

Transcribed Excerpts from "Lest We Forget - The Quaker Seedsmen of Long Ago" Article, April 21, 1909

LEST WE FORGET

The Quaker Seedsmen of Long Ago...

As regularly as the season came and went, these smoothfaced, mild-eyed, gentle-mannered representatives of the New Lebanon Shaker Community, appeared on our streets, called from door to door on our merchants of from thirty to forty years ago, counted the garden seeds left over from the year's commission sale, took their pay for such packages as had been disposed of, and left fresh boxes for the ensuing season's trade ... the Shaker seeds were always to be depended on...

Levi Shaw, the chief traveling representative of the Shaker Community, was wisely selected ... to make friends in the world at large. Suave, handsome, companionable, he was always welcome in business houses, even at a time when "drummers" were as a rule regarded as nuisances...

We pause to remark on this condition of our old friends, the Shakers, because it marks the decline of almost the last of that once very popular form of communistic experimentation which bore fruit in the Oneida Community of John Humphrey Noyes, the Hopedale Community- of Hosea Ballou, the Brook Farm hazard of Charles A. Dana, Horace Greeley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller and others, the New Harmony settlement in the west, and others which have made a lesser stir in the world. Of later years there have been other ventures of the sort, but they have lasted even for a shorter than those enumerated. In all of them the basic idea has been community of property and purpose, an altruistic and generally impracticable theory of brotherly love, and also,... in most instances, some fantastic religious schism ... In all of them, however, be it noted, money has been made and the central idea was beautiful, as a theory...

The conclusion inevitably to be deduced from these numerous failures is that the time is not ripe for the communistic ideal to be realized. To become thus ripe presupposes a vast amount of unselfishness, industry and disinterestedness, such as mankind has not yet had instilled into it...