

CHAPTER VIII

FREE LOVE

Everyone seems to agree that some people came to Liberal feeling that freedom of thought meant free everything. Walsler himself was accused of advocating "free love." This is not too surprising. At this point, Walsler did not believe in God, and his wife had not been with him for months, or years. He did not marry his second wife, Hannah, until about 1887.

Clark Braden wrote:

"In a speech in the U.M.L. Hall, in April 1884, Walsler declared before a crowded audience, that he was a 'free lover,' and that he established Liberal to make it a free love town. The Lyons woman, President of the Sunday Evening Entertainments, declared in Mr. Cumins Meat Shop that she was a free lover in belief and practice. Mrs. Belk, the Postmistress, the Replogle woman, the Yoemans girls, and others have made such statements repeatedly . . ."

"The following facts are well known and will not be denied in Liberal and vicinity. There lives near Liberal a farmer named George Boulware. He is a sceptic, but a man whose word is good. He tells openly and boldly this story. His hired man attended Sunday Evening Entertainments in Liberal. He told Mr. Boulware that while the dancing jamboree that always follows the Sunday Evening Entertainment was in progress, boys, young men and old men, were allowed, after paying a dollar each, to go behind the scenery on the stage and commit fornication with a female who was there for that purpose . . ."

The St. Louis Daily Globe Democrat, May 2, 1885, published a lot of charges, even though the reporter felt that most of them were untrue. Here is a small sample:

"The freedoms and unrestraint of the Liberals, human nature being considered the same everywhere, have given rise to scandal of the most

unsavory sort, and charges of free love and mixed relations between the sexes are freely made. Young girls and young women in all the enthusiasm of their Liberal belief, use cuss-words that would stagger a sailor. Books which are generally kept under lock and key are read freely by the young, and 'Plain Facts,' by Dr. Kellogg, and 'The Science of Prevention,' by another medical quack, have been seen in the hands of young people who would never have the opportunity see them except in a Liberal town. The charges include foeticide, and the statement is made by a Denisionian that but three children have been born in Liberal in five years.

Clark Braden vowed that such charges were true. He said they were "iron clad," and "water proof." Regarding the charge of "foeticide," he wrote:

"Foeticide is the prevailing practice in Liberal. There have not been as many children born in Liberal, born of infidel parents, as it has been years in existence. Mrs. Rosenkrantz, the wife of a hotel keeper in Liberal, told Dr. Bouton, when dying of foeticide, that it had been performed for her in Liberal sixteen times, and that the ground around the hotel was full of murdered foetuses. Van Law, the marshal, dug up a half developed embryo in digging a drain for the hotel."

When J.P. Moore wrote "The Strange Story" in 1963, the earliest resident of Liberal, still living, was Mrs. Bertha Palmer. She was born June 6, 1875. She moved with her family to Liberal in 1880 when she was only five years old. Her little brother, Claude Bouton, was accidentally scalded to death in the summer of 1882. He was the first person to be buried in the Liberal Cemetery.

Moore notes p. 98:

"As to freelove, Mrs. Palmer believes that there were definitely some votaries of this cult who found their way into Liberal, in the town's very early days, seemingly believing that 'Freethought,' meant 'free everything' - which it definitely did not. In respect to this she recalls attending a public meeting at the opera house, when a speaker asked all who believed in freelove to stand up. She says there was quite a sprinkling who did stand up. According to the best of her memory, one of those who stood up was a young man named Sam Suydam. The young man's mother, who was a Christian, was present. When she saw her son stand up she was so

disturbed that she cried and said, 'Why, Sammy, I didn't know you believed that awful way.' "

The frank presentation of these unpleasant facts needs to be tempered by the realization that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." David is described in Scripture as a "man after God's own heart." Yet, David was a sinner. Here is a portion of Ps. 51: David is thought to have composed this psalm after committing adultery with Bathsheba.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee . . ."
(Ps. 51:1-13)

Every generation develops certain "sayings." For example, almost everyone has heard that a stitch in time saves nine. The early church had "sayings" too. Paul wrote one to Timothy:

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am chief" (I Tim. 1:15.)

We must never become so focused on the sins of others that we forget our own.