The Road to Hopedale

The Hopedale Community was the most enduring of several efforts in New England during the 1840s to establish the good society in a corrupted world. It was an element in a great socioreligious ferment that inspired thousands of New Englanders to dream anew some version of the old Puritan dream of creating a truly godly community. Although overshadowed by Brook Farm, Hopedale as a social experiment outlived its better publicized rival by a decade. It, too, eventually failed, but only after the power of its governing faith had transformed a barren farm into a successful village—a village that eventually took the search for a good society into drastically different times. That it succeeded as it did resulted not from fortuitous circumstance but from the characters and the vision of the people who created it.

Why do such people—only the few—make the risky, difficult, and ultimately frustrated effort to establish the City of God in this world? Although the effort might be attributed to some irrational "fanaticism," the founders of Hopedale were generally rational people committed to a social vision that, while unimaginable to most of their contemporaries, had evolved from their immediate culture and experience during a time of religious ferment. This was especially the case with their longtime leader and spokesman, Adin Ballou, a man of modern reason as well as deep religious devotion.

Near the end of his long, creative life, Ballou was discovered by Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and mystic, who predicted that he would be "in the future acknowledged as one of the great benefactors of mankind."1 With this one exception, however, Ballou never achieved much public notice, in part because he spent virtually all
his years in a corner of New England that was obscured by the blaze of Boston and Concord and of Lowell and New Bedford. In terms of conventional success, Ballou judged himself a failure. "My hopes were too urgent and sanguine," he wrote in his Autobiography, "my standard and aim were set too high for immediate realization. So have I been defeated in some of my noblest schemes." And yet he remained confident that he had, through reasonable deduction from concrete experience, found the God-given religious and social principles whose truth and beauty would ultimately convert the world.

Adin Ballou was born on 23 April 1803 in Cumberland, the most northerly town in Rhode Island, in an area heavily populated by the descendents of Maturin Ballou, a Huguenot and an associate of Roger Williams in the founding of the original colony. By the early nineteenth century, the Ballou clan had begun to scatter in search of opportunity. One of them, James Ballou, moved first to the wilderness of New Hampshire and then to Ohio, where his daughter, Eliza, eventually became the mother of a future president, James Garfield. Adin's father, Ariel, however, chose to remain in his native region, where he was a man of substance, the owner not only of a large farm but of a sawmill and a cider mill. Although Cumberland was largely a farming town, it was not wholly isolated from changing times, since the Blackstone River on its western border furnished the waterpower for many of the early cotton mills established by Samuel Slater; the village of Woonsocket, less than ten miles from Ballou's birthplace, was soon to develop into an industrial center.

Ariel Ballou himself invested some two thousand dollars in borrowed money in the establishment of a woolens mill on the Mill River immediately above its juncture with the Blackstone, a venture that also employed his eight-year-old son as a mill boy. Although Adin's factory experience lasted for only a few months, most of his life was destined to be spent in the mill towns of the Blackstone Valley and its tributaries. Decades later, a radical critic of industrialism was to write of the "brave little" Blackstone that "all the way between Worcester and Providence it is tugging at the wheel of Corporations, and summons its thousands of operatives to serve and slave under its despotism of machinery." In these earlier and simpler years, though, these towns retained a strong rural char-
acter that set them apart from the great manufacturing centers of the industrial age.\(^5\)

Ballou’s father was a disciplinarian who expected obedience and hard work from his children, but he was not indifferent to their needs. Adin, who early showed a bookish disposition, was given all the formal education the area provided, three months a year in the local school until he was fifteen. Although the boy had access to only a few books and newspapers, he made the most of them and of whatever other sources of education he could find. Eventually, he wanted to go to Brown University, only to be told by his father, “I am too much in debt.” All Adin received was a last few months of formal education at an academy in Franklin, Massachusetts. Later he was to conclude that his inability to attend the university had saved him from falling into “some popular channel of respectability and renown.” Instead of acquiring a conventional education, he was left free to form from his own experiences “the independent convictions, principles, and aims now so sacred to me.”\(^6\)

Ballou found his best school in the local world of religion, which came to a boil during his youth. When he was ten, the area was enlivened by the “Reformation,” one of many local outbursts of revivalism that broke out in southern New England under the influence of the Second Great Awakening. The revival caused great excitement and produced nearly a hundred converts in Cumberland. Once the original enthusiasm subsided, most people slid back into their old ways; but even if it disappointed hopes for a complete change of heart, the revival had an enlightening influence on the town, producing what Ballou later called “a wholesome agitation of thought” that “awakened inquiry, investigation, and a progressive exercise of understanding.”\(^7\) Whatever its effects on others, this agitation opened a great religious channel for his developing thought that he would follow for the rest of his life.

In 1813 Ballou’s awakened parents joined the Christian Connexion, a new dissenting faith that rejected any religious authority other than Christ and any test of church membership other than Christian character. This denial of the authority of clerics and of dogmas became the hallmark of Ballou’s adult career, but what was of more immediate importance was the stand taken by this faith on
the nature of the afterlife. The rebellion against orthodoxy often challenged the old view that sinners were condemned to eternal punishment after death, leading some radicals to reject the doctrine of endless punishment in favor of the idea that God would save everyone. The Christian Connexion, however, refused to accept universal salvation and adopted the more conservative idea that the souls of departed sinners would simply be annihilated, thereby preserving heaven only for the faithful.8

This “Destructionism” helped to stimulate young Ballou’s interest in religion. By the time he finished his schooling in his sixteenth year, he seemed destined for the ministry. It was not a destiny that he was yet willing to accept, however. He had absorbed at least some of the widespread contempt for ministers, “a pitiable class” by the world’s standards, and he had agonizing doubts about his own abilities to succeed in the pulpit. On the other hand, his parents were proud of his evident talent for religion, and he had no other career in prospect. The absence of a career acquired serious importance when at seventeen he became engaged to Abby Sayles, who was three years his senior. What to do? As would happen during later occasions of psychological distress, he found his answer in a vision: one night he awoke to see before him the glowing specter of his dead brother, Cyrus, who told him that “God commands you to preach the Gospel of Christ to your fellow man.” Soon after, he forced himself to give a sermon at the local “Ballou Meeting House” (where his father was a deacon), which soon led to his appointment as minister of the congregation.9

Over the next few years the young preacher acquired local notice, particularly as a defender of Destructionism against the advocates of both endless punishment and universal salvation. When he was eighteen, he won more general attention when he published a critical review of the writings of Hosea Ballou, a distant cousin and a champion of Universalism. This review established him as a leading advocate for the Christian Connexion, but it also drew him into a lengthy debate with the Universalists, whose arguments began to weaken his belief in Destructionism. For the first time, Ballou was forced to submit his own convictions to one of the most essential tenets of his developing faith, that any belief should be subject to rational criticism. Later, in writing about these times he declared,
"My religion teaches me to be afraid of nothing but sin—to hear, read, examine—to 'prove all things and hold fast that which is good.'" After rereading the Bible in the light of the Universalist arguments, he publicly admitted that they were right and Destruc­tionism was wrong.\textsuperscript{10}

This proved to be more than a simple act of intellectual courage, since it antagonized his congregation; even his father threatened to disinherit him unless he recanted. Although he did not fulfill this threat, Ariel Ballou did support the decision of the congregation to disavow publicly his apostate son. Having been disowned by the Christian Connexion, young Ballou had no choice but to join the Universalists. This decision soon led to more conflict when the new Universalist began to preach in the small towns of southern Massachusetts. At Bellingham, he persuaded the authorities to allow him to use the town meetinghouse one week a month, only to become embroiled in a controversy with a local Baptist minister, who objected to any use of the house by one whom he condemned as no more than "a deist under a mask." The affair culminated in a ludicrous tussle between the two for control of the meeting place, which ended in Ballou's retreat but not his surrender. Characteristically, he responded with an act of peaceful aggressiveness. In his first published work, \textit{The Furious Priest Reproved} (1823), the young minister launched a verbal assault on the Baptist preacher for failing to follow the example of "the meek and lowly Jesus" in the Christian policy of "love, tranquility, and order."\textsuperscript{11} Throughout his career, he refused to be passive in his pursuit of harmony and peace.

Ballou was to find all too little love or tranquillity in these intensely religious times, but his decision to join the Universalists did lead him into a larger and more significant fellowship than he had known before. Although it had only a small following when measured against the established churches, Universalism was a growing faith that by the late 1830s claimed at least eighty ministers in Massachusetts alone. By 1823 Ballou had escaped from the narrow world of his boyhood to become the minister for the Universalist society at Milford, Massachusetts. He was to spend most of the next half-century within twenty miles of Milford.\textsuperscript{12}

Universalism introduced Ballou to a general optimism regarding the world and the future. Its doctrine of universal salvation re-
flected its larger faith in the existence of a benevolent God who would, in the words of its 1803 statement of belief, “finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.” Horace Greeley, another independent Yankee thinker influenced by Universalism, described its hopeful effects on him: “Once conceive that an Omniscient Beneficence presides over and directs the entire course of human affairs, leading ever onward and upward to universal purity and bliss, and all evil becomes phenomenal and preparative—a mere curtain or passing cloud which hides for a moment the light of the celestial and eternal day.”

Ballou said later that his conversion came after he had experienced “a vision of the final triumph of good over evil.” Universalism consolidated his maturing confidence that the world was inherently rational and progressive, the work of a God “of love and justice, of benevolence and truth.” God had given to every person a soul, a dynamic and rational spirit, which he expected eventually to perfect itself. Souls were of inestimable value, created with the intention not that they should sin and be punished but “that they should exist and flourish in the enjoyment of happiness, and rise from knowledge to knowledge, from bliss to bliss through endless ages.” In Ballou’s idea of a spiritual economy, it was as foolish as it was malevolent for God to create souls simply either to punish or to destroy them. Rather, the Creator intended that they all participate in the ultimate attainment of universal holiness and happiness.

Ballou, however, had more faith in Universalism than he did in the thinking of leading Universalists, many of whom held to what he called the “ultra” view that there would be no punishment in the afterlife for even the worst of sinners, the afflictions of sin being confined entirely to this world. He was uncomfortable with a doctrine that threatened his idea of moral responsibility and accountability. While he was prepared to accept the eventual salvation of all persons, his sense of justice rebelled at the idea that even the most unrepentent sinner would, with death, escape punishment. This, he believed, was an issue of “radical and vital importance,” one that was soon to furnish another guidepost for his pilgrimage.

He did little about it, however, until his private life abruptly changed. In 1828, while away from his family, he dreamed that his first wife lay dead beside a newborn baby. When he later described
this dream, he called it a gloomy premonition, and such it proved to be. Less than a year later, three weeks after the birth of his second child, Abby Ballou died following a period of deteriorating health. Ballou was shaken by the loss, but not for long. A year later, he married Lucy Hunt, the nineteen-year-old daughter of the most prominent member of his congregation.  

There is no indication that he felt any guilt over having lost a sickly wife who was three years older than he and gained one who was not only eight years younger but better suited to his expanding interests. This change, however, may have intensified his growing interest in moral practice. Sometime between his bereavement and his remarriage he had succeeded after much prayer and effort in freeing himself from "the filthy, harmful, and reprehensible practice of smoking." Over the next decade, his concern with practical moral behavior evolved into a deep commitment to what he came to call "practical Christianity."

However much this tendency was influenced by Ballou's home life, it was certainly fundamental to his resolution of the theological question that had dominated his earlier years. As a young minister, he had taken the leap from Destructionist to Universalist in his views of the afterlife. Now he resolved to make another leap by opposing the then dominant Universalist doctrine of no punishment for sin after death. He rejected this "ultra" doctrine on the grounds that it not only denied the moral responsibility of mankind but also weakened "the thread of continuity between this life and the next." In defense of what he believed was the essential moral order of God's creation, he argued that the sinful soul would suffer after death in order to purge it of its sinful tendencies; although God would "sooner or later" restore all people to their intended place in heaven, for sinners it would be later rather than sooner. Ballou believed that this "Restorationist" view made for a dynamic moral order in which humankind, guided by the precepts of Christ, would participate in realizing God's ultimate plan for "a full end of sin and misery" throughout creation.

In 1830 he began to publish a Restorationist weekly, The Independent Messenger, with himself as its editor, beginning what proved to be thirty years of religious journalism. His need for a press to print the Messenger soon brought him into partnership with the first of
those who would later help him form the Hopedale Community, George W. Stacy, previously publisher of the Groton Herald. After pledging any profits “to the establishment of a liberal literary institution for the education of youth,” Ballou began his newspaper with the promise that he would devote it to religious truth, free inquiry, civil and religious liberty, and efforts “to amend the hearts, enlighten the understanding, refine the sentiments, and ennoble the minds of mankind.”

Less than a month after he began this new venture, Ballou’s largely ultraist congregation at Milford fired him. Essentially exiled from Universalism in general, he soon found a new home and friends. In 1831 he and his fellow rebels organized the Massachusetts Association of Restorationists to promote belief in “Future Rewards and Punishment, to be followed by the Final Restoration of all men to holiness and happiness.” Outside of Restorationism, Ballou had also begun to attract the interest of various other liberal Christians, especially some of the Unitarians in the area, and within a few months after his firing he was appointed minister of the First Congregational (Unitarian) Church at nearby Mendon. While he continued to insist that he was only defending Universalism from the “modern” perversions of the ultras, he had in fact left it behind him.

Mendon was to be his home for the next decade. Although this town on the Mill River was then one of the largest and most thriving in southern Massachusetts, his new church was neither large nor thriving, having lost most of its membership to a conservative revival in the area. Over the next years, Ballou was able to rebuild it, chiefly by attracting those who, for varied reasons, “had drifted away from the established institutions of religion.” He was an energetic and innovative minister who, among his other works, persuaded his congregation to abandon their traditional Yankee prejudice against the celebration of Christmas and to have a special evening service in honor of Christ’s birth.

These were often trying years. In February 1833 his two sons died from scarlet fever, leaving him the only comfort of a bereaved father: “Where immortal spirits reign / There shall we meet again.” It is notable that when he later wrote of this tragedy, his thoughts were of the earthly future as well as the afterlife: “The causes, pre-
ventives, and cure of disease will no doubt be better known in future ages than at present, and such knowledge will, I believe, deliver our human race from most of the pain, suffering, and premature death that now afflict it." Knowledge did not come fast enough, however. In the summer of 1833 Ballou was comforted by the birth of another son, who, along with his daughter, Abbie, became his pride—only eventually also to lose this boy to disease, at the very beginning of manhood.\textsuperscript{22}

Tragedy intensified his interest in a practical Christianity. In 1831 he had written that "we deem true morality the natural offspring and only demonstrable evidence of pure religion." He came to believe that the only real Christian was one who conformed both his spirit and his earthly behavior to moral principle. Initially, this meant little more than the morality of conventional Calvinism. After having broken himself of the habit of using tobacco, he became a confirmed advocate of total abstinence from any kind of alcohol except for medicinal purposes, and he took an increasing interest in "moral reform," meaning opposition to every form of sexual "licentiousness." Increasingly, though, his moral concerns came to involve not simply the improvement of individual human character but also the betterment of the human social condition in the interests of freedom and happiness. Through total abstinence in particular, he was exposed to dreams of a radically better world, to a millennial vision of a happy land freed from corrupting and debilitating drunkenness.\textsuperscript{23}

His first expressed social concern reflected his fundamental conservatism. In 1830 he condemned much of the public press for spewing out "torrents of falsehood" threatening to the good order and welfare of society, and he proposed the formation of "Newspaper Temperance Societies" to boycott those newspapers not committed to truth and morality. Ballou's social interests took a radical turn, however, when he discovered abolitionism. Previously, he had considered slavery to be a distant sin beyond his immediate moral concerns, but the often violent persecution of abolitionists in the 1830s convinced him otherwise. Before long, he concluded that John Wesley was right in condemning slavery as "the sum of all villainies," and he joined the ranks of the Garrisonian abolitionists. This movement significantly broadened his thinking regarding freedom and
equality. Having decided that the essential wrong of slavery was that it prevented personal moral development, he became an advocate of equal freedom and responsibility for all regardless of race or sex, thereby giving new depth and meaning to his belief in the brotherhood of mankind. By the end of the decade, his thoughts had shifted from heaven to earth, toward the hope of attaining, through the reform of society, freedom for all men and women to strive for holiness and happiness in this world.  

This tendency was brought into focus by his discovery, through Garrisonian abolitionism, of the doctrine of nonresistance. Nonresistants believed that God, acting through Jesus, had introduced a revolutionary new principle into human society by supplanting the old Hebraic practice of "an eye for an eye" with the injunction to love all, even one's enemies. In their view, the new law forbade physical resistance against anyone, including one's most threatening foes. They were not passivists, since they believed in the aggressive use of spiritual force, the active promotion of the good and true against every kind of sin. Physical force, however, they repudiated in any form, from the armed violence of war to attempts to coerce a person into doing anything he was not willing to do.

Initially, Ballou found the doctrine too radical for his tastes, but as he had done with other new ideas, he examined it in the light of both faith and reason and soon concluded that it was right. In 1839 he appeared at the annual meeting of Garrison's New England Non-Resistance Society, where he gave such an effective exposition of the doctrine that he was accepted as one of its leading advocates. Over the next few years, he developed nonresistance into a coherent moral philosophy, notably in his book *Christian Non-Resistance* (1846). He attempted to make the simple biblical principle "resist not evil" into a practical basis for human behavior. God, he believed, had chosen through Jesus's character and words to express a basic truth which if practiced by men would establish a Christian paradise. Nonresistance, in his view, was not simply a test of one's preparation for the afterlife but the practical basis for the kind of life that God had intended for man on earth and in a regenerated world.

Ballou rejected the prevailing contention that violence was often a necessary and natural act of self-defense on the grounds that the
practice of responding to evil with evil only enflamed the danger. He agreed that self-preservation was a natural instinct, but he denied that injurious force was the way to preserve life. Over the course of recorded history, "how happens it that, according to the lowest possible estimate, some fourteen thousand millions of human beings have been slain by human means, in war and otherwise?" Not all the uncontested murders and robberies in history could have produced anything like that havoc. In general, the armies, crusades, prisons, and gallows through which profane men had attempted to conquer evil had only produced more corruption and misery. The best hope for humanity, then, lay in a full commitment to nonresistance. 

Although he did accept some use of nonviolent force—to restrain a maniac, for instance—Ballou believed that the world could be saved only by moral power, which "operates on the affections, passions, reason, and moral sentiments of mankind and thereby controls them without physical force." Moral power was pervasive and creative, even in contrast with the legitimate force of government:

Moral power unites male and female in marriage, multiplies human beings, subdues the earth, increases wealth, forms neighborhoods, and builds cities. Political power takes the census, levies taxes, trains soldiers to do its fighting, and assumes the office of protecting the people. Moral power educates the people intellectually, religiously, morally, socially, and industrially. Political power tickles their ambition, uses up their substance, and punishes a few of their grosser crimes.

He rejected the prevailing political institutions of existing society. At the beginning of the decade, he had expressed the hope that "our most excellent form of government be perpetuated with all its ultimate blessings." Now he concluded that it was a Christian's duty to withdraw from government because it supported war, slavery, capital punishment, and other acts of violence. To hold office or even to vote was, therefore, to sanction violence. On the other hand, he did not advocate either resistance to government or even a complete disassociation from it. A Christian could make use of legal titles to property, patent inventions, and pay general taxes, provided that such things did not make him an accomplice in violence.
Ballou was careful to disavow the extreme anarchist implications of nonresistance: “We are not anti-socialists, nor insurrectionists. We know mankind are by nature social beings, and will associate somehow. . . . The method whereby social organization in a nation, state, or community executes its aggregate will is government.” He could at least dream of a truly Christian government and of a politics not of injurious force but of redeeming love and moral power.

Whatever his hopes for government, however, he was becoming much too radical for most of his Restorationist colleagues. When the Restorationist Association held its annual meeting in 1837, he submitted a series of resolutions for moral reform that began with the declaration that “it has pleased God in these latter days to awaken the special attention of the people to the prevailing vices, iniquities and corruptions of the age, and to excite them to extraordinary efforts for the reformation and improvement of their fellow men.” Many of his colleagues, however, seemed more interested in building a new religious denomination than in acting like Christians, and the resolutions were not submitted to a vote. By 1839 his new commitment to nonresistance deepened the split between himself and the conservatives, virtually assuring the breakdown of the Restorationist Association.

Again, however, he won new friends and associates, men and women who this time would accompany him to the end of his pilgrimage. As his local reputation grew, his home at Mendon became, as he called it later, “a sort of cabinet or place of resort for all kinds of reformers,” among them a number of people who shared his deepening devotion to a practical Christianity. Although Ballou was the leader of the group, he was far less a dominating figure than the first among equals, influenced by the ideas and enthusiasms of the others. Generally, this group was made up of the siftings from the reform-minded middle class of the Blackstone Valley, young townspeople of some talent and ambition who mixed with their religious concerns at least some anxiety over the depressed times that followed the Panic of 1837.

The most fateful of this group, since he became the most persistent mainstay of the Hopedale Community, was Ebenezer D. Draper of nearby Uxbridge, a textile town whose principal mill had been
thrown into bankruptcy by the panic. Eleven years younger than Ballou, Draper, the son of a Yankee inventor, combined a deep interest in morality with some practical business experience. In 1834 he had married Anna Thwing, who also was to become a significant member of Hopedale, as was her brother, Almon—another man with notable practical skills. By 1837 Draper's involvement with both temperance and abolitionism had led him to join Ballou's Mendon congregation, beginning a friendship that was to last for nearly fifty years. It was probably through Draper's influence that William W. Cook, a young resident of Uxbridge and later a successful florist, joined the group.33

The Uxbridge group brought a variety of skills and interests that made the building of Hopedale possible, but they were overshadowed in the beginning by several young ministers who constituted what Ballou called the "progressive" wing of Restorationism. Among them was his earlier associate in religious journalism, George Stacy, who had become a Restorationist minister at Carlisle, Massachusetts; in 1837, before his conversion to nonresistance, he had served for a term in the state legislature. Probably the most aggressively individualistic of Ballou's associates, Stacy was an ardent come-outer who hoped to liberate society from what he called "mental slavery" to sects and organized churches.34

Another minister who hungered for freedom was Daniel R. Lamson. A restless soul, Lamson had begun his ministry at Berlin, Massachusetts, in 1834, but by 1840 he was teaching school in West Boylston, where, so he claimed, he and his wife were persecuted for their religious views. Ballou found a far steadier associate in Daniel S. Whitney, a lifelong advocate of temperance, abolitionism, and rights for women. Although he eventually left the Hopedale experiment, Whitney was long remembered by Ballou as "a man of intelligence, sterling rectitude and honor," who made notable contributions to the cause of a practical Christianity.35

Ballou's staunchest ministerial ally was William Henry Fish, a fellow Rhode Islander. Born in Newport in 1812, Fish became a Restorationist soon after meeting Ballou in 1834. Three years later, with the latter's support, he became minister of a mixed Restorationist and Unitarian congregation at Millville, where he had frequent contacts with his mentor at nearby Mendon. Like the others, he was
a devout abolitionist and nonresistant. More than the rest, he was a visionary who saw in the radical religious ferment of his times the promise of a radically better life for man: "Our age is certainly a peculiarly interesting one," Fish wrote in 1840. "Does it not bear a strange resemblance to that in which the Savior dwelt in the flesh, than any one that has preceded it for centuries?" He did not believe in a literal reappearance of Christ on the Blackstone or anywhere else, but he was confident that the rising agitation against evil signaled the return of Christ's regenerative spirit, whose influence could create a heaven among men. "Human life, I know," he wrote in 1844, "might be as beautiful and as blessed as the 'angels'—a life of prosperity, of peace, of improvement—a life of intelligence and love." That was the founding spirit of Hopedale.

The road to Hopedale began to open in 1839 when, under the influence of nonresistance, Ballou and his loyal band decided to make a determined commitment to actually living their ideal of a thoroughly Christian life. At least since his acceptance of total abstinence in the early 1830s, Ballou had pondered the problem of converting intentions to do good into actual practice. He concluded that what was needed were clearly defined specific acts of virtue to which the individual would uncompromisingly pledge to conform his behavior. Not trusting the ability of the isolated person to maintain this commitment, he had also decided that some form of voluntary cooperation was needed to support individual moral behavior. In the spring of 1839 he met with Fish, Lamson, Stacy, and Whitney to work out a detailed plan of Christian moral conduct, "a faithful epitome of what is laid down in the New Testament to guide the practice of professed Christians." The result was a prolix "Standard of Practical Christianity," which they pledged to follow in every particular; signing the pledge with them were two laymen, William W. Cook and Charles Gladding, a young tailor from Millville.

The new Practical Christians declared that "our grand object is the restoration of man, especially the most fallen and friendless. Our immediate concern is the promotion of useful knowledge, moral improvement, and Christian perfection." They then listed the things that as Christians they were pledged not to do, a list that clearly reflected the influence of the moral reform movements to
which they had committed themselves in the 1830s, especially total abstinence, abolitionism, and nonresistance. Eventually, they condensed their statement into a more readable “Declaration,” which bound each signer

never under any pretext whatever to kill, assault, beat, torture, rob, oppress, defraud, corrupt, slander, revile, injure, envy or hate any human being—*even my worst enemy*; never in any manner to take or administer any oath, never to manufacture, buy, sell, or use any intoxicating *liquor as a beverage*; never to serve in the army, navy, or militia of any nation, state, or chieftain; never to bring action at law, hold office, vote, join a legal posse, petition a legislature, or ask governmental interpositions in *any case involving a final authorized resort to physical violence*; never to indulge self-will, bigotry, love of pre-eminence, covetousness, deceit, profanity, idleness, or an unruly tongue; never to participate in lotteries, games of chance, betting, or pernicious amusements; never to resent reproof or justify myself in a known wrong; never to aid, abet or approve others in anything sinful but through divine assistance always to recommend and promote with my entire influence the holiness and happiness of mankind.³⁸

Ballou and his friends intended the “Standard” to be a platform for a true Christian church as well as a basis for their own personal action. In their view, they were not attempting to found a new religious sect. Rather, they had compiled truths on which Christianity, riven by arid sectarian conflicts over doctrinal matters, could be reunited so that it might resume its mission to regenerate the world. To disseminate their views, they began, in April 1840, to publish a biweekly newspaper, the *Practical Christian*, devoted to “a faithful exposition, defence, and promulgation of Primitive Christianity.” Included in the first issue was the Standard of Christianity supported by a thicket of footnoted references to passages in the Bible; the first paragraph alone had nineteen footnotes. As editor of the fledgling paper, Ballou admitted that its backers were “few in numbers and feeble in resources,” but he found much hope in the essential righteousness of their cause.³⁹

Undoubtedly, the Practical Christians hoped to reap an abundant harvest of recruits from the growing number of religious rebels in New England who had “come-out” from the established religions.
Under the spur of anxious but hopeful times, the come-outers had determined to take their pursuit of holiness outside of what they took to be corrupted churches and a corrupt society, following the biblical injunction "come out of her my people, that ye partake not of her sins." When in August 1840 the radicals gathered for a "Christian Union" convention at Groton in northern Massachusetts, some of the Practical Christians attended. They were disappointed, however, by the manifest lack of unity among the delegates and by the limited interest in their cause. In other respects, too, the first year of their missionary effort seems to have had little effect beyond a few conversions in the immediate vicinity.

For more than twenty years, they were to cling to the hope that they could transform the governing spirit of the existing social order and so make the practice of true Christianity possible, but these early disappointments seemed to indicate that society had rendered people blind to the Christian promise. The oppressiveness of conventional religion hit close to home when in 1840 Lamson's wife, Mary, was expelled from her church because of her Unitarian views. For this as well as for other reasons, Ballou had also begun to feel oppressed by a situation under which "we of the nominal Christian ministry and church lived down faster than we could talk up true righteousness." In existing society, then, how could even the devout be able to conform their own lives to the Standard of Practical Christianity?

By 1840 these disappointments and the economically depressed times had begun to inspire thoughts of coming-out from the existing order and of creating new social conditions suited to a holy life. In September 1839 Ballou had concluded a long speech on nonresistance by attempting to picture how a nonresistant majority would manage the affairs of society: "They will propose measures, discuss them in friendship, and come to a conclusion in favor of the best—without wounding personal vanity or breeding a quarrel with each other's selfishness. The law of love and wisdom will prevail without strife, and all be eager to contribute their full share of expense and effort." At the time, he intended nothing more than a rather pious illustration of the practicality of nonresistance, but illustration led easily to thoughts of actually demonstrating that such behavior was possible. Initially, the Practical Christians considered buying a farm
to serve as "a sort of missionary outpost," but the idea soon grew into a dream of establishing independent communities for all of the faithful.  

Ballou first unveiled the dream in the 15 September 1840 issue of the *Practical Christian*, after noting that there had been much discussion among "our brethren" on the subject of establishing communities. The leading idea, he said, was to establish "a compact neighborhood or village of practical Christians, dwelling together by families in love and peace, insuring themselves the comforts of life by agricultural and mechanical industry and directing the entire residue of their intellectual, moral and physical resources to the Christianization and general welfare of the human race." Although Ballou did not try to provide all the details of such a community, he did emphasize that it would be firmly grounded in the Standard of Practical Christianity. He concluded the article in a burst of millennial enthusiasm:

> If one such community could be established, the number might be indefinitely multiplied over the whole face of the earth, till at length the kingdom of the earth should be absorbed into the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then the reign of ignorance, selfishness, pride and violence will be terminated among men, and the whole great brotherhood of our race dwell together in peace, under the immediate government of Him, to whom belongeth the kingdom, power and glory forever.

By this time Ballou had become convinced that God had made such a millennial state available to humankind. However, having decided, as he said later, that "we must try to build a new civilization radically higher than the old," he and his followers had to confront the problem of actually beginning the first community. How could the Standard of Practical Christianity be realized in practical social form? And how could a group as limited in its earthly resources as it was in numbers find the money needed to launch even the holiest social experiment? The effort to resolve such questions delayed the beginning of Hopedale by more than a year; the answers were imperfect, but they proved good enough to inaugurate one of America's more successful attempts to create a community at peace with its God.