

# Helicon Hall Hobbies

Inconsiderate Fire Interrupts an Interesting Experiment in Collective Housekeeping.

Upton Sinclair's Englewood Effort Toward Individuality Through Limited Co-operation—Merely an Organized Protest Against the Irritations of Existence in a Big City—Not a Brook Farm Dream, but a Business Proposition. Colony May Continue.

By ROBERTUS LOVE.

THAT was a most unmanly and inconsiderate fire which destroyed Helicon Hall, the roof-tree of Upton Sinclair's home colony on the heights of Englewood, N. J. But for that blaze, so sudden and sweeping, this latest experiment in limited co-operation might have run along in its original groove until the test of time should pronounce it practicable or impracticable. As it is, the colony now must make a new start, if it determines to keep going at all.

The experiment at Englewood has been misunderstood by the general public. There is just a possibility that some of the experimenters themselves did not quite comprehend it. The habit has been to speak of the Helicon Hall project as a Socialistic or communal community. In some sense this was true. In a broader sense it was an individualistic community. Perhaps Mr. Sinclair himself will dispute this, but his own descriptions and declarations go toward proving it.

The Helicon Hall people co-operated in an effort to realize individuality. Is that paradoxical? Let us see. Most of them, perhaps all, were residents of the city of New York or belonged to that large class of city workers who "commute" from the suburbs. They were—happily all of them survived the fire, so we may say they are—persons of artistic or intellectual tendencies. They are not wealthy. Their incomes are modest, earned by professional or business labor in the city or connected with the city, thus requiring that they reside within shooting distance of the metropolis. The millionaire may live in congenial environment provided he

is the servant question. Where are the servants? All those who have satisfactory servants please raise the right hand.

**The Why of Helicon Hall.**

Mr. Sinclair determined to overcome the annoyances of separate housekeeping. He had no notion of surrendering any of his individuality. On the other hand, he proposed to develop his individuality by getting rid of the petty fetters which hindered its growth. That, as a mere matter of fact, was the why and wherefore of the founding of Helicon Hall. Mr. Sinclair discovered many others who thought as he did concerning the comparative uselessness of the conventional manner of keeping house, and these persons went into the co-operative colony.

How far did the co-operation go? Not far enough to hurt. The Helicon Hall people really established for themselves an improved boarding house, with the disagreeable features eliminated. The very first thing was to get congenial fellow boarders. As a matter of fact, the worst feature about the average city boarding house is the promiscuous aggregation of human specimens with whom one needs must be associated. That is even worse than the prunes and the pictures. The man across the table may perfume his person with musk that shrieks to heaven, and he may talk horse when you prefer homiletics. The bewitching female creature at your side may entertain you through a whole dinner with a dissertation on the virtues of her pet poodle pup when you would be more intimately interested in a dissertation on roast pig, a la Lamb.

Intellectual persons to do the cooking, the washing, the cleaning and other necessary duties about the big house was tried at first, but when found impracticable it was given up in the main, outsiders being hired.

**Character of the Colonists.**

Most of the colonists were authors, editors, artists or devotees of intellectual pursuits of some other sort. This is significant. People like to talk shop. Birds of a feather, you know. The hod carrier prefers the society of another hod carrier to that of the bricklayer or the construction foreman. So it is with those higher up. It is quite conceivable that Mr. Sinclair's associates, could they have happened to get together in a large boarding house in the city, would have enjoyed life just as well as they did at Helicon Hall, but without co-operation they could not get together so they must be Heliconized.

A somewhat widespread misconception as to the Helicon Hall status led to many annoyances. Mr. Sinclair was obsessed with cranks and nuisances of all sorts. Some there were who seemed to imagine that the Hall was a sort of free for all, that the Heliconians were living in a state of free and easy hospitality such as only the very rich can afford and not even the very rich ever dispense.

On one occasion Mr. Sinclair received a telegram from a man of whom he had never heard to the effect that this individual, "with friends," would arrive that evening. An hour later the self-announcer arrived, accompanied by another man and a woman. All carried suit cases and announced that they had come for a week's visit. As it happened that every room in the Hall was occupied and some colonists were sleeping on bunks, the visitors were delicately directed to the Englewood hostelry. They made what is described as a scene, and the ringleader filled columns of newspapers with his denunciations of the colonists. It was ascertained that at an anarchist meeting on the east side in New York this man had casually met a member of the colony, who had casually said:

"Come up and see us some time."

**Not Like Brook Farm.**

Another error in relation to Helicon Hall is to call it a Brook Farm experiment. There is scarcely anything about the Helicon proposition to suggest the celebrated experiment in co-operation which was tried for two or three years by a small band of enthusiasts near West Roxbury, Mass., early in the forties. Brook Farm was altogether a different proposition. Professor George Ripley had a theory that men and women could dig a living out of the dust of the earth by working a few hours a day and could live on a higher and more rational plane by so doing. He gathered about him a band of plain livers and high thinkers. They founded Brook Farm. Mrs. Ripley, a highly accomplished woman, did the community washing. Nathaniel Hawthorne is said to have fed the pigs. As the members were vegetarians this imputation is exploded. However, several of these afterward eminent persons did farm labor and household drudgery. Among them were Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, George William Curtis, Charles A. Dana and A. Bronson Alcott. Mr. Emerson also used to run out from Concord and transcendentalize the enthusiasts, but he was not a member of the community.

After a time Brook Farm got under the influence of Albert Brisbane, a devout Fourierite, who Fourierized it and incidentally killed it off. The farmers built a phalanstery after the teaching of Charles Fourier, who held that all mankind should divide into "phalanxes" of 2,000 persons each. One large building, or phalanstery, was to house all the 2,000. In this building and on the land around it they were to produce all things necessary for their subsistence. They were to provide their own music and amusements. The Brook Farm phalanstery burned down one day, and the farmers separated to become noted poets, philosophers, journalists and other things just as good.

Helicon Hall was something in the order of a phalanstery, to be sure, but it was not Fourieristic. Mr. Sinclair and his associates surely must be accredited with a scheme much more practicable than that which was tried and found wanting at Brook Farm.

That Upton Sinclair is not overwhelmed with fine haired theories was proved by his athletic and corporeal swatting of the beef trust with his club, called "The Jungle," last year. The fire came too soon for him and his associates to have a fair trial of their experiment. It is well known that the original idea embraced the separate cottage system, with the community dining hall. Mr. Sinclair and many other members declare that the colony must go on, and in the event of its continuation it is not unlikely that the cottage system will be tried.

**Killed by the Railroads.**

A striking editorial paragraph in the current Harper's Weekly calls attention to the callousness of Americans regarding the enormous annual list of dead and wounded travelers and employees on the railroads of the United States. The disquieting statement is made that since the 1st of January this year 123 persons have been killed and more than 300 injured in seven disasters on five different roads. "The railroads," comments the writer, "have the strongest possible motives for avoiding accidents. Shifts that result in dead passengers and wrecked machinery save neither time nor money. How our railroad mortality is to be reduced is a question for our railroad experts to solve. And it must be solved. Not only in the case of the railroads, but in a hundred other fields of our activities we Americans are disastrously waste of human life."

## The Father of the American Navy.

THE American people are growing more and more fond of erecting memorials to their military and naval heroes. One of the latest of these is the statue of Commodore John Barry, recently unveiled in Philadelphia. It stands in Independence square, in the very shadow of Independence hall, so intimately associated with the birth of American liberty. Barry is often called the "fa-



THE BARRY MONUMENT IN PHILADELPHIA. Commodore John Barry, father of the American navy. John Paul Jones was an officer under him. The statue of Barry now possessed by Philadelphia was presented to the city by the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, of which the naval fighter was a member, and it was unveiled by Miss Elsie Hazel Hepburn, great-granddaughter of the hero, on March 16. Barry was born in Ireland in 1745 and came to the colonies when fifteen years old. He elected to make the sea his profession and soon took rank as a sailor of rare ability and was given command of a number of big ships engaged in commerce. At the outbreak of the Revolution he was commissioned to command the brig Lexington, and this vessel was the first to fly the Continental flag. He captured the first ship ever taken by an American warship. His remains lie in the churchyard of the venerable St. Mary's Roman Catholic church in Philadelphia, and the inscription on his tomb reads in part as follows:

Sacred to the memory of Commodore John Barry, father of the American navy. Let the Christian patriot and soldier who visits these mansions of the dead view this monument with respect and veneration. Beneath it rest the remains of John Barry, who was born in the County Wexford, Ireland, in the year 1745. America was the object of his patriotism and the aim of his usefulness and ambition. At the beginning of the Revolutionary war he held the commission of captain in the then limited navy of the colonies. His achievements in battle and his renowned naval tactics merited for him the position of commodore and to be justly regarded as the father of the American navy. He fought often and died in the cause of freedom, but his deeds of valor did not diminish in him the virtues which adorned his private life.

Barry died in 1803. One of the most exciting of the engagements in which



COMMODORE JOHN BARRY.

he participated was that between the Alliance, which he commanded, and the British ships Atlanta and Trepassy. At the beginning of the battle the Alliance lay in a dead calm and could not bring her broadside to bear. The two British ships poured a galling fire into her, and early in the engagement Captain Barry was carried below wounded in the shoulder by a grape-shot. The flag of the Alliance was shot away, and the crew of the enemy began cheering at the prospect of a certain victory. Barry, lying wounded in the cockpit, declined to listen to any proposition to surrender. "If the ship can't be fought without it," he said, "I'll be carried on deck." His bravery stirred his crew. They cheered wildly the bloody figure carried on deck, a new flag was hoisted, and the American shot was sent ripping into the enemy's breast. Then nature came to the aid of the sorely pressed Americans. A breeze sprang up and gave the Alliance a chance to shift and use her guns. The Americans then fought with such unparalleled valor that the two British ships were forced to surrender.

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UPTON SINCLAIR AND HELICON HALL.



has brains enough. It is not so with the artist, the author, the college professor or the newspaper editor whose limited income depends upon his sticking close to a great city.

**Upton Sinclair's Protest.**

For such persons city life means the boarding house, with all its age worn horrors, the flat or apartment, with its ills and evils, or the rooming house, with the rooming restaurant existence.

Mr. Sinclair something less than a year ago conceived the conviction that people didn't really have to put up with the annoyances, the irritations and the downright distresses of the separate household system of living. They could get together and do the thing better. Why not? He considered his own case. The young author had been living on a farm in New Jersey, which was very fine in theory. In practice it was otherwise, as any city born, college bred, artistically inclined person will discover by trying it for awhile. There were no amusements, no neighbors of congenial tastes, nothing but broad fields, whispering woods and a large lonesomeness. The city was not to be thought of because there was the small boy of the household, and what really thoughtful parent ever is satisfied with bringing up a child in a boarding house or an apartment?

The city boarding house wherein the diet runs largely to prunes and the art environment is bounded on the dining room wall by a nightmare chromo of bullet slain birds hanging by their necks after they are dead and on the bedroom wall by a steel engraving of Washington crossing the Delaware when it was full of floating ice—well, who wants to live in a boarding house? Then there is the flat, which in New York they call apartment. That is a cliff dwelling with modern improvements. The family occupying the ledge directly overhead may possess a phonograph with an all Bowery repertory, and the family inhabiting the ledge below you may subsist on garlic and take the household dog to bed with them. Does anybody ever occupy a New York apartment except from sheer necessity?

As to living in a whole house to yourself—now, that appeals. But there

So these Helicon boarders took good care that they should be congenial one to another. There was much pruning down and weeding out. This process hurt now and then, and some of the unadmitted candidates vented their opinions through the people's forums of the daily newspapers. One gentleman declared that he had been excluded because he was a Jew, but Mr. Sinclair denied this, the inference being that the candidate was not accepted because he evinced an overweening desire to rule the roost.

**The Children's Dormitory.**

At last the colony got down to a living basis. Helicon hall was acquired, and late last fall the co-operative boarding house was opened. It was well filled, with plenty of candidates on the waiting list. An executive committee served in lieu of the traditional landlady. There was a big dining room, with family tables, though only the adults ate therein. The children had a dormitory to themselves, where they slept, ate and played under the watchful eyes of one or more women belonging to the colony. This children's dormitory idea, by the way, was one of Mr. Sinclair's pets. He held a theory as to the bringing up of children which seems to be gaining ground slowly throughout the world, but very slowly. Most mothers still prefer to keep their children in their own care, and even at Helicon Hall some of them did this. In several instances the children slept in the rooms of their parents. There were no bidbound rules as to the children.

To each of the colonists rooms were assigned in the big hall. In these rooms, of course, there was the same privacy that one finds in his own home. There was a common drawing room, with a big fireplace, a music and amusement room and in the interior of the building a glass roofed court where rubber trees flourished and the colonists might wander at will. Most of the members of the community were "commuters," going daily to New York city and back. They paid for their food at so much per week, just as in a boarding house, and for rooms accordingly. Only a few of the actual colonists did any work about the place. The experiment of finding artistic and