

CHAPTER VI

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE CAME?

Howard R. Russell, in his book, "A Lawyer's Examination of the Bible," provides this interesting quotation from James Russell Lowell. When Mr. Lowell was Minister of State to England, he rebuffed critics of Christianity with these pointed words:

"I will challenge such skeptics to find a place ten miles square on the globe, where a man can live in comfort, security, and decency, where he can find education for his children, reverence for infancy and old age, honor for womanhood, or any sacred regard for human life, where the gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way, laying a foundation for such a condition of affairs. If they can find such a place, it will then be in order for them to emigrate thither and advocate their unbelief. Scoffers against religion are dependent upon the religion they discard for every privilege they enjoy as citizens of a Christian community." (Pages 191-192)

In this regard, we must admire Mr. Walser for having the courage to put his theories into practice. He didn't like Christianity, thought it was wrong, and therefore tried to improve on the efforts of the pilgrims. Unfortunately, things did not go as smoothly as he had planned.

Again, I quote from Clark Braden. Mr. Braden visited Liberal during those early turbulent years when liberalism was unalloyed by the moderating influences which came later. These words were written in 1886:

"No doubt there are infidels all over the United States and Canada, who long for a sight of this infidel land of Canaan, and its new Jerusalem, as devout Mohammedans long for a sight of Mecca, and for the same reason, they have never seen it. Hundreds have been duped into making the pilgrimage to this Infidel Utopia, only to waste time and money in the journey, or worse, to be swindled and losing all they invested . . . there was no lack of free love . . . Liberal was famous for its lawsuits. If an infidel got mad at another, he rushed before a magistrate or to Lamar, and charged his enemy with some

Liberal, Missouri

GEORGE H. WALSER

crime or misdemeanor . . . There was no trouble to get men and women to swear what was wanted . . . perjury was gross and infamous . . . profanity has ever been the commonest form of speech in Liberal."

Braden alleged one particularly distressing incident that involved Mr. Walsler himself:

"The town was notorious for its rows and scrapes. We have mentioned the brutal assault of the Walsers on Grayson. Walsler tried to swindle Gilmore, the man who opened his mines. In a suit Gilmore's evidence was believed . . . the cowardly Walsler ruffians followed him into a store, and while old Walsler stood before him and abused him, the cowardly ruffian, Mark Walsler, sneaked up behind him and knocked him down with a weight. Then, the two ruffians stamped and kicked their helpless victim, splitting his ear, his lip, and fracturing his jaw. Old Walsler tauntingly yelling at him, 'God damn you, why don't you lie still?'"

If you think Braden was wrong, or that he overstated the sad state of affairs in Liberal, why don't you try the same experiment on your own? First, either move to some remote place on the globe where there is no Bible or Christian influence, or start a city on your own as Walsler did. Make sure you emphasize that you do not want the Bible and Christian influence. Do not be surprised if such a community becomes a sewer, filled with the dregs of human society.

J.P. Moore regretted Braden's approach, though he did admit that there were a "few rotten apples in the barrel." Moore cited Mr. and Mrs. J.K. Belk as an example of people whom he considered to be "an honorable and highly respected couple, and useful citizens." He said they would have "abhorred any thought of Freeloze" though some accused them of being "votaries of that cult."

All I know about the Belks is related by Moore in his book, *The Strange Town*. The essence of what he told about them, however, defeats his own arguments. The history of the Belks actually substantiates the theory that people came to Liberal to escape the responsibility of moral restraints.

On page 135 Moore relates that:

"Mr. and Mrs. J.K. Belk came to Liberal from northwestern Kansas in 1881.

Liberal, Missouri

GEORGE H. WALSER

They were Freethinkers, and because of that they were attracted to Liberal. They were wealthy, and through their daughter, Mrs. Lillian Myrtle Belk-Branson-Sibley, the city of Liberal and the Liberal school district came into a considerable portion of their wealth, by bequest."

On page 160 Moore informs us that Belk had two sons by a previous wife. This information was obtained "by chance." It seems that a resident of Liberal, Mary Burgess, made a trip to California. While she was there, she just happened to meet a woman by the name of Belk. It turned out to be Mr. Belk's first wife. The first Mrs. Belk was amazed to hear that her husband was still alive. Belk was a stage coach driver, and when he didn't come home, she assumed he had been killed in an Indian massacre. She had no idea that he had a new "Mrs. Belk" and was living in Liberal, Missouri.

Moore continued the story on p. 161:

"This story was corroborated by one of these sons, who came here after his father's death in 1917, on behalf of himself, his brother and their mother, and demanding a share in their father's estate. He found that title to the real property had been transferred to the daughter. But he did receive a substantial cash settlement. In proof, this son, who was a frequent visitor in my office while here, exhibited to this writer a check and a bank draft, totaling \$20,000, that had been given to him by Mrs. Belk, to satisfy his claim without litigation. If there was to be more, he did not say."

I think it was Ross Perot who said: "If a man's wife can't trust him, why should I?"

Liberal, Missouri
