The 1850s was a time of notably mixed blessings both for the world and for the Hopedale Community. In some respects, this opening of the second half of a progressive century reinforced hopes for the eventual triumph of Practical Christianity. "A new Christian chivalry has sprung up within our century," declared the Universalist Quarterly in 1851. "Want, darkness, suffering and oppression are beginning to be studied . . . in the light of the law of brotherhood, the supreme good of spiritual culture, and infinite value of the soul." In other respects, however, the surge of spirituality and morality intensified the passions, especially over the slavery issue, that engendered violence and led eventually to the Civil War. On the great moral and economic tides of the times, Hopedale was to be first raised to high expectations and then dashed to despair.

In May 1854 Ballou began the fifteenth volume of the Practical Christian with an editorial on the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon, he said, was a great epitome of the spirit and principles of Practical Christianity, a code of conduct without the doctrines and dogmas over which Christians had long quarreled, a simple code that if only men had followed it "would have regenerated the entire human race before this time, and rendered the habitable globe a paradise." If Hopedale had only imperfectly realized this promise, it had for Ballou demonstrated how the code could bring harmony and happiness to those who practiced it. In 1855 he said that the village afforded "a peaceful and congenial home for all conscientious persons of whatever religion, sect, class or description," enabling them to meet the needs of both body and mind through rational Christian cooperation. There Christians could invest both money and energy
with moral as well as financial safety, since property had been made "pre-eminently safe, useful, beneficent. It is Christianized. So, in good degree, are talent, skill, and productive industry." Seemingly, where property holders were governed by the obligations of Practical Christianity, capitalistic instincts could coexist with brotherhood and love.

The village was not an isolated island of Christian socialism, however, but a tiny vessel attempting to navigate the world's often stormy seas during a time of chaotically uneven prosperity. Having determined to demonstrate that it was possible to combine Christianity with economic security and physical comforts—and to do so in the familiar confines of a settled area, the community paid for its successes with a growing dependence on the outside economy. In the new age of railroads and quickening activity, what in 1840 had been the semiautonomous little world of the Mill River Valley was fast becoming a part of a larger economic world. By the mid 1850s surrounding Worcester County had become a leading manufacturing county in a manufacturing state, ranking first in the number of manufactories and second in the production of cotton cloth, much of the cloth coming from mills in nearby towns such as Blackstone and Uxbridge. Hopedale's own town of Milford had developed into an important boot- and shoe-producing center, employing nearly 3,500 men and women in that line. In this changing world even the Christian village would be affected by what one of its members condemned in the world's progress: "It is rash and irreverent. It rushes with railroad speed over the Holy Land itself... crushing beneath it the most Paradisal flowers without remorse."

During the early 1850s the community was able to bask in the sunny side of economic progress. In 1854 Ebenezer Draper, Ballou's successor as president, estimated that over the previous decade the value of its communal and private property had risen from less than $12,000 to more than $90,000; in 1853 alone, it had added more than $17,000 to its holdings, chiefly new houses, shop buildings, and equipment. By 1855 it had nearly six hundred acres of land, fifty houses, a cooperative grocery store, a printing establishment, a saw-mill, a gristmill, and "several mechanic shops with water power." And its progress was evident in more than its financial and indus-
trial accounts. "The general appearance of the Village is improving from year to year," wrote William Heywood in the summer. "New dwellings are going up; new streets opening; new sidewalks made; new House Lots taken up and cultivated; fruit and ornamental trees take their place and extend their branches along the public ways." The once rundown farm had become the site of a prospering village with nearly three hundred inhabitants; in 1854 Hopedale's self-financed post office handled nearly seven thousand letters, private and commercial, to and from the official post office at Milford.\(^5\)

The Hopedale experiment was perhaps too undramatic in appearance as well as too complex in reality to win much attention from the great world, but it did attract the interest of some people within its own region. Both the Milford Journal and the Woonsocket Patriot took note of its successes, and a visitor from Providence wrote a poem celebrating its virtues:

In your magic bowers would linger,
In your homes would long abide,
But it may not be, for tendrils
Stretching homeward, draw me back.
I must go once more and journey
In the old and beaten track.\(^4\)

Other people came to stay. Between 1852 and 1856 the population of the village increased by nearly 50 percent, and the number of members of the community rose by nearly as much, from 75 to approximately 110. In 1853 some 40 people applied for membership, of whom 18 were admitted either as probationers or as regular members; in just two months of the following year, the community voted to admit 14 persons to membership.\(^5\)

The rapid increase of newcomers caused some concern. Early in 1854, after the free-love scandal of the previous year, the Council of Religion, Conciliation and Justice—one of whose duties was to examine applicants for membership—urged the community to demand the highest moral character in every applicant. Better that Hopedale limit its growth than to open itself to the influence of the old social order: "It is acknowledged on all hands that this Community presents far greater attractions for the worldly wise, at the
present time than it did ten years hence.” Apparently, the majority paid little heed. In 1855, Heywood complained of the laxity of admission standards. Only too late would there be occasion for regret.

During the good years, the new members seemed to fit readily into community life. However little they understood the special character of Practical Christian socialism, they generally came from the same local culture that had nurtured the experiment, men and women with at least some interest in radical reform and progressive religion. Often, they were come-outers from conventional institutions who sought a home. One new member, Jonathan Whipple, had belonged to the “Rogerine Quakers,” a religious group peculiar to one locality in Connecticut, while another, Harriet Greene, was a feminist and spiritualist. Justus Soule had first been attracted to the village by an advertisement for a husband placed in the Phrenological Journal by Mary Ann Heywood, one of four unmarried sisters; Soule liked what he saw and became both a husband and a member. Still another newcomer, George Gay, had once been a Universalist minister. At Hopedale these people seem on the whole to have found the opportunity to satisfy their special needs and dreams.

Life at Hopedale was not for everyone. No one there was to keep or use any deadly weapon, and all were obligated to “discountenance utterly in any of our children the use of all warlike, savage-like, or ruffian-like toys, playthings, sports and amusements.” No one was to drink an alcoholic beverage, gamble, swear, or engage in anything that could be viewed as dissolute behavior. Nor could anyone have a dog, since the normally tolerant Ballou had a strong aversion for what he saw as useless beasts noted only for their “endless fightings, growlings and barkings.” Beyond the outright prohibitions were the more subtle restraints of communal expectations. While not prohibited, “idle words and foolish jesting” were discouraged, as were tobacco using and coffee drinking. By the 1850s many of the villagers had become interested in the dietary practices proposed by Sylvester Graham and other members of their progressive reform culture. They were especially inclined toward vegetarianism, limiting meat to a small part of their diet if they ate flesh at all. In “our general practice,” wrote William Heywood in 1854, “two or three pounds of choicest beef, free from fat as possible, has been deemed admissible to our larder once in three, four, or six weeks.”
With its strong commitments to specified behaviors, Hopedale was not a place for the freewheeling individualist. But it was not an uncomfortable place for those who, under the influence of moral reform, dreamed of a society without drunkenness, brawls, gambling, bickering, petty meanness, and the other seemingly endless causes of the social friction, wasted effort, and personal unhappiness that afflicted the world. In 1856 one sympathetic observer called Hopedale “a great and excellent social-reform institution” in which there was “nothing crazy or visionary, but everything . . . required by nature, reason, and the highest good of mankind.” In such a view, the community represented not moral repression but the beginnings of a new moral order that would free humankind to live a higher and happier life in a world without violence, war, slavery, crime, or poverty.

Certainly, a not insignificant part of that life already existed at Hopedale. Along with the exclusion of slavery and violence, there was security from poverty and a guarantee of productive work in a community obliged to use its resources to provide for all of its members. And there was the chance for women as well as men to participate in the decisions that affected their lives. There was schooling for the children and informal education for adults in the weekly lyceum. There were periodic festivals, singings, and musical affairs. Along with security, the village provided opportunities for a satisfying social and cultural life beyond those available to most Americans in either city or countryside.

Of course, even Hopedale, as Ballou had learned, was not protected from the tragedies of life. In July 1853 Ida A. Draper, the five-year-old adopted daughter of Ebenezer Draper, died suddenly from scarlet fever soon after she had given her first recitation at a community festival; she was the Drapers’ only child. Before the end of the summer, two other children died suddenly from dysentery, and another drowned in the village millpond. The year ended with the death of twenty-eight-year-old Hannah H. Swazey from “bilious cholera.” Ballou visited her as she was dying: “She welcomed him with a smile at once ghastly and angelic, as if one about to join some blessed circle in the Spirit-Home. She had just had a delightful vision of God and heaven, and beckoning angels; and said she was ready to ascend to their embrace.”
In general, life in the village, as elsewhere, was dominated by the need to earn one's bread by the sweat of physical labor. "We are troubled by no idlers, loafers," reported the Practical Christian. "If there be any not sufficiently supplied with manual labor, they are expected to be employed about something else that would make them useful to themselves and to mankind." And the wages paid for labor, while at least adequate, were hardly in the utopian range: In 1854 the combined community and private operations of the village paid out a total of $21,410 to an undisclosed number of workers. Of this amount, $16,410 went to some eighty resident members, an average income of about $200 each. Undoubtedly, pay for skilled workers was greater. During a three-month period in the spring of 1854, for instance, the Cabinet Branch paid out on the average more than $30 a month to each of its four full-time workers, but there were sharp fluctuations in pay, the four averaging less than $18 a month each in November. Two years later annual living costs in the village were estimated to be about $145 for a single man and $200 for a married couple "keeping house in a small tenement with a little garden."\(^\text{12}\)

Whatever its present limitations, Hopedale could continue to look to the future it was building for itself. In time, it would attain the "new and glorious Christiandom" that Ballou predicted for it, a godly society solidly grounded in economic success. Part of this success was to be found in the various private businesses allowed in the village since the great changeover of 1847, especially that operated by Ebenezer Draper. Before joining the community, Draper had acquired the rights to the self-acting loom temple developed by his inventor father, Ira Draper. When he had come to Hopedale from Uxbridge, he brought his new business with him and it produced a modest but growing income, the loom temple being much valued for its ability to speed up the weaving process. Because of Draper's devotion to Practical Christianity, his private affairs were closely related to those of the community, much of his income being invested in various village enterprises for communal good.\(^\text{13}\)

Soon the Hopedale Community would recognize that it was too dependent on Draper's success, but during the prosperous years of the early 1850s the community itself accomplished substantial economic progress. Part of this involved the expansion of the commu-
nity's joint-stock enterprises, like its Machine Branch, which employed as many as a dozen operatives in the manufacture of tools, hardware, and other small metal appliances, and also its Transportation Branch, whose teams of horses and wagons were hired for hauling materials in the surrounding area. Although Hopedale had become somewhat more cautious than it had been in the 1840s in promoting new industrial enterprises, it continued to diversify. It created a new Soap and Candle Branch managed by its chemical wizard, Dudley B. Chapman, who by 1855 was advertising a chemical soap of his own invention, called Eureka, for sale to the world. By then it had added a "book bindery and blank book manufactory," a logical complement to its established printing business; the new operation was soon advertising in the Practical Christian that, being "supplied with the best modern equipment," it was prepared to provide blank books for diaries, ledgers, and drawing as well as other kinds of paper such as sheet music and ruled paper.¹⁴

Growth brought complexity. In early 1855 the community voted to erect an "Advertising Bulletin" at a central location in order to "facilitate the daily publication of necessary commercial and business information." To accommodate its expanding business operations, it also established a "Contingent Fund" to provide short-term credit both to its own branches and to private businesses within the village. Even with these improvements, Hopedale remained a petty economy by the world's standards, but it seemed to be making steady progress in realizing what one of its members in 1855 called "the hope of ultimate strength, productiveness, maturity, order, and self-subsisting competency," a competency that would assure adequate care and employment for all its members.¹⁵

The community also made some notable efforts to strengthen the softest spot in its economy, agriculture. Although in 1852 more than half of its capital assets consisted of land, farming employed less than a quarter of its work force, and most of its nearly six hundred acres was unimproved and unproductive.¹⁶ Its village-oriented members had a natural preference for trade and manufacturing, but at the same time they were governed by the romantic view of agriculture common to their day. Most probably agreed with Ballou when he declared that agriculture was the God-intended way to paradise:
The first man was an agriculturalist, a gardener. The last man will be such. What a pleasant thought is this—that in the far-off future, nearly the entire surface of this earth will be tilled to the perfection of a garden, and teem with perhaps fifty or a hundred times its present population—all wise, holy and happy. So predict the prophets of God. So sing the divinest of bards.17

This biblical vision was to be attained by modern means. Ballou urged the community, as part of its "ground culture," to carry out an analysis of its soil to determine what could best be grown and what "chemical changes are necessary to render it productive," no easy task given the poor quality of local soils. Anticipating increased agricultural production, the community borrowed two thousand dollars to construct a large barn for its crops and livestock, a belated replacement for the much repaired farm buildings from the original purchase. Financed through the sale of a new issue of joint stock, the barn was begun in May 1854, but its construction suffered a setback resulting from the community's decision to experiment with gravel walls as a way of cutting costs: after raising the walls to a height of twenty feet, it was concluded that they were too weak and would have to be partly rebuilt with wood, delaying completion of the work until the summer of 1855. The barn was eighty feet long, forty feet wide, and nearly thirty feet high, making it, with its large cupola-ventilator, "the most conspicuous building on the domain."18

The great barn bolstered the hopes of the community that its Agricultural Branch could be made more effective and that its extensive farm could be made far more productive than before. No action, however, did much to remedy the basic defects in agriculture, neither improving the fertility of the soil nor converting the members into farmers. The principal result of the efforts to enlarge farm production seems to have been the planting of about twenty-five acres in potatoes and corn—out of some five hundred acres of available community land. In general, there was little to affirm the claim of one member that the principal "business of the people should be the cultivation of the soil." Later Ballou said that the community's farm had been a drain on its finances, and he concluded that, rather than trying to work the domain collectively, it would have been better to have divided the land into individual holdings.19
While the cultivation of the soil continued to lag in the Agricultural Branch, it continued to flourish in the Horticultural (chiefly market gardening) and Orchardry (fruit raising and nursery stock) branches. Between 1854 and 1855 Horticulture expanded from eight to twelve acres the land devoted to growing vegetables, to meet a large demand in Milford and elsewhere; in 1855 the community opened a store in Milford center for the sale of its produce, while continuing its past practice of making deliveries by market wagon to its regular customers. By the 1850s the Orchardry branch was benefiting from the some two thousand apple trees that had been planted on the community domain over the years, along with a smaller number of other fruit trees. In the spring of 1855 the community was confronted with an invasion of caterpillars, which had stripped the leaves from neighboring orchards: “By constant watching and considerable labor,” the invaders were nearly all destroyed in Hopedale. The most profitable part of Orchardry was the nursery, which did an extensive business in the sale of fruit and ornamental trees, grapevines, berry bushes, and various kinds of shrubs and flowering plants to the outside world.  

The vitality of such ventures reflected the existence of strong entrepreneurial instincts at Hopedale. In 1854 the village welcomed a new and important venture that promised to partly fulfill Ballou’s long-deferred dream of a great Educational Home. The death of Adin Augustus Ballou early in 1852 had disrupted that dream, but his father kept it alive with the encouragement of some of his associates; a quarterly conference called the school “an enterprise which the world greatly needs as promotive to its individual and social redemption.” Although Ballou had discussed it at length in his *Practical Christian Socialism*, he was too busy with his missionary work to start the school himself, but he probably paved the way for its establishment by Mr. and Mrs. Morgan Bloom, newcomers who had not even seen Hopedale until 1853. It was with the community’s sanction that in October 1854 the Blooms—previously associated with the Five Points Mission in New York City—opened their Hopedale Juvenile Home School, a boarding and day school for boys and girls between five and seventeen.  

In their advertising the Blooms emphasized the moral order and healthful environment of the village. It would, they promised, com-
plement their efforts to give each child “a healthy body, a well toned mind, and a loving heart,” preparing him or her “to detect and combat evil, and discern and desire to follow good and truth.” At the school the young Christians would become well equipped to deal with the ways of world, since they would learn not only habits of productive labor but the value of money and the art of keeping accounts; all students were expected to do some work, for which they would be credited on the school’s accounts.22

The Juvenile Home School was a rather bare shadow of Ballou’s ambitious Educational Home; it opened in one of the larger houses in the village rather than in the great academy building of which he had dreamed two years before. Moreover, the Blooms had trouble attracting boarding students—at forty dollars per quarter—perhaps because they were strangers to New England. In 1855 they attempted to expand their enrollment by adding an adult department to their renamed Hopedale Juvenile and Collegiate Home School, striving to make it “a well ordered HOME, in which youth . . . middle-aged, and elderly people should compose the family, and unite in instructing each other.” This experiment apparently did not help, however, since in April 1856 they sold the school to William and Abbie Heywood; the Blooms’ last reported activity at Hopedale was an attempt to run a boardinghouse for summer vacationers.23

The sale opened the way for what proved to be the more successful Hopedale Home School, a venture especially consoling to Ballou because it was the accomplishment of his daughter and son-in-law. William was principal and teacher of ancient languages, higher mathematics, philosophy, chemistry, and English literature, while Abbie served as associate principal and teacher of French, phonography, history, botany, physiology, painting, drawing, and penmanship. With the assistance of a few part-time teachers, the two attempted to provide a “thoroughly Reformatory and Progressive” academy and precollegiate education for older youth, especially for those who favored “the better tendencies and movements of the age.” Although they maintained the Blooms’ emphasis on moral and physical culture, the Heywoods gave particular emphasis to the development of disciplined reason and intellectual self-reliance. They announced that they conducted their classes “in the spirit of inquiry
rather than dogmatism," in accordance with the method Abbie had learned in normal school:

Oral teaching is mingled freely with that derived from text-books. *Mere* book-knowledge is of comparatively little value. An accumulation of facts... does not constitute the wealth of the intellect... Hence the importance of the analytical method of instruction, which investigates the reasons and uses of things, unfolding "the why and whereof" of every operation and assertion. This method is rigidly adhered to, in order to the revealment and elucidation of great principles and general truths.24

Until the Civil War disrupted its enrollments, the Heywoods' Home School seemed well on its way to becoming a successful educational enterprise. Beginning with 28 full-time students in 1856, it increased its enrollment to over 50 by 1858. In the two years from 1857 to 1859 the Heywoods educated at least 167 different students on a coeducational basis. Most were boarders, the children of progressive parents from as far away as Boston who were willing to pay sixty dollars per term; but more than 25 of Hopedale's own children were able, for nine dollars a term, to get at least some academy education without leaving home. Beyond its contributions to Hopedale's income and culture, the Home School promised to satisfy the provision in Ballou's Constitution of the Practical Christian Republic for an education that would "develop harmoniously the physical, intellectual, moral and social faculties of the young," inducing not simply sound morals and good habits but a sound mind "capable of inquiring, reasoning and judging for itself" and a healthful, vigorous body.25

The school helped round out what seemed by the mid 1850s to be the successful establishment of a godly community suited to modern conditions. On the surface at least, Hopedale was able to combine a strong commitment to brotherly love and practical morality with a notable amount of personal energy and entrepreneurship. In its economy, it had worked out a balance between socialism and individualism, especially in its property relationships. On the socialistic side, its collective joint stock owned the basic resources in land and waterpower, along with the school, the great barn, and various shop
buildings; every member could acquire a claim on the 4 percent dividend guaranteed to stockholders by purchasing one or more of the fifty-dollar shares in the collective. On the individualistic side, it was possible for members to acquire considerable amounts of their own private property. As early as 1850 the census taker indicated that of twenty-seven people clearly identified with the community, at least fifteen were property owners. Of these, Ballou was credited with the $35,000 in joint stock held by the community, but fourteen others had individual holdings of between $800 and $2,000, much of it in the tools of their trade; most of the rest probably had some property.  

The decision to allow and indeed to encourage private ventures like Draper's production of loom temples and the Heywoods' Home School contributed significantly to Hopedale's overall development. In 1856 a correspondent for William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator, in presenting the village as a working example of the nonresistance paradise, made note of a significant reason for its economic success: "A few men of capital and business talent generously devote them to establish business and furnish employment." Ballou was thinking of this entrepreneurship when he praised the community for having found a way to harmonize individual freedom and social obligation: "All may thrive together as individuals, without degrading or impoverishing any." And so socialism, with its stress on collective welfare, was able to benefit from the energy of capitalism.

As Ballou was well aware, the lion did not lie down easily with the lamb, but he believed that the requirement limiting ownership in the village to those who had agreed to abide by the Standard of Practical Christianity virtually guaranteed that the more energetic and successful would use their talents and property for the welfare of all. With economic power safely confined to members of the Practical Christian community, property could grow in extent and power without threatening peace and brotherhood. For a time, it seemed as if this were true as Hopedale entered the mid 1850s. "It thrived in all departments," Ballou later recalled, "materially, socially, and religiously." Its foundations seemed secure.

It soon became apparent, however, that there were several cracks in those foundations, including two that were particularly serious. One was a weakening of religious zeal and of commitment to the
godly mission of the community, a natural consequence of prosperous times. That crack might have widened for years before it became fatal if not for a second flaw, one that in 1855 was imperceptible to the common eye. This involved not the heart and inspiring word but the calculating brain and the account book—and a new, dominating figure who would soon give Hopedale a very different direction from that which Ballou had planned.