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MALE CONTINENCE

BY JOHN HUMPHREY NOYES

PUBLISHED BY THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

OFFICE OF THE ONEIDA CIRCULAR

ONEIDA, N.Y.

1872

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John Humphrey Noyes

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THE Oneida Community has long been receiving almost daily letters of inquiry respecting its method of controlling propagation. Many of these letters evidently come from intelligent and respectable persons. We will give a few recent specimens. Here is one from an English clergyman:

London, March 11, 1872.

MR. J. H. NOYES:

Dear Sir:

For some time past I have wished to ask you to inform me what is the "scientific discovery" you have made relating to Male Continence, referred to by Hepworth Dixon in New America, 6th Ed., 1867. As a clergyman I think a knowledge of it would be exceedingly useful to me and to some of my brethren in pastoral work.

Hoping you will take the trouble to answer my request, I am, Dear Sir,

Yours most truly, _____

The following is from an American clergyman:

_____, Ohio, May 11, 1872.

MR. J. H. NOYES:

Dear Sir:

Please send me a copy of your letter on "Male Continence." My object is to get some reliable information as to how to prevent conception, without injury to either husband or wife. I am a married man; and the delicate state of my wife's health, besides having a family of seven children, renders it very desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to adopt some safe means to prevent conception in the future. Any information you can give will be thankfully received.

I am a Congregational minister by profession.

Very respectfully yours, _____

We have on file many letters from intelligent men and women in ordinary married life, who were induced to seek information about

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[paragraph continues] Male Continence by seeing and suffering the miseries of involuntary propagation. Here is a specimen remarkable for its details of horrors, which, according to recent disclosures, are being enacted everywhere, even in the high places of society, though seldom exposed. It is a mother who writes.

_____, May 12, 1872.

(Addressed to a lady in the Community.)

* * * I must tell you a sad story. Two years ago last September my daughter was married; the next June she had a son born; the next year in July she had a daughter born; and if nothing happens to prevent she will be confined for the third time in the coming June; that is three times in less than two years. Her children are sickly, and she is sick and discouraged. When she first found she was in the family way this last time, she acted like a crazy person; went to her family physician, and talked with him about having an operation performed. He encouraged her in it, and performed it before she left the office, but without success. She was in such distress that she thought she could not live to get home. I was frightened at her looks, and soon learned what she had done. I tried to reason with her, but found her reason had left her on that subject. She said she never would have this child if it cost her life to get rid of it. After a week she went to the doctor again. He did not accomplish his purpose, but told her to come again in three months. She went at the time appointed in spite of my tears and entreaties. I told her that I should pray that Christ would discourage her; and sure enough she had not courage to try the operation, and came home, but cannot be reconciled to her condition. She does not appear like the same person she was three years ago, and is looking forward with sorrow instead of joy to the birth of her child. I often think if the young women of the Community could have a realizing sense of the miseries of married life as it is in the world, they would ever be thankful for their home.

Your sincere friend, _____

It has been impossible to refuse sympathy to such inquirers, or to entirely neglect their requests for information. But considering ourselves engaged in an unfinished experiment of social science, and therefore in the stage of learners rather than teachers, we have for

many years contented ourselves with very brief answers. And we have been induced to pursue this policy partly by the fear that bad men might avail themselves of our sexual theories for licentious purposes. This fear, however, has proved to be nearly groundless, at least so far as the doctrine of Male Continence is

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concerned; for we have found licentious persons almost uniformly opposing that doctrine with bitterness and scorn. The real self-denial which it requires cannot be adjusted to their schemes of pleasure-seeking. And in any case the actual use of it by such persons could only improve their morals and mitigate the evils of their misdoings.

Six years ago we ventured a little beyond the limits of our reticent policy on the occasion of receiving the following letter from a Medical student:

New York, July 20, 1866.

EDITOR OF THE CIRCULAR:

Dear Sir:

I have taken your paper for several months, and although I do not agree with all your religious theories, I have read each paper attentively, and with special interest in your communistic ideas. I am now preparing to go to Europe to study medicine, and shall therefore no longer be able to receive your paper. But before bidding good-bye, I would like to avail myself of your invitation to those who are not satisfied with your account of the Oneida Community as published in the CIRCULAR, to ask further. As I am to be a medical man, I would like to know definitely what you mean by your principle of "Male Continence." I have just graduated from college, and after hearing considerable discussion there in the shape of lectures, some relating directly to this subject, I am ignorant of any means of legitimate Male Continence except abstinence from intercourse. Of course I am well aware of the tricks of the French voluptuaries, by which Male Continence is effectually secured on all occasions, but such barbarous means of procedure cannot possibly be employed by you. These and all other artificial methods are liable to the charge of abusing the organs, which should above all things be held sacred and kept sound. I would like to have a detailed account of your process, which could not but be interesting to any professional man.

I remain yours, &c., _____

To this inquiry we returned the following answer:

New York, July 26, 1866.

MR. _____ :

DEAR SIR :

Your letter addressed to the CIRCULAR, asking for information in regard to our method of controlling propagation, has been sent to me, and as it seems to come from a well-disposed person (though unknown to me), I will endeavor to give it a faithful answer - such, at least, as will be sufficient for scientific purposes.

The first question, or rather, perhaps I should say, the previous question in regard to Male Continence is, whether it is desirable or proper

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that men and women should establish intelligent voluntary control over the propagative function. Is it not better (it may be asked), to leave "nature" to take its course (subject to the general rules of legal chastity), and let children come as chance or the unknown powers may direct, without putting any restraint on sexual intercourse after it is once licensed by marriage, or on the freedom of all to take out such license? If you assent to this latter view, or have any inclination toward it, I would recommend to you the study of Malthus on Population; not that I think he has pointed out anything like the true method of voluntary control over propagation, but because he has demonstrated beyond debate the absolute necessity of such control in some way, unless we consent and expect that the human race, like the lower animals, shall be forever kept down to its necessary limits, by the ghastly agencies of war, pestilence and famine.

For my part, I have no doubt that it is perfectly proper that we should endeavor to rise above "nature" and the destiny of the brutes in this matter. There is no reason why we should not seek and hope for discovery in this direction, as freely as in the development of steam power or the art of printing; and we may rationally expect that He who has promised the "good time" when vice and misery shall be abolished, will at last give us sure light on this darkest of all problems - how to subject human propagation to the control of science.

But whether study and invention in this direction are proper or not, they are actually at work in all quarters, reputable and disreputable. Let us see how many different ways have already been proposed for limiting human increase.

In the first place, the practice of child-killing, either by exposure or violence, is almost as old as the world, and as extensive as barbarism. Even Plato recommended something of this kind, as a waste-gate for vicious increase, in his scheme of a model republic.

Then we have the practice of abortion reduced in modern times to a science, and almost to a distinct profession. A large part of this business is carried on by means of medicines advertised in obscure but intelligible terms as embryo-destroyers or preventives of conception. Every large city has its professional abortionist. Many ordinary physicians destroy embryos to order, and the skill to do this terrible deed has even descended among the common people.

*Then what a variety of artificial tricks there are for frustrating the natural effects of the propagative act. You allude to several of these contrivances, in terms of condemnation from which I should not dissent. The least objectionable of them (if there is any difference), seems to be that recommended many years ago by Robert Dale Owen, in a book entitled *Moral Physiology*; viz., the simple device of withdrawing immediately before emission.*

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Besides all these disreputable methods, we have several more respectable schemes for attaining the great object of limiting propagation. Malthus proposes and urges that all men, and especially the poor, shall be taught their responsibilities in the light of science, and so be put under inducements not to marry. This prudential check on population - the discouragement of marriage - undoubtedly operates to a considerable extent in all civilized society, and to the greatest extent on the classes most enlightened. It seems to have been favored by Saint Paul; (see 1st Cor. 7); and probably would not be condemned generally by people who claim to be considerate. And yet its advocates have to confess that it increases the danger of licentiousness; and on the whole the teaching that is most popular, in spite of Malthus and Paul, is that marriage, with all its liabilities, is a moral and patriotic duty.

Finally, Shakerism, which actually prohibits marriage on religious grounds, is only the most stringent and imposing of human contrivances for avoiding the woes of undesired propagation.

All these experimenters in the art of controlling propagation may be reduced in principle to three classes, viz.:

- *Those that seek to prevent the intercourse of the sexes, such as Malthus and the Shakers.*
- *Those that seek to prevent the natural effects of the propagative act, viz., the French inventors and Owen.*
- *Those that seek to destroy the living results of the propagative act, viz., the abortionists and child-killers.*

Now it may seem to you that any new scheme of control over propagation must inevitably fall to one of these three classes; but I assure you that we have a method that does not fairly belong to any of them. I will try to show you our fourth way.

We begin by analyzing the act of sexual intercourse. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Its beginning and most elementary form is the simple presence of the male organ in the female. Then usually follows a series of reciprocal motions. Finally this exercise brings on a nervous action or ejaculatory crisis which expels the seed. Now we insist that this whole process, up to the very moment of emission, is voluntary, entirely under the control of the moral faculty, and can be stopped at any point. In other words, the presence and the motions can be continued or stopped at will, and it is only the final crisis of emission that is automatic or uncontrollable.

Suppose, then, that a man, in lawful intercourse with woman, choosing for good reasons not to beget a child or to disable himself, should stop at the primary stage and content himself with simple presence continued as long as agreeable? Would there be any harm? It cannot be injurious

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to refrain from voluntary excitement. Would there be no good? I appeal to the memory of every man who has had good sexual experience to say whether, on the whole, the sweetest and noblest period of intercourse with woman is not

that first moment of simple presence and spiritual effusion, before the muscular exercise begins.

But we may go farther. Suppose the man chooses for good reasons, as before, to enjoy not only the simple presence, but also the reciprocal motion, and yet to stop short of the final crisis. Again I ask, Would there be any harm? Or would it do no good? I suppose physiologists might say, and I would acknowledge, that the excitement by motion might be carried so far that a voluntary suppression of the commencing crisis would be injurious. But what if a man, knowing his own power and limits, should not even approach the crisis, and yet be able to enjoy the presence and the motion ad libitum? If you say that this is impossible, I answer that I know it is possible - nay, that it is easy.

I will admit, however, that it may be impossible to some, while it is possible to others. Paul intimates that some cannot "contain." Men of certain temperaments and conditions are afflicted with involuntary emissions on very trivial excitement and in their sleep. But I insist that these are exceptional morbid cases that should be disciplined and improved; and that, in the normal condition, men are entirely competent to choose in sexual intercourse whether they will stop at any point in the voluntary stages of it, and so make it simply an act of communion, or go through to the involuntary stage, and make it an act of propagation.

The situation may be compared to a stream in the three conditions of a fall, a course of rapids above the fall, and still water above the rapids. The skillful boatman may choose whether he will remain in the still water, or venture more or less down the rapids, or run his boat over the fall. But there is a point on the verge of the fall where he has no control over his course; and just above that there is a point where he will have to struggle with the current in a way which will give his nerves a severe trial, even though he may escape the fall. If he is willing to learn, experience will teach him the wisdom of confining his excursions to the region of easy rowing, unless he has an object in view that is worth the cost of going over the falls.

You have now our whole theory of "Male Continence." It consists in analyzing sexual intercourse, recognizing in it two distinct acts, the social and the propagative, which can be separated practically, and affirming that it is best, not only with reference to remote prudential considerations, but for

immediate pleasure, that a man should content himself with the social act, except when he intends procreation.

Let us see now if this scheme belongs to any of the three classes I

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mentioned.

- *It does not seek to prevent the intercourse of the sexes, but rather gives them more freedom by removing danger of undesired consequences.*
- *It does not seek to prevent the natural effects of the propagative act, but to prevent the propagative act itself, except when it is intended to be effectual.*
- *Of course it does not seek to destroy the living results of the propagative act, but provides that impregnation and child-bearing shall be voluntary, and of course desired.*

And now, to speak affirmatively, the exact thing that our theory does propose, is to take that same power of moral restraint and self-control, which Paul, Malthus, the Shakers, and all considerate men use in one way or another to limit propagation, and instead of applying it, as they do, to the prevention of the intercourse of the sexes, to introduce it at another state of the proceedings, viz., after the sexes have come together in social effusion, and before they have reached the propagative crisis; thus allowing them all and more than all the ordinary freedom of love (since the crisis always interrupts the romance), and at the same time avoiding undesired procreation and all the other evils incident to male incontinence. This is our fourth way, and we think it the better way.

The wholesale and ever ready objection to this method is that it is unnatural and unauthorized by the example of other animals. I may answer in a wholesale way, that cooking, wearing clothes, living in houses, and almost everything else done by civilized man, is unnatural in the same sense, and that a close adherence to the example of the brutes would require us to forego speech and go on "all fours!" But on the other hand, if it is natural in the best sense, as I believe it is, for rational beings to forsake the example of the brutes and improve nature by invention and discovery in all directions, then truly the argument turns the other way, and we shall have to confess that until men and women find a way to elevate their sexual performances above those of the

brutes, by introducing into them moral culture, they are living in unnatural degradation.

But I will come closer to this objection. The real meaning of it is, that Male Continence in sexual intercourse is a difficult and injurious interruption of a natural act. But every instance of self-denial is an interruption of some natural act. The man who virtuously contents himself with a look at a beautiful woman is conscious of such an interruption. The lover who stops at a kiss denies himself a natural progression. It is an easy, descending grade through all the approaches of sexual love, from the first touch of respectful friendship, to the final complete amalgamation. Must there be no interruption of this natural slide? Brutes, animal or human, tolerate none. Shall their ideas of self-denial prevail? Nay, it is the glory of man to control himself, and the Kingdom of

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[paragraph continues] Heaven summons him to self-control in ALL THINGS. If it is noble and beautiful for the betrothed lover to respect the law of marriage in the midst of the glories of courtship, it may be even more noble and beautiful for the wedded lover to respect the laws of health and propagation in the midst of the ecstasies of sexual union. The same moral culture that ennobles the antecedents and approaches of marriage will some time surely glorify the consummation.

Of course, you will think of many other objections and questions, and I have many answers ready for you; but I will content myself for the present with this limited presentation.

*Yours respectfully,
J. H. NOYES.*

This letter soon after its date was printed in tract form, as a convenient answer to many letters of inquiry that were pouring in upon the Editors of the CIRCULAR. That little tract is all that we have offered the public directly on the subject of Male Continence since 1866; and it has been sent only where it was explicitly demanded. Four editions of it have been called for and exhausted, and the demand still continues and increases. Thus the time seems to have come for something more elaborate; and meanwhile our experience has been maturing, so that we have more to say. Instead, therefore, of issuing simply a fifth edition of the tract, it has been thought best now to make the exposition more complete by

adding to the brief theory therein presented, some account of the origin, history, and practical results of that theory.

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To those who regard the principle of Male Continence as a valuable addition to science, it will be interesting to learn how it was discovered; and the misrepresentations on this point which have been put in circulation by Hepworth Dixon and others make it proper and even necessary that the true story of the discovery should be put on record. I tell that story in few words thus:

I was married in 1838, and lived in the usual routine of matrimony till 1846. It was during this period of eight years that I studied the subject of sexual intercourse in connection with my matrimonial experience, and discovered the principle of Male Continence. And the discovery was occasioned and even forced upon me by very sorrowful experience. In the course of six years my wife went through the agonies of five births. Four of them were premature. Only one child lived. This experience was what

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directed my studies and kept me studying. After our last disappointment, I pledged my word to my wife that I would never again expose her to such fruitless suffering. I made up my mind to live apart from her, rather than break this promise. This was the situation in the summer of 1844. At that time I conceived the idea that the sexual organs have a social function which is distinct from the propagative function; and that these functions may be separated practically. I experimented on this idea, and found that the self-control which it requires is not difficult; also that my enjoyment was increased; also that my wife's experience was very satisfactory, as it had never been before; also that we had escaped the horrors and the fear of involuntary propagation. This was a great deliverance. It made a happy household. I communicated my discovery to a friend. His experience and that of his household were the same. In the course of the next two years I studied all the essential details and bearings of the discovery. In 1846 we commenced Community life at Putney, Vt. In 1848, soon after our removal to Oneida, I published the new theory in a pamphlet which passed through several editions, but is now out of print. This is the only true account of my discovery of Male Continence.

The pamphlet referred to embraced a general exhibition of the principles of the kingdom of heaven promised in the Bible, and for this reason it was entitled *The Bible Argument*; but the most important chapter of it was that which undertook to show "How the sexual

function is to be redeemed and true relations between the sexes are to be restored." Under this caption the doctrine of Male Continence was propounded substantially as it is in the letter to the Medical student, but more in detail and with less reserve. For the sake of showing what we believed and printed on this subject twenty-five years ago - which therefore essentially belongs to the history of Male Continence - I will now venture to reprint that notable chapter.

From The Bible Argument, printed in 1848.

The amative and propagative functions of the sexual organs are distinct from each other, and may be separated practically. They are confounded in the world, both in the theories of physiologists and in universal practice. The amative function is regarded merely as a bait to the propagative, and is merged in it. The sexual organs are called "organs of reproduction," or "organs of generation," but not organs of love or

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organs of union. But if amativeness is the first and noblest of the social affections, and if the propagative part of the sexual relation was originally secondary, and became paramount by the subversion of order in the fall [as had previously been shown], we are bound to raise the amative office of the sexual organs into a distinct and paramount function. It is held in the world, that the sexual organs have two distinct functions, viz., the urinary and the propagative. We affirm that they have three - the urinary, the propagative, and the amative, i. e., they are conductors, first of the urine, secondly of the semen, and thirdly of the social magnetism. And the amative is as distinct from the propagative, as the propagative is from the urinary. In fact, strictly speaking, the organs of propagation are physiologically distinct from the organs of union in both sexes. The testicles are the organs of reproduction in the male, and the uterus in the female. These are distinct from the organs of union. The sexual conjunction of male and female no more necessarily involves the discharge of the semen than of the urine. The discharge of the semen, instead of being the main act of sexual intercourse, properly so called, is really the sequel and termination of it. Sexual intercourse, pure and simple, is the conjunction of the organs of union, and the interchange of magnetic influences, or conversation of spirits, through the medium of that conjunction. The communication from the seminal vessels to the uterus, which constitutes the propagative act, is distinct from, subsequent to, and not necessarily

connected with, this intercourse. On the one hand, the seminal discharge can be voluntarily withheld in sexual connection; and on the other, it can be produced without sexual connection, as it is in masturbation. This latter fact demonstrates that the discharge of the semen and the pleasure connected with it is not essentially social, since it can be produced in solitude; it is a personal and not a dual affair. This, indeed, is evident from a physiological analysis of it. The pleasure of the act is not produced by contact and interchange of life with the female, but by the action of the seminal fluid on the internal nerves of the male organ. The appetite and that which satisfies it are both within the man, and of course the pleasure is personal, and may be obtained without sexual intercourse. We insist, then, that the amative function - that which consists in a simple union of persons, making "of twain one flesh," and giving a medium of magnetic and spiritual interchange - is a distinct and independent function, as superior to the reproductive as we have shown amateness to be to propagation.

We may strengthen the preceding argument by an analogy. The mouth has three distinct functions, viz., those of breathing, eating, and speaking. Two of these, breathing and eating, are purely physical; and these we have in common with the brutes. The third function, that of speaking, is social, and subservient to the intellectual and spiritual. In

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this we rise above the brutes. They are destitute of it except in a very inferior degree. So, the two primary functions of the sexual organs - the urinary and reproductive - are physical, and we have them in common with the brutes. The third, viz., the amative, is social, and subservient to the spiritual. In this again we rise above the brutes. They have it only as a bait to the reproductive. As speech, the distinctive glory of man, is the superior function of the mouth, so the social office of the sexual organs is their superior function, and that which gives man a position above the brutes.

The method of controlling propagation which results from our argument is natural, healthy, favorable to amateness, and effectual.

First, it is natural. The useless expenditure of seed certainly is not natural. God cannot have designed that men should sow seed by the way-side, where they do not expect it to grow, or in the same field where seed has already been

sown and is growing; and yet such is the practice of men in ordinary sexual intercourse. They sow seed habitually where they do not wish it to grow. This is wasteful of life and cannot be natural. So far the Shakers and Grahamites are right. Yet it is equally manifest that the natural instinct of our nature demands frequent congress of the sexes, not for propagative, but for social and spiritual purposes. It results from these opposite indications, that simple congress of the sexes, without the propagative crisis, is the order of nature for the gratification of ordinary amative instincts; and that the act of propagation should be reserved for its legitimate occasions, when conception is intended. The idea that sexual intercourse, pure and simple, is impossible or difficult, and therefore not natural, is contradicted by the experience of many. Abstinence from masturbation is impossible or difficult, where habit has made it a second nature; and yet no one will say that habitual masturbation is natural. So abstinence from the propagative part of sexual intercourse may seem impracticable to depraved natures, and yet be perfectly natural and easy to persons properly trained to chastity. Our method simply proposes the subordination of the flesh to the spirit, teaching men to seek principally the elevated spiritual pleasures of sexual connection, and to be content with them in their general intercourse with women, restricting the more sensual part to its proper occasions. This is certainly natural and easy to spiritual men, however difficult it may be to the sensual.

Secondly, this method is healthy. In the first place, it secures woman from the curses of involuntary and undesirable procreation; and, secondly, it stops the drain of life on the part of man. This cannot be said of Owen's method or of any other that merely prevents the propagative effects of the emission of the seed, and not the emission itself.

Thirdly, this method is favorable to amateness. Owen can only say

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of his method that it does not much diminish the pleasure of sexual intercourse; but we can say of ours, that it vastly increases that pleasure. Ordinary sexual intercourse (in which the amative and propagative functions are confounded) is a momentary affair, terminating in exhaustion and disgust. If it begins in the spirit, it soon ends in the flesh; i. e., the amative, which is spiritual, is drowned in the propagative, which is sensual. The exhaustion which follows naturally breeds self-reproach and shame, and this

leads to dislike and concealment of the sexual organs, which contract disagreeable associations from the fact that they are the instruments of pernicious excess. This undoubtedly is the philosophy of the origin of shame after the fall. Adam and Eve first sunk the spiritual in the sensual, in eating the forbidden fruit; and then, having lost the true balance of their natures, they sunk the spiritual in the sensual in their intercourse with each other, by pushing prematurely beyond the amative to the propagative, and so became ashamed, and began to look with an evil eye on the instruments of their folly. On the same principle we may account for the process of "cooling off" which takes place between lovers after marriage and often ends in indifference and disgust. Exhaustion and self-reproach make the eye evil not only toward the instruments of excess, but toward the person who tempts to it. In contrast with all this, lovers who use their sexual organs simply as the servants of their spiritual natures, abstaining from the propagative act, except when procreation is intended, may enjoy the highest bliss of sexual fellowship for any length of time, without satiety or exhaustion; and thus marriage life may become permanently sweeter than courtship or even the honey-moon.

Fourthly, this method of controlling propagation is effectual. The habit of making sexual intercourse a quiet affair, like conversation, restricting action of the organs to such limits as are necessary to the avoidance of the sensual crisis, can easily be established, and then there is no risk of conception without intention.

Ordinary sexual intercourse, i. e., the performance of the propagative act without the intention of procreation, is properly to be classed with masturbation. The habit in the former case is less liable to become besotted and ruinous than in the latter, simply because a woman is less convenient than the ordinary means of masturbation. It must be admitted, also, that the amative affection favorably modifies the sensual act to a greater extent in sexual commerce than in masturbation. But this is perhaps counterbalanced by the cruelty of forcing or risking undesired conception, which attends sexual commerce, and does not attend masturbation.

Our theory, separating the amative from the propagative, not only relieves us of involuntary and undesirable procreation, but opens the way for

scientific propagation. We are not opposed, after the Shaker fashion, or even after Owen's fashion, to the increase of population. We believe that the order to "multiply" attached to the race in its original integrity, and that propagation, rightly conducted and kept within such limits as life can fairly afford, is a blessing second only to sexual love. But we are opposed to involuntary procreation. A very large proportion of all children born under the present system are begotten contrary to the wishes of both parents, and lie nine months in their mother's womb under their mother's curse or a feeling little better than a curse. Such children cannot be well organized. We are opposed to excessive, and of course oppressive procreation, which is almost universal. We are opposed to random procreation, which is unavoidable in the marriage system. But we are in favor of intelligent, well-ordered procreation. The physiologists say that the race cannot be raised from ruin till propagation is made a matter of science; but they point out no way of making it so. Propagation is controlled and reduced to a science in the case of valuable domestic brutes; but marriage and fashion forbid any such system among human beings. We believe the time will come when involuntary and random propagation will cease, and when scientific combination will be applied to human generation as freely and successfully as it is to that of other animals. The way will be open for this when amateness can have its proper gratification without drawing after it procreation, as a necessary sequence. And at all events, we believe that good sense and benevolence will very soon sanction and enforce the rule that women shall bear children only when they choose. They have the principal burdens of breeding to bear, and they rather than men should have their choice of time and circumstances, at least till science takes charge of the business.

The separation of the amative from the propagative, places amative sexual intercourse on the same footing with other ordinary forms of social interchange. So long as the amative and propagative are confounded, sexual intercourse carries with it physical consequences which necessarily take it out of the category of mere social acts. If a man under the cover of a mere social call upon a woman, should leave in her apartments a child for her to breed and provide for, he would do a mean wrong. The call might be made without previous negotiation or agreement, but the sequel of the call - the leaving of the child - is a matter so serious that it is to be treated as a business affair, and not be done without good reason and agreement of the parties. But the man who under the cover of social intercourse commits the propagative act, leaves

his child with the woman in a more oppressive way than if he should leave it full born in her apartment; for he imposes upon her not only the task of breeding and providing for it, but the sorrows and pains of pregnancy and childbirth. It is right that law, or at least public opinion, should frown on

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such proceedings even more than it does; and it is not to be wondered at that women, to a considerable extent, look upon ordinary sexual intercourse with more dread than pleasure, regarding it as a stab at their life, rather than a joyful act of fellowship. But separate the amative from the propagative - let the act of fellowship stand by itself - and sexual intercourse becomes a purely social affair, the same in kind with other modes of kindly communion, differing only by its superior intensity and beauty. Thus the most popular, if not the most serious objection, to communistic love is removed. The difficulty so often urged, of knowing to whom children belong in complex-marriage, will have no place in a Community trained to keep the amative distinct from the propagative. Thus also the only plausible objection to amative intercourse between near relatives, founded on the supposed law of nature that "breeding in and in" deteriorates offspring (which law, however, was not recognized in Adam's family) is removed; since science may dictate in this case as in all others, in regard to propagation, and yet amativeness may be free.

In society trained to these principles, as propagation will become a science, so amative intercourse will have place among the "fine arts." Indeed, it will take rank above music, painting, sculpture, etc.; for it combines the charms and benefits of them all. There is as much room for cultivation of taste and skill in this department as in any.

The practice which we propose will give new speed to the advance of civilization and refinement. The self-control, retention of life, and ascent out of sensualism, which must result from making freedom of love a bounty on the chastening of physical indulgence, will raise the race to new vigor and beauty, moral and physical. And the refining effects of sexual love (which are recognized more or less in the world) will be increased a thousand-fold, when sexual intercourse becomes an honored method of innocent and useful communion, and each is married to all.

This exposition, designed, as it manifestly was, to sweep the whole theoretical area of Male Continence and glance at all its logical results, present and prospective, was nevertheless hedged about with much practical conservatism. It stood in the midst of a serious religious theory, and expressly declined all responsibility for the doings of those who should attempt to make a separate hobby of it, and carry it into practice without the fear of the Lord. The keynote of the whole Bible Argument, reiterated on every page of it, is heard in such passages as these:

- *The first thing to be done in an attempt to redeem man and reorganize society is to bring about reconciliation with*

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[paragraph continues] God; and the second thing is to bring about a true union of the sexes. In other words, religion is the first subject of interest, and sexual morality the second, in the great enterprise of establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Bible Communists are operating in this order. Their main work from 1834 to 1846 was to develop the religion of the New Covenant and establish union with God. Their second work, in which they are now specially engaged, is the laying the foundation of a new state of society by developing the true theory of sexual morality.

- *Any attempt to revolutionize sexual morality before settlement with God is out of order. Holiness must go before free love. Bible Communists are not responsible for the proceedings of those who meddle with the sexual question before they have laid the foundation of true faith and union with God.*

The theory thus carefully launched was not left to a chance-career. The Oneida Community in an important sense owed its existence to the discovery of Male Continence, and has evidently been the Committee of Providence to test its value in actual life. The original conservatism and other qualifications of this Committee were set forth in the introduction to the Bible Argument in the following specifications:

- *It is not immodest, in the present exigency, to affirm that the leading members of the Putney Association belonged to the most respectable families in Vermont, had been educated in the best schools of New England morality and refinement, and were by the ordinary standards irreproachable in their conduct, so far as sexual matters are concerned, till they deliberately commenced, in 1846, the experiment of a new state of society, on principles*

which they had been long maturing and were prepared to defend before the world.

- *It may also be affirmed without fear of contradiction, that the main body of those who have joined the Community at Oneida are sober, substantial men and women, of good previous character and position in society.*
- *The principles discussed in the ensuing argument have never been carried into full practical embodiment, either at Putney or Oneida, but have been held by the Community as the principles of an ultimate state, toward which society among them is advancing slowly and carefully, with all due deference to sentiments and relations established by the old order of things.*
- *The Community, in respect to practical innovations, limits itself to its own family circle, not invading society around it; and no just complaint of such invasions can be found at Putney or Oneida.*

[Next: Evaluation \(Part III\)](#)

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The testing Committee, thus qualified, has now been in session twenty-five years. Two hundred and fifty sober persons have lived together a quarter of a century under the rule of Male Continence in constant observation of its tendencies and effects. Their experiment has gone on through all the vicissitudes that reach from one generation to a second. Many applications of their sexual discovery which were in the far-off future when it was first published, are now matters of experience. They have tested Male Continence even in its application to Scientific Propagation. In a word, the rosy but infantile theory of 1848 has reached the manhood of robust embodiment in 1872. Has that rosy theory fulfilled its promises? It is time the Committee should report. If the experiment is still unfinished, it is far enough advanced to warrant some conclusions. We shall doubtless be able to make a more full expose after another quarter of a century's experience; but we will briefly report progress up to this time.

In the first place, in regard to the injurious effects of Male Continence, which have been anticipated and often predicted, the Community has to report, in general, that they have not been realized. For example:

It is seriously believed by many that nature requires a periodical and somewhat frequent discharge of the seed, and that the retention of it is liable to be injurious. Even if this were true, it would be no argument against Male Continence, but rather an argument in favor of masturbation; for it is obvious that before marriage men have no lawful method of discharge but masturbation; and after marriage it is as foolish and cruel to expend one's seed on a wife merely for the sake of getting rid of it, as it would be to fire a gun at one's best friend merely for the sake of unloading it. If a blunderbuss must be emptied, and the charge cannot be drawn, it is better to fire into the air than to kill somebody with it. But it is not true that the seed is an excrement like the urine, that requires periodical and frequent discharge. Nature has provided other ways of disposing of it. In fact it has an immanent value, and is in its best function while retained. It is the presence of the seed, and not the discharge of it, that makes the bull superior to the ox. The Community has had no trouble from retention of seed; but, on the other hand, has nearly exterminated masturbation by the reflex

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influence of Male Continence. Masturbation is a disreputable branch of the same seed-wasting business that is carried on more decently in ordinary matrimonial intercourse, and is evidently destined to pass away with it.

Closely connected with this popular fallacy respecting the seed, is the suggestion of certain medical men that the practice of Male Continence would lead to seminal degeneracy and impotence. The experience of the Community has signally refuted this suggestion in the only effectual way, viz., by a great number of intentional impregnations, which have occurred, within a few years, between persons who have been longest in the practice of Male Continence.

Another apprehension suggested by medical men has been, that the avoidance of the crisis in sexual intercourse would so increase and prolong the excitement as to induce excesses, which would lead to various nervous diseases. This suggestion, it must be confessed, has some antecedent probability; but the general experience of the Community has not confirmed it. The New York Medical Gazette of October, 1870, in a review of our article on Scientific Propagation, published in the Modern Thinker of that year, took occasion to criticise our practice of Male Continence, as likely to prove injurious in the way above suggested; and expressed a wish to see the statistics of nervous diseases in the Community. Whereupon a professional examination was instituted and a report made by Theodore R. Noyes, M. D., in which it was shown, by careful comparison of our statistics with those of the U. S. census and other public documents, that the rate of nervous diseases in the Community is considerably below the average in ordinary society. This report was published by the Medical Gazette, and was pronounced by the editor "a model of careful observation, bearing intrinsic evidence of entire honesty and impartiality." [1](#)

It was, however, admitted in that Report that there had been one or two cases of nervous disorder in the Community, which could be traced with probability to a misuse of Male Continence in the way suggested by the Gazette; and I will here take occasion to

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add that I have no doubt the greatest danger attending the practice of Male Continence is, and ever will be, the temptation to make a separate hobby of it and neglect the religious conditions out of which it originally issued and to which it belongs. Male Continence in its essence is self-control, and that is a virtue of universal importance. To cultivate self-control in respect to the seminal crisis, but neglect it in other sexual indulgences, is evidently Male Continence in a spurious and dangerous form. It is certain that this spurious self-control may be cultivated even for the purpose of gaining freedom for sensual and riotous

pleasure. We may be thankful that such a counterfeit cannot escape the checks prepared for universal vice. Nothing less than heart-abandonment to the grace of God, which teaches and gives temperance in all things, can ever release us from the old tutelage of suffering. Our theory in its oldest form defined the sexual organs as conveyancers, not only of the seed, but of the "social magnetism." Now it is certain that the social magnetism is a vital element, as real as the seed, and as really limited in its supply; and that the loss of it in excessive quantities entails diseases as atrocious as those which follow seminal waste. And to this liability women are as much exposed as men. So much of warning the experience of the Community enables it to contribute; though it has had no actual shipwrecks on this coast of danger.

But after all it is not to be forgotten that the effects of nervous exaltation may be good as well as evil. Herein the spiritual view is perhaps a little different from the medical. A degree of excitement which would injure a sick man may be harmless and even invigorating to the healthy. And this principle must be carried upward, as our definition of health rises. We must not seek examples of nervous phenomena exclusively among the weaklings of debauchery, as writers on sexual pathology generally do. Human nature certainly does not reach its normal condition till it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, filled with all the fullness of God. A nervous system in that condition can bear a weight, not only of suffering but of glory, which would destroy ordinary health. Paul's philosophy teaches that even the Lord's Supper, received unworthily, may work damnation, thus causing physical weakness and death. (See I Cor. XI: 29, 30). The ultimate way to escape nervous injury

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will be found, not in the direction of abstinence from excitement, but in the toning of the nervous system to the divine standard of health by fellowship with resurrection-life.

As evidence of the good effects of Male Continence, we mention, in the first place, the universal feeling and testimony of the community in its favor. Allowance of course must be made for party feeling in such testimony, and it must pass only for what it is worth. But it seems incredible that so large a body of sober persons as the Oneida Community should be entirely mistaken in thinking, as they certainly do, that Male Continence, in as experience of twenty-five years, has more than fulfilled its early promises. A young member who is just closing his career at college, expresses the general feeling of men and women, not only of the first generation but of the second, in the following enthusiastic terms:

Dear Mr. Noyes:

I want to tell you how much it stirs my spirit to hear our people magnify Male Continence. It seems to me that we are just beginning to say the good things that will be said of it; and it makes me happy to think of the honor that is sooner or later certain to be poured upon it. I love the principle of Male Continence with my whole soul, for I know that it has been and is a help to my fellowship with Christ.

This Yankee nation claims to be a nation of inventors, but the discovery of Male Continence puts you, in my mind, at the head of all inventors. There has certainly been no higher conservation of force than that realized by Male Continence, and I am confident that the blessings which will flow from it cannot be measured by those which have followed the steam-engine and the electric telegraph,

Yours truly, _____

The general condition of the community may properly be put in as evidence of the good effects of Male Continence. It is the principle to which the community in some sense owes its existence, and which has been the very soul of its working constitution. Such a principle, in a trial of twenty-five years, must inevitably manifest its real character for weal or woe, in the morals and physical conditions of its adherents. In the place of any testimony from ourselves, the following picture of the Community, drawn by a gentleman well known for his intelligence and power of observation, will give the reader the best means of judging what have been the general results of Male Continence.

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Having lately a day's interval between two lecturing engagements in central New York, I spent that time at the Oneida Community. After a tolerably extensive acquaintance with the various types of religious enthusiasm, I can truly say that I never met with a body of men and women in whom that enthusiasm seemed a more genuine thing, or less alloyed by base motive. The very fact that some of their main principles seem to me false, and others actually repulsive, should give additional weight to this testimony.

As you approach the stately brick edifice of the Community on a winter day you hear the voices of children, while a little army of sleds outside the main entrance, shows that outdoor happiness is at hand for them. Entering, you find yourself in a sort of palace of plain comfort: admirably warmed and ventilated, with spacious corridors, halls, parlors, library and natural history

museum. You are received with as much courtesy as in any private house. The men you meet are well dressed, well mannered, well educated. The women, though disfigured by the plainest of all possible bloomer dresses, look healthy and cheerful. At table and in the dining-hall, where the sexes meet, you see cordial and inoffensive manners. Your food is well cooked and served, with home-made wine, if you wish, and the delicious bread-and-butter and snowy table-cloths of the Shakers. After dinner, perhaps, they give you an improvised concert. The family assembles in the great hall. The side door of the wide stage opens, and half a dozen little children from two to three years old are let in as the advance-guard of the juvenile department. They toddle about the stage at their will - its edge being protected by a light partition for their benefit - and shout and crow to their parents, who sit below. The little ones are all rosy and healthy, all about the same size, and all neatly dressed in little frocks and fresh, white aprons. It is a pretty prelude for an afternoon's performance. Then twenty of the elder children follow, and sing songs. They also look happy and well cared for; and are neatly, though ungracefully dressed. Then you listen to a really excellent orchestra of six or seven instruments, led by a thoroughly trained leader - a young man brought up in the Community and musically educated at their expense, - while a boy of eleven plays the second violin. They play good German music, while the little ones find their way down upon the floor, and are petted by their special parents, and watched with apparent admiration and affection by men and women generally. This, at least, was what I saw that day. Later I saw the machine-shops and the silk-factory; but these can be seen anywhere. But a family of two hundred living in apparent harmony and among the comforts which associated life secures, - this is not to be seen every day, and this is what one at least convinces himself that he sees at Oneida.

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Meanwhile the essential theories upon which all this rests appear to the observer - to me at least - all wrong. At Oneida they practice community of property. I disbelieve in it, and only believe in association and cooperation. At Oneida they subordinate all the relation of the sexes to the old Greek theory - held by them as Christian - that the community has a right to control parentage, and to select and combine the parents of the next generation of the human race as in rearing domestic animals. Such a theory I abhor; I believe it must cause much suffering in its application, and that it will defeat its own

end, by omitting from these unions all deep personal emotion. Therefore I utterly dissent from the essential theories of the Oneida Community. All the more reason for trying to do them justice. In the wonderful variety and complexity of human nature, it often happens that the theories which would be injurious and even degrading in your hands or mine, are somehow purged of the expected ill effects in the hands which hold them. There is a divine compensation that limits the demoralizing effects of bad principles, when these are honestly adopted. I found a good deal of such compensation at Oneida.

It must be remembered that the whole organization is absolutely based upon a special theology, that none who do not adopt this would in any case be admitted to membership. As a matter of fact, they have for several years admitted no new members whatever, having no room. This cuts off all floating and transient membership, and excludes all the driftwood of reform. Members must be either very sincere proselytes to a religious theory, or else very consummate hypocrites. The Community rejects the whole theory of "attractive industry" of Fourier, and accepts a theory of self-sacrifice. In the same way it rejects the whole theory of "affinities" in love and marriage. It accepts, instead, a theory of self-control, and even what seems unlawful and repulsive indulgence must be viewed against this stern background of predominant self-sacrifice.

The two things they most sternly resist in practice are, first - lawlessness, or doing what is right in one's own eyes; and secondly - exclusive ownership, whether of property, or wife and child. All must be subordinated to the supposed good of the whole. They admit that this theory would be utterly disastrous to the world in its present stage, if adopted without preparation. Nothing but religious enthusiasm would make it practicable, even in a Community of two hundred, without its resulting either in agony or degradation.

But now, as a matter of fact, how is it? I am bound to say as an honest reporter, that I looked in vain for the visible signs of either the suffering or the sin. The Community makes an impression utterly unlike that left by the pallid joylessness of the Shakers, or the stupid sensualism which impressed me in the few Mormon households I have seen. I saw

some uninteresting faces, and some with that look of burnt-out fire of which every radical assembly shows specimens, but I did not see a face that I should call coarse, and there were very few that I should call joyless. The fact that the children of the Community hardly ever wish to leave it; that the young men whom they send to Yale College, and the young women whom they send for musical instruction to New York, always return eagerly and devote their lives to the Community; this proves a good deal. There is no coercion to keep them, as in Mormonism, and there are no monastic vows, as in the Roman Catholic church. This invariable return, therefore, shows that there is happiness to be found in the Community, and that it is of a kind which wins the respect of the young and generous. A body must have great confidence in itself when it thus voluntarily sends its sheep into the midst of the world's wolves, and fearlessly expects their return.

I came away from the Community with increased respect for the religious sentiment which, in however distorted a form, can keep men and women from the degradation which one could expect to result from a life which seems to me so wrong. I brought away, also, increased respect for the principle of association, which will yet secure to the human race, in the good time coming, better things than competition has to give. I saw men and women there whom I felt ready to respect and love. I admire the fidelity with which they maintain the equality of the sexes. Nevertheless, I should count it a calamity for a boy or girl to be brought up at Oneida.

T. W. H.

In conclusion, I will mention one specific and very significant symptom of moral health which has manifestly resulted from Male Continence. The natural desire for children, which has almost died out in general society, has returned to us, with all the vigor that it had in the young and healthy ages. Instead of voluntary abortions and continual dread of child-bearing, the demand for offspring in the Community and especially among the women, though liberally provided for and enjoying ordinary success, is far ahead of the supply.

Footnotes

[19:1](#) This Report, in connection with the article from the Modern Thinker, has been reprinted in pamphlet form under the title Scientific Propagation. (See advertisement on the cover.) The reader is referred to that pamphlet for many interesting facts bearing on the above questions as to the physiological effects of Male Continence.

J. H. N.