasoning, many human superstitions, and to confute by the *ad absurdum* many books, maxims, and statutes honored as wise, or worshipped as divine. But let us remember, that to expose errors is not necessarily to distinguish truths; a train of deductive logic may suffice for the one, but dispassionate observation and accurate knowledge can alone suffice for the other.

OK at this point I have finished reading the first book of lectures. There is some in it about slavery, but not really a lot, as I would have expected based on reputation. It is really a much deeper blueprint for full societal revolution based on overthrowing the church and existing systems of culture and business, with emphasis on her theory that it is knowledge/observation that much be expanded, while speculation on religious and other matters that cannot be answered should be minimized. I see no discussion whatsoever of the issue of life after death.

Now on to the second book of lectures.

This is just SO fascinating. Wright's target is indeed going to be slavery, but she is not content just to oppose slavery - she sees the source of the movement toward war -- on both sides -- as caused by financial interests / financial speculators / banks which she identifies as a movement of the "chartered monopolies" promoting their own interests:



And it appears that she singled out as her opposition not mobs of pro-slavery agitators, but "Federal Bank mobs":

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instructions. They who esteem the contrary will attend them. My individual duty? This regards my own convictions, both as respects my views of general utility, and my own persuasions as to my fitness to advance it. Such is my answer to the instigators of Federal Bank mobs, such as assaulted me and my hearers at the Falls of Schuylkill; to preacher politicians, such as attempted to prevent my occupying the public Court-house in York, Pennsylvania; and to the Mayor of this city, whose official summons tendered in a lawful way, I shall always be ready respectfully to answer, but whose arbitrary orders I shall at all times disregard, and whose incendiary proceedings I shall resist, and, as I believe, defeat, even as was the case on a late occasion.

FRANCES WRIGHT DARUSMONT.
Philadelphia, 15th Sept., 1836.

Here she denies that she was an abolitionist as that term was generally understood:

myself, few have said less. Whatever epithets the anger of misguided party, or misconceiving prejudice may have coupled with my name, it rather pleases me to imagine, that of philanthropist cannot be one of them; a title which, however good in its etymological and dictionary meanings, has ever been, considered in its actual application, and current worldly acceptation, as foreign to my ambition as to my regard. I should have thought also, I might have escaped that of 'abolitionist,' which, in the sense now generally attached to it, is certainly as far removed from my character, as could be any other epithet significant of violent or unconstitutional sentiment or proceedings.

The passage to which I advert in the editorial comments on my circular of Saturday, is the following: "At the time present this ('modern abolitionism') is so effectually ostracized, that even Madame F. W. D., forgetting all her ancient amalgamation notions, has more prudence than to discuss it."

The editor of the Gazette is evidently unaware that my experiment in Western Tennessee (of which others have talked and written).
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ten more than myself) proposed for its means, well directed, or what might express it better, organized and thoroughly disciplined labor; and, for its correlative object, the improvement of the Negro, morally, intellectually, and industrially, (without which emancipation must ever be a work of anarchy,) and his colonization without the limits of the United States. The soul of the plan contemplated, was agricultural, and otherwise, industrial schools, in which each generation might reap the cost of its raising, training, outfit, and all other expenses before colonization. Viewing, as I have ever done, all human reform as a work not governmental or controlling, but educational, administrative, and industrial, I could never propose to myself or others, any measures that should run counter to public opinion or national sentiment.

The editor may be also unaware that my own people, in compliance with public sentiment, and in keeping with my own pledge to the citizens of the slave state in which my experiment was attempted, were removed to the island of Hayti. And since I have been led to advert to this subject, let me here submit, in testimony to the honorable and much disordered character of the southern planter, that never, during the whole course of my journeyings and residence in the south, although my general sentiments and purpose were understood, did I ever experience slight but respectful treatment, and candid, open-hearted hospitality. There is a tone of thought and a mode of proceeding, with regard to all questions, that in America will disarm prejudice, and conciliate good feeling; and, were such sought and followed by all who desire human reform, pretended philanthropists and intriguers, foreign and domestic, would be distinguished on the instant, and consequently quieted and disarmed.

Here are her views on what would happen after emancipation, and her views on racial developments later:

XV APPENDIX TO THE PREFACE.

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Chambers, June 2, 1838.

F. W. D.