The search for some form of property to serve both individual and communal good ranged far beyond the limits of Hopedale village. At least for its leaders, the village remained what it had initially been intended to be, "Fraternal Community No. 1," the first of an ever-growing number of Practical Christian communities that would eventually transform the world. It was to be, as Ballou put it, a "powerful concentration of moral light and heat" that would inspire all those who were dissatisfied with existing society to create Christian commonwealths of their own. By 1843 there were signs of progress in that direction. The *Practical Christian* published a report that a "Society of Practical Christians" recently formed in Pittsburgh was planning to establish a community in western Pennsylvania. This plan came to nothing, but it reflected a growing public interest in the formation of cooperative communities.

In New England the new spirit produced not only Hopedale and George Ripley's Brook Farm but John Humphrey Noyes's society of Christian Perfectionists at Putney, Vermont, and the more secular Northampton Association in western Massachusetts. Although each of these communities was founded on different principles, all were laboring, said William Henry Fish, "to realize the Kingdom of God on earth." Fish believed that they rode upon a rising tide of radical reform against what he and others saw as the inevitable tendency of existing society toward chaos, corruption, inequality, and misery:

What a contrast would a well-regulated Community present compared with the present order of things—especially in large towns
and villages. None very rich and none very poor, none worn out with excessive toil, none idle, no children growing up in ignorance, and none without friends—all, young and old, male and female, prosperous and making progress in knowledge and Christian excellence.2

These communities were in fact part of a larger search throughout the North Atlantic world for some kind of cooperative society that could prevent the rampant abuses of property. This search was a natural response, in a world of uneven economic progress, to the concentration of wealth and power and the growing dependence of labor on capital for work. In 1849, Ballou gave his version of the problem:

Capital is gaining power and influence every day. It is progressively assuming greater and greater importance throughout the civilized world. Who could prevent it, if he would; or would do so if he could? Property is good—indispensable in its place. . . . The problem then is to subject property to the great Christian law of love—to render it as powerful a means of promoting righteousness, peace, and happiness as it now is of promoting iniquity, selfishness, antagonism, war, violence, and misery.3

Broadly, the search was for some way to socialize property, to subordinate it to human needs and humane ends.

This emerging socialism promised to give new importance to Hopedale, but it also presented powerful competition, since most of the awakening American interest in cooperative communities was drawn to two European secular ideologies, Owenism and Fourierism, which soon dominated the debate over property. Almost twenty years after his failure at New Harmony, Robert Owen returned to the United States with the hope of awakening popular support for his form of communism. In 1845 he spent two days at Hopedale, where he won much admiration for his character but not for his cause. The greater part of the new cooperationism, however, was attracted to the more flamboyant but seemingly more practical doctrines of the French utopian Charles Fourier. Between 1843 and 1846 dozens of new communities were attempted along Fourierist lines.

Both movements raised questions of critical importance to Prac-
tical Christianity. Although Ballou admired Owen as a person, he detested the Englishman's communism and, even more, his doctrine that social circumstances were responsible for human character and behavior. In the spring of 1843 Ballou appeared at a "Property Meeting" of radical reformers in Boston in order to battle against the Owenite gospel. He spoke for individual property and moral responsibility, arguing that the cause of social evils lay neither in property nor in circumstances but in the heart of man. Any effort to reorganize society on the assumption that man was a "mere creature of circumstances," he said, was both undesirable and impracticable, since it neglected the need to reform the moral dispositions of individuals, which could be effected only under the influence of Christian nonresistance.

Ballou also had strong reservations about Charles Fourier, particularly the Frenchman's emphasis on the need to free human passions from the repressions of civilization, but Fourierism was a form of collectivism that seemed to share his respect for individuality and individual property rights. He assumed a significantly more positive attitude, therefore, when he and Daniel Whitney represented the Hopedale Community at a social reform convention held in Boston in late 1843 and early 1844. This largely Fourierist convention warmly received the Hopedale delegates, along with those from Brook Farm and the Northampton Association, as representatives of communities that had demonstrated some of the possibilities of cooperative life. Heartened by the general optimism of the convention, the three communities agreed to hold a series of conferences among themselves with the particular aim of studying "the practical workings of their respective internal economies, with a view to mutual correction and improvement." During 1844 their representatives met first at Hopedale and then at Northampton.

These conferences stopped before the close of the year, but not before they had furthered the interest in Fourierism, which Brook Farm had already adopted in the hope of giving its faltering economy greater energy and more effective organization. As in earlier years, Hopedale's commitment to the Standard of Practical Christianity prevented any affiliation with Ripley's society, and that same commitment also separated it from the Fourierist movement in general. Whereas Fourierism emphasized the satisfaction of the
passions, the Standard emphasized self-denial. Like the Brook Farmers, however, the Practical Christians were attracted to Fourierist plans for a well-ordered economic and social life in the form of the "phalanx." At a time of growing concern at Hopedale over the dangers of selfish individualism and of impatience over the slowness of development, the new scheme promised to provide for more effective and productive cooperation and to do it without resorting to communism, since it held to the same principles of joint-stock ownership and limited profits that had already been adopted.

How to have a cooperative society that would not weaken individual initiative and the will to work? In December 1844 the community adopted an elaborate "By-Law Respecting Industrial Organization" that provided for the organization of all resident members and their dependents into "Bands and Sections," each to engage in some specialized form of production under the general direction of an executive board. Every individual was to perform sixty hours of labor per week during the warmer half of the year and forty-eight hours during the remainder, with four vacation days per year. Whenever possible, each band was to consist of those members whose skills and interests matched its particular work.

In exchange, the community agreed to pay each adult member twenty-five dollars a year in spending money and to supply everyone with "house room, fuel, light, food, washing and mending, medicine, medical and nursing attendance, and conveyance by horse and carriage... fifty miles each per annum"; it was also to provide twenty hours per week of schooling to all children from the nursery to age eighteen. Profits from community industries were to be distributed first to the holders of the joint stock, up to the 4 percent maximum, and then to the general membership on the basis of the number of hours worked.

Ideally, this well-regulated economy would enable the community to mobilize its full productive power for the good of all. With the expected wealth, everyone would be guaranteed all of life's essentials "through health and sickness," regardless of one's contribution. Here, it was hoped, would be the basis for a cooperative order that could resist selfish egotism and assure true Christian brotherhood, where "religion, reason, and humanity have full scope without conflict." On the other hand, this system would avoid the dan-
gers of communism, since it provided for a return on capital and some rewards for labor. It also allowed for the individual possession of houses and house lots; those who had houses were to be given up to forty dollars a year in lieu of the housing provided to others.  

Ballou admitted that there were likely to be imperfections in this scheme, but he defended it as the basis for "the true social state" in which property "is so far common as to secure all the benefits of a united interest, and so far individual as to preserve personal rights from the encroachments of social tyranny." On matters relating to property and economic organization, he and most other members were empiricists willing to test any system that promised to realize the dream of cooperative Christian brotherhood and to reinforce the behavior required by the Standard of Practical Christianity.

One member who did not accept this well-ordered scheme was Ballou's longtime associate in prayer and printing, George Stacy. An original signer of the Standard, Stacy had taken on most of the responsibility for publishing the Practical Christian, the biweekly newspaper of the movement, helping to make it a superior example of both radical and religious journalism. This work, combined with his missionary efforts for the cause, had removed him from the day-to-day life of Hopedale, a remoteness that he found comfortable, particularly since his wife had persistently refused to join the Fraternal Communion. As his instincts were more individualistic than communal, he was not disposed to accept the new scheme, particularly when he recognized that it would incorporate the printing business into its organization. In late 1845, therefore, he withdrew from the Fraternal Communion and established his own printing business in nearby Milford. Over the next decades, he succeeded in combining a devotion to abolitionism and temperance with interests in both business and politics, but he permanently abandoned the idea of any kind of community, Practical Christian or otherwise.

In defense of his withdrawal, Stacy attacked the new system both as impractical and as a threat to individual freedom and integrity. If people were the Christians they were supposed to be, he said, it would be possible to have a loving and cooperative society without "the artificial and burdensome machinery" established at Hopedale; if they were not, then it was better to abandon any thought of
“forced” communal organization and to concentrate on converting individuals to true Christianity. The new arrangements, he warned, would eventuate in “despotism,” since the lazy and irresponsible would compel leaders to devise ways of forcing all to work. Better, then, that Hopedale entirely dissolve itself as a joint-stock community: “I am very certain that Christian neighborhoods would secure all the advantages now enjoyed or hoped for by communities without the useless theorizing and petty tyranny felt to be so essential.”

Stacy’s criticisms, published in late 1845 in the Practical Christian, were a powerful intellectual challenge to the Hopedale experiment, not least because they evoked the community’s own preference for individual integrity over social contrivances. The first response came from Clement O. Reed, a new member with distinctly Fourierist leanings and Hopedale’s elected “Intendant for Manufactures and Mechanical Industry.” Four years later Reed himself was to leave the community for New York City, where he played a leading role in founding an “extensive Bathing and Washing Establishment” designed especially for the poor. In 1845, however, he was satisfied with at least the idea of a well-ordered community. Although he conceded that the new organization was hardly perfect, he defended it as a “system of Christian equality” that would prevent the social evils engendered by individualism: “Here the strong help the weak.” Whatever its defects, it was far better than leaving the average person to the untender mercies of “individual integrity” in a society based on the principle of every man for himself.

Adin Ballou was reluctant to engage in a public dispute with his earliest convert. When Stacy complained of the lack of freedom at Hopedale, however, he was directly attacking what for Ballou was an enterprise as “dear to me as the apple of my eye.” Probably because he shared Stacy’s belief in the importance of personal integrity, he chose as his main line of defense an attack on Stacy’s own integrity. Contrary to Stacy’s portrayal of himself as a victim of communal oppression, said Ballou, the printer and roving minister had actually suffered little of Hopedale’s early privations while drawing on its benefits, including a profit denied to its leading residents: after having invested only $15 in the community, “he is going away with more than $200 nett savings, to set up printing within a
mile and a half of our press.” According to Ballou, the immediate cause of Stacy’s disquiet at Hopedale was a communal decision to ring a bell at 7:30 in the morning to summon everyone to work, a rule Stacy denounced, said Ballou, as “factory despotism” when it was simply a matter of good management.¹⁴

This exchange betrayed a decline in the religious enthusiasm that had inspired and sustained the Fraternal Communion in its early years. By the mid 1840s, religious radicalism in New England had begun to give way to more-secular forms of radicalism, and this had an effect on Hopedale, whose attitudes were also being influenced by a change of membership. In the first three years, nearly twenty members had left and an even larger number of new people had joined the community. Although new members like Clement Reed were committed to Practical Christianity, they were at least a step removed from the special conditions that had produced it in the late 1830s. For more than a decade, Hopedale would retain its special character and sense of mission, but the Primitive Christianity that had been its inspiring model was pushed further into the past, and the millennium that had been its compelling hope deferred further into the future.

In his address as president at the annual meeting of the community in January 1846, Ballou called Hopedale “a Bethlehem of salvation to the glorious social future” when “war is to cease, slavery is to cease, competition of interests to cease, false education, false religion, false government, false industry, false wealth, poverty and misery—all to cease.” He said, however, that this future might be generations and even ages away. Of more immediate importance to him was the growing wealth of the community, particularly its joint stock, which had quadrupled despite the loss of “several thousand dollars” used to settle accounts with those who had withdrawn. He was particularly proud that the community had finally produced a profit and one large enough to pay the promised 4 percent dividend on its stock, not only for the year but also for the preceding years. Although this last achievement depended in small part on a $124 donation from Ballou’s loyal friend Ebenezer Draper, it enabled the president to dream of a time when there would be profits beyond the 4 percent dividend to distribute among all the members.¹⁵

The first two years under the new system justified this optimism.
By 1846 Hopedale had become a “thriving little village” of some seventy residents with a dozen dwellings, a schoolhouse, a machine shop, and other facilities. And the community continued to improve its industrial base. It completed a second dam on the Mill River to increase available waterpower, added a sawmill and a blacksmith’s shop, and experimented with a soap-making business. It also took steps to expand what proved to be its most important business, the manufacture of temples for power looms in the textile mills (a temple is a device that keeps the cloth in the loom stretched to the proper width during the weaving process); in March 1847 the trustees of the community voted “that the Blacksmith Branch charge the forging of Temples to the Machine Branch at 70 cents and that the Machine Branch charge finished Temples to Finance and Exchange at 180 cents for the present year.”

This decision reflected Hopedale’s growing involvement in the outside economy, where the expansion of the New England textile industry was creating a steady demand for the appliance. By early 1847 the village had begun to advertise some of its businesses—notably printing, carpentry, and shoemaking, in addition to loom temples—with the announcement that it had installed boxes in nearby Milford where orders for its goods could be deposited.

Such policies expressed the will of a provincial middle class to create a manufacturing village shaped to their own needs and experiences. For most members, it was natural to look upon the mill towns of their native Blackstone region as forms of urban-industrial society comfortably shaped to a human scale. By adapting the mill village to Christian socialism, they hoped to avoid the future emerging at places like Boston and Lowell. On the other hand, they had no intention of basing their future on rural ways and on agriculture. Although they did do some farming, their thoughts were tuned chiefly to the new urban horticulture. In 1843 the community planted an apple orchard with 325 young trees shipped to it by a Practical Christian in Cincinnati, but its greatest effort went into its gardens. Its resident inspiration was the English-born Edmund Soward, a free spirit who had joined the group in 1843. An adept horticulturist, Soward willingly shared his plants and his knowledge with the other members; after his death in 1854, one member wrote, “When Spring and Summer and Harvest shall come around again—
the time for tomato-plants, for strawberries, for peaches—many will remember him.”

By 1846 Hopedale had a common garden and was offering gardening plots to anyone who might use them, even young boys. Of greatest importance, of course, were the plots owned by individual householders. To each householder who planted a garden, it provided from two to four cartloads of “good manure” per year and, to allow time for cultivation, exemption from twelve days of required work, in exchange for which the householder was to sell any garden surplus to the community at a fixed rate. In order to encourage each family to become as self-sufficient in food as possible, it also supplied those who were willing to raise poultry with fowls and with a bushel of grain per year for each hen.

Under the system adopted in 1844, the community was also obligated to provide every adult with twenty-five dollars a year in clothing and pocket money and to meet every person’s food, fuel, and lighting needs. Most of the goods were delivered on order from the community store to the resident’s house; supplying these goods and delivering firewood were the responsibility of the Department of Domestic Economy. Although there were no formal limits on consumption, accounts were kept of the costs of meeting these needs, for the purpose, said Ballou, of “enabling all to understand what relations our expenditures bear to our income.” In early 1847 this same accounting was applied to personal transportation, in the form of rent-a-carriage charges of nine cents per mile.

Hopedale seemed well on its way to fulfilling Ballou’s hope in 1841 that it would “feed, clothe, educate and maintain our families better than is now done by the middling class of society.” And it had attracted some respectful attention from the outside world, particularly from George Ripley, whose Brook Farm had collapsed in 1846. Although Ripley considered the Hopedale system to be “non-scientific” by the standards of Fourierism, he commended it as “a model of a Christian church” whose members were demonstrating that it was possible for people to “arrange their social relations, on the principle of Christian brotherhood, far better than others can do it for them on the system of selfishness and antagonism.”

Ripley concluded his article, however, by quoting a lament from Ballou that the community had ended the year 1846 with “a consid-
erable pecuniary loss," which prevented it from paying the 4 percent dividend. Ballou attributed this abrupt turnabout in part to an outbreak of sickness. Whereas in 1845 he was able to observe that no one had died at Hopedale, now he noted that death had become a familiar visitor: "We have been wasted by disease, bereaved by the destroyer, care-worn by anxious vigils over our emaciated friends, enfeebled in our industry, impoverished in our financial resources." The destroyer was typhoid, which caused the death of one woman and three children and depleted the health of a significant part of the small community. "Death has once more entered our fold," Ballou wrote regarding young Rebecca Brown, "and has taken one of the precious lambs of our fold." For nearly a month he had to suspend his editorial work for the Practical Christian in order to meet the labor needs of the community.22

Disease was only a part of the difficulty, though. By the end of 1846 Hopedale had also begun to experience troubles with its well-regulated economy that challenged its commitment to collective enterprise. Ballou and his associates knew the familiar argument that equal distribution of wealth encouraged laziness and irresponsibility, but they believed that they had found a way around the problem. Laziness, said William Henry Fish, was far more likely to occur in the old society, which allowed some to thrive without working while denying many the employments suited to their talents and interests. In contrast, a "well organized Practical Christian Community" would shame even the naturally lazy to work along with their brothers. Moreover, once it achieved its destined prosperity, it would be able to provide satisfying work for all: "Only a moderate degree will be required, and it will be performed, not merely to produce the immediate supply for the wants of the body, but to make for ourselves and our posterity a home of beauty, intelligence, refinement and love—'a kingdom of heaven on earth.'" In such a community of rewarding, transcendentally significant labor guided by the pervasive spirit of brotherly love, it would be natural for nearly everyone to do the best they could for the good of all.23

This happy state could only be achieved through sacrifice and hard work. In theory, the common commitment to Practical Christian behavior guaranteed both, and in fact there was much dedicated labor at Hopedale. By the end of 1846, however, Ballou had
concluded that actual production was not enough to overcome the adversities of that year. In November he delivered a long discourse on the need for productive industry, declaring, "I hold idleness to be a sin; useful labor a part of Christian righteousness" and arguing that since people were social beings dependent on society, everyone had an obligation to labor for the good of all. He soon followed this exhortation with a detailed scheme for the better utilization of available labor power. In his annual address to the community in January 1847, he proposed a plan to render industry "more efficient, pleasant, and productive" and implied that some of the members had been more interested in filling their quota of work hours than in actually producing.  

As approved by the community, Ballou's plan included "a distinct branch of business . . . to be called Domestic Industry," which was to enroll all women and children for useful community work when they were not otherwise employed at home or at school. And for workers in the established production branches, there was a "special recommendation" that they meet each Saturday evening to discuss ways of making their work more efficient. Also approved was a complex plan to evaluate labor in terms of its actual productiveness rather than its "mere duration," the value of labor in each branch of business to be set by the community in dollars and cents. In turn, this led to an effort to fix the price of both goods and services; in February, for instance, the transportation branch was authorized to charge the other branches 12.5 cents per mile for the hire of horses and wagons. At the same time, Ballou also tried to persuade his followers to consume no more than they produced by presenting them with what he described as "a very detailed report" on both the overall average costs of subsistence at Hopedale and "the specific costs of each family for ordinary supplies, for rent, fuel and other items."

The evident intention of this scheme was to revive the promising tendency of 1845. The specific goal was to pay the 4 percent dividend, which was acquiring significance, not just for itself, but because it represented the breakthrough point beyond which lay the dream of a growing surplus of wealth. If Hopedale could meet its obligations to those who had invested in it, it would be ready to demonstrate that a Christian commonwealth could guarantee to all
its members the benefits enjoyed in conventional society only by an advantaged minority.

Unfortunately, this venture pushed the well-regulated community all too close to the “petty tyranny” and cumbersome social machinery against which George Stacy had protested in 1845. During the first half of 1847 Ballou and his associates struggled to give energy and efficiency to their social machine but with little success. As a member of the Board of Trustees, the elected five-member board that controlled Hopedale’s property, Ballou found himself directly involved with a multitude of economic decisions on such matters as the sale of the community’s bull and whether its “Fruit Branch be connected with the Garden Branch.” In February the community’s Intendant of Agriculture and Animals abruptly resigned in protest against the new arrangements, leaving the already overworked president to prepare for the planting season. While he was entangled in these details, Ballou was also attempting to continue his work as head of the Practical Christian Communion; and with Stacy’s departure, he had been forced to shoulder the responsibility for issuing the Practical Christian, his principal pulpit in the world. By the spring, as he later recalled, a combination of physical exhaustion and mental pressure “seriously threatened an entire collapse of my system.”

The willingness of the strong to dedicate their talents to the welfare of the weak had its limits. As overburdened as he was, Ballou would undoubtedly have been willing to continue the experiment if it had begun to succeed, but he finally concluded that it was becoming increasingly “embarrassed by the friction of a complex industrial machine, multifarious counsel, protracted discussions, diverse judgments, and tardy cooperation.” Aside from overtaxing the more enterprising members, the scheme’s chief effect seems to have been to have made the less capable, responsible, and satisfied members even worse. And Hopedale could find little reason for hope outside, since the popular enthusiasm for Fourierism, which had influenced it in 1844, had fizzled; Brook Farm had collapsed, as had most of the other phalanxes, which had been launched with expectations of great benefits from well-organized communal economies. It seemed to be time for a change in direction.

In June Ballou published a long disquisition entitled “Social Re-
organization” in which he condemned society's failure to reconcile “individualism and socialism,” leaving them “perpetually at war—blindly and madly consuming their resources in a quarrel which only renders a bad matter worse.” His principal concern was to persuade his own community of its failure to find, as yet, the correct balance between the two principles. Although he was ready to acknowledge the importance of social influences on human behavior, he returned to his old emphasis on the essential importance of individual moral responsibility, and he listed the principal evils to be expected from an excessive emphasis on social organization: “over responsibility in the cares of management, irresponsibility and carelessness in the naturally unenterprising, friction of uncongenial intimacy, and the abridgment of personal independence.”

Apparently, most members of the community agreed that some fundamental change in its organization was necessary. They soon began to meet to determine what could be done, appointing a special committee to rewrite their constitution, and on 17 July 1847 they approved its plan of reorganization. The result was an entirely new constitution that replaced the Constitution of the Fraternal Communion originally approved in 1841 and much amended since. Significantly, the new plan was designed not for some national communion of—in theory—many communities but specifically for the Hopedale Community. And its preamble boldly proclaimed an intention to establish a community “with as little as possible of mere human constraint, in which all members may be perfectly free to associate or separate their secular interests according to inclination and congeniality.” It was a landmark in Hopedale's history, bringing to an end the effort to create a Christian socialism exclusively on the basis of the collective ownership of property and the collective management of labor.

In line with this new policy, the community's Board of Trustees was instructed to sell off or rent out the productive property owned in joint stock to individual members. Consequently, the gristmill, sawmill, and machine shop were leased, and smaller businesses like shoemaking, transportation, and even the medical department were sold outright. Within a month Ballou announced that he had become sole proprietor of the Practical Christian and its printshop; as such, he said, he planned to relinquish “those cares and labors
which have confined him so closely to the secular affairs of the Community, and will hereafter devote himself to the more general service of humanity as editor and publisher." Although he remained as president of the community and one of its trustees, he was plainly quite content to escape from the well-organized life of the past.

He insisted, however, that this did not mean an abandonment of Christian socialism, nor did it. The community continued to own its farmlands, school, and that part of the village proper which had not been sold to individual owners, and it continued to operate its store, where groceries could be obtained at cost. Even some of those businesses that were to be sold or rented out remained under its control. In 1849, for instance, the community offered to rent its carpentry shop to any association of members willing to furnish employment at a "fair" wage and to turn excess profits over to the education fund; when it found no takers, it assumed direct responsibility for the carpentry business.

Equally important, all property was controlled by those pledged to the Standard of Practical Christianity; no one who had not agreed to the pledge was allowed to own property or to reside permanently in Hopedale. Under the influence of Practical Christianity, it was at least likely that various individuals would voluntarily associate their interests for the mutual benefit of themselves and the community. Moreover, the community had in the preamble of its new constitution guaranteed that "no individual shall suffer the evils of oppression, poverty, ignorance, or vice, through the influence or the neglect of others," a guarantee that included employment for the able and charity to the disabled.

Ballou rightly denied that Hopedale had become a mere "neighborhood" little different from conventional society. It remained dedicated to nonresistance and the other principles of the Standard, which formed the bedrock for its social experiments. At a time of growing misery and conflict in the world, the village could boast that it had no poverty, no crime, no drunkenness, no unemployment, no slavery, and no violence; nor did it squander its wealth on war, jails, or a corrupted and burdensome government. It continued to demonstrate to the world that it was possible to guarantee to everyone "comfortable subsistence, moral order, and all the great
essentials of individual and social welfare.” In these ways, it re­
mained an example of Practical Christian socialism which, while
recognizing individual possessions, had socialized property for the
good of all, combining “the largest innocent individuality and the
largest social cooperation.” As such, it pointed the way toward a
solution to the great problem of the age: “Property must be Chris­
tianized. Otherwise it will Mammonize and Atheize nominal Chris­
tiandom.”

Eventually, property would triumph over love even at Hopedale,
but the following years affirmed Ballou’s faith. Having settled its
fundamental questions, the community entered into its golden age,
materially and morally. Although it fell short of a realized utopia,
it did seem to demonstrate that Practical Christianity could even­
tually bring humankind to the gates of heaven, where righteous­
ness, peace, and happiness would prevail.