peculiar to them. And this choice will I exercise, without regard to any public or private prejudices, as they are produced by surrounding circumstances and will disappear as real knowledge increases.

In choosing my dress, I shall analyze the various circumstances connected with it, and shall choose that which will give me more pleasure than pain. If I wish for a dress which costs much pain and labor to obtain, and if I perceive that I can apply my time to more advantage than to the obtaining of such a dress, I shall wear a less costly dress, without any other regard to the examples around me, than regret that I can not please their tastes consistently with my own happiness. And I shall endeavor to examine into, and reason upon, all things with which I find myself connected, shall endeavor to estimate them by their real intrinsic worth, according to the amount of happiness or unhappiness which I find them capable of producing, always reserving freedom to change with increasing knowledge; and no further than this will I be governed by the customs and manners which surround me: as I perceive that some of them are merely the production of the most whimsical and injurious practices of my fellow beings, which have been created by the whimsical and injurious circumstances in which they are placed.

J. W.

“Improvement in the Machinery of Law”
(*Free Enquirer*, July 17, 1830, vol. 2, no. 38)

The immense expense with which the making and administering of law has hitherto burthened individuals and nations, suggests the idea of a substitute for law makers and law expounders.

At first thought it may appear to some that the proposal to carry on the business of law by machinery is too novel, perhaps too absurd, for consideration; but let it be remembered that nothing is too absurd to find proselytes.

Let it be considered, that in electing our legislators, we go mechanically to work; we elect them according to old established customs,
and at a certain time of the year which is determined by the almanack and the clock. We next go through a certain routine of praises and adulation of our candidates, and a certain amount of abuse of the other parties; this occupies all the time between the nomination and the election, and this time may easily be measured by clock work. The routine of words in praise of our party and in abuse of the others are generally the same, or vary so little, that the advantage of variety when compared with that of performing this expensive, monotonous, and dirty business by machinery, loses all its importance. Therefore, let a number of words and phrases such as “scoundrel,” “traitor to his country,” “despicable time-server,” “heartless demagogue,” “Judas,” “Infidel,” “miserable tool of party,” &c., be placed upon the periphery of a wheel, to be turned by the wind or any other power, so that the words would make all due display. Upon another wheel might be placed “hero,” “patriot,” “defender of his country,” “transcendent talents,” “the hero and the statesman,” “friend to infant manufactures,” &c. All these could be as easily and as justly applied to candidates for office by machinery as they now are by the advocates of parties; and when we consider that one machine can be so constructed as to furnish adulation without limit for our candidate, as well as abuse for our opponent, and that a machine so constructed will apply to all parties alike from year to year (only changing the names of the candidates), the inanimate machine, in my view, claims the decided preference on the score of economy; especially when we take into the account that it would save the addling of so much (or so little) brains, the annual consumption of so much good clean writing paper and the setting up and distributing of such vast quantities of types.

We might go through an analysis of the whole business, and show the incalculable advantages of substituting an inanimate machine in each department, but this would be tedious for me and the printer, a bare hint at each must suffice to set the reader fairly on the road to economy, and to show how much has been lost for want of such an improvement.
Think, then, that when the candidate arrives at the legislative hall, the same routine of ceremony, bombast, and sophistry is repeated which has been acted over and over, time out of mind; the same personal abuse of opponents; the same “rising to explain,” “rising to correct the gentleman opposite”; and, in fact, the same general routine of words uttered apparently without regard to anything but quantity and sound, both of which we know, by the printing press and the hand-organ, can be produced for at most one twentieth part what they now cost. And as to their effects on the interests of the people, if they do no good they would do no harm, and this we cannot say in favor of the more orthodox common practice.

But last not least, comes the decisions by law, the constructions and applications of these hopeful productions of eight dollars per day.

A citizen has a horse stolen, catches the thief, and seeks redress; where is he to find it? Common sense answers, that the thief should remunerate the citizen to the same amount that he has injured him, in loss of time or property; but law says that law shall decide it. According to which, the thief, the citizen, jurors, judges, lawyers, constables, loungers, ragamuffins, &c., assemble, say to the amount of one hundred, spend perhaps a whole day in discovering that the lawyers on different sides construing these laws in their own way, no one law can be brought to bear so as to decide the case; and that the only way is to search for some precedent among the old relics of monarchical courts, before they can proceed in their republican decision. Referring therefore, to some old musty records of decisions, the very absurdity of which is forgotten in their age, they find authority from my Lord C. or my Lord Q. and proceed to decide that the thief shall be shut up in unproductive idleness for three, five, or seven years; the exact number depending on what the judges ate at the last meal.

Now look at the results. The injured citizen is not remunerated: the hundred days time of the judge, jurors, lawyers, loungers and ragamuffins is entirely lost, viz. 100 days.

Loss of the citizen’s and constable’s time in catching thief, say 3 days.
Time lost by thief being shut up in idleness, say 825 days.
828 days lost by this method; whereas by the proposed machine, we might save a great part, if not the whole, and stand quite as fair a chance of doing justice.

Thus: Let an index point to the crime “horse stealing.” Then place a number of precedents up to the periphery of the wheel, set it going, and when it stops, decide the case by the precedent which stops opposite the index. By this means we could save at least the hundred days time of judges, lawyers, ragamuffins, &c., and we might have one chance of saving the whole thousand eight hundred and twenty five days by putting on the wheel in the place of one of the precedents the suggestion of common sense: that “the thief shall remunerate the citizen and the constables for their loss of time and expense in detecting him.” If this decision should happen to stop opposite the index, we should save say about 825 days time in this one case which would be sufficient to raise horses enough to supply all the horse thieves in the county with horses, gratis. Only think of it! for the same expense that we can prosecute one thief!

These views are thrown out to induce reflection. I am not overtenacious for the fame of an originator: if these suggestions lead to the economy of the public time and money, so that the benevolent may have a little to spare for the erection of houses of punishment for the poor, and that the patriot may spend five dollars at a dinner in honor of a political economist, the very prospect of public improvement and consistency will more than compensate for declining the monopolizing privileges of a patent.

Modern Education

This is essentially an advertising brochure for a school—the Mechanical College—at Modern Times, no doubt printed by Warren, dated December 1861. It’s a vision of education for self-reliance and community building. If Thoreau had written an essay on teaching, he would have said much the same (and in fact he did much the same as a schoolmaster). Warren’s is a quintessentially American statement, acting as a bridge