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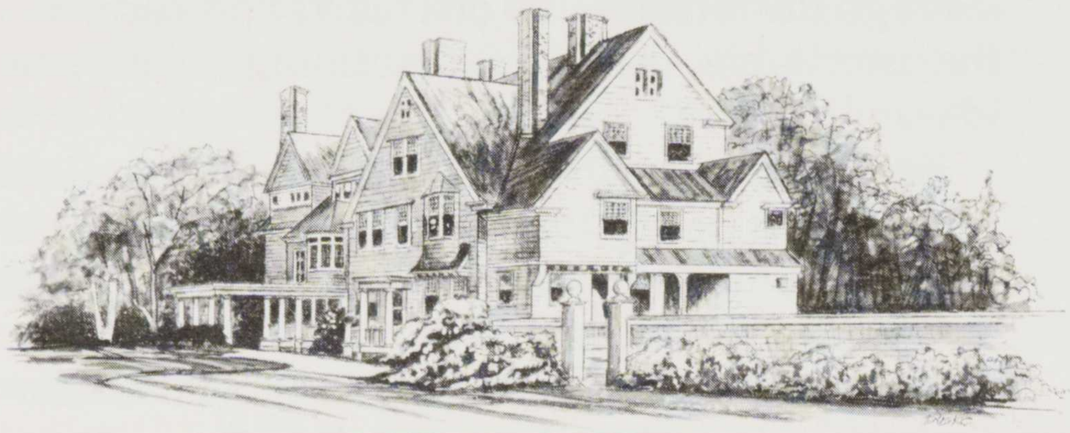

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The Freedom Rule

"The idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading: men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other."

—David Reisman,
The Lonely Crowd

The will to be free is as ancient as man. But this desire cannot of itself bring into being the free society. Individuals who seek freedom just for themselves are not the building blocks from which a free society is made.

The reason is fairly obvious. The free society depends not merely on what we want for ourselves, but also on the freedom each of us is prepared to extend to others. Our social conduct determines our social freedom. If we conduct ourselves so as to avoid the use of force to impose our will on others, the result is a society of free people. The simple basic rule is: *"Do not force others to do for you what you would not wish others to force you to do for them."—**The Freedom Rule!***

If this injunction could be practiced as a moral absolute, the free society would evolve as surely as if we were to live by the Biblical Golden Rule. The practice of The Freedom Rule, along with the desire for personal freedom—a natural and inherent part of our being—is all that would ever be required for the realization of a better world.

There are, however, at the emotional level, as well as through learned values, many forces working against the attainment of social freedom. An understanding of these forces, and how they have prevented people from enjoying the free society, is as essential as understanding the vision of liberty itself.

There seems to be a herd tendency in each of us to sink and merge with the crowd, to be just like everyone else. An even worse trait, which appears time and again in history, is found in those who seek power in order to cast others in their own image. The two tendencies are similar; in each there is a denial of individuality which constitutes a formidable barrier to the realization of the free society.

Knowing what must be, with an awareness of what has been, reminds us that some things are easier said than done! The whole of human history has been riddled with the story of man plundering man. Collective wrongdoing in the form of war and slavery, individual wrongdoing from murder to theft—such has been the sinister specter throughout the ages. The lust for power, and the willingness to submit to power, have kept millions in poverty and misery. As William Hazlitt observed over a century ago, "The admiration of power in others is as common to man as the love of it in himself. The one makes him a tyrant, the other a slave."

But the capacity of man to reason and to frame general rules for the practice of freedom created the potential for individuals to act for good and seek a better future. In time it led to the gradual