

# The Oneida Community.

## A DIALOGUE.

By **HENRY J. SEYMOUR**, one of the original members.

The Oneida Community always lived in the light of day and never feared to make public its principles and practices. This was done chiefly through a periodical which it furnished without money and without price to all who cared to take it. From the time that the fundamental principles of the Perfectionist movement took shape in the mind of John H. Noyes in 1834 until Dec. 25, 1879, a period of forty-five years, publicity was given to that movement through a paper which at different times was entitled *The Perfectionist*, *The Witness*, *The Spiritual Magazine*, the *Free Church Circular*, *The Circular*, *The Oneida Circular* and the *American Socialist*. But now, alas! there is no Oneida Community, and of course no paper as its exponent. All that visibly testifies of its past existence in the business world is a tomb-stone in the shape of a congeries of manufactories that produce canned goods, steel traps, table-ware and sewing silk, bound together by the commonplace tie of joint stock.

The world has an inexpugnable habit of persecuting and killing its benefactors, and afterwards building and garnishing their tombs and putting up statues in their honor. This fashion has been maintained from the days of the old prophets and Christ, down to the present time, as is witnessed in this country by the historic instances of John Brown and the Oneida Community. The latter was an institution so far in advance of the age that it could not expect a different fate. The appropriate time for garnishing the tomb and erecting the statue, has not arrived yet, but it is a matter of paramount necessity to

put on record such facts, hints and suggestions as will help the future artist when he begins that work in earnest with the approval of an applauding world.

To project upon the minds of strangers a true picture of the Community, let us first give attention to its leading doctrines. A very prominent one, that which gave the name *Perfectionism* to the movement, was entitled the doctrine of *Salvation from Sin*. Let us imagine a conversation between an inquirer and one of the central members of the Community. We will suppose the inquirer to begin by asking, "Are you saved from sin?" The answer given by one of those at the center and nucleus of the Community would be "yes."

*Inquirer.* But how can you make such a claim? Does it not imply omniscience and omnipotence? Do you claim that in all cases and in all conceivable circumstances you can say and do precisely the right thing? That you can walk without stumbling?

*Communist.*—I claim no such knowledge or power as pertaining to myself apart from my Heavenly Father. I simply stand in a justified and loving relation to Him and He does not condemn me for my mistakes and stumblings. Would you condemn or punish your child because he had many falls in learning to walk? Neither does my Heavenly Father condemn me for the mistakes I make in learning the theory and practice of a righteous life. In many cases stumbling and mistakes appear to be a necessary part of education. Nevertheless I am certain that omniscience and omnipotence are behind me ready to be exerted on my behalf whenever and wherever such exertion is necessary to save me from fatal blunders.

*Inq.*—But how did you get into this relation to the Father?

*Com.*—By heartily confessing Christ in me a Saviour from Sin. You know Christ said, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven." Such was the material of which the nucleus of the Community was composed—men and women who did not believe they were any longer miserable sinners and subjects of an irresistible gravitation towards wickedness, but who

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claimed that through the generosity of God they were lifted out of the slough of sin\* and condemnation.

Another community doctrine was that of common ownership of all material goods. This doctrine grew out of the primary doctrine that God owns all things and that we can enjoy them only as a loan or gift from Him.

*Inq.*—That doctrine does not of itself necessarily imply community of goods.

*Com.*—Very true; but there were specific reasons why we derived from it the corollary of communistic ownership. In the first place this method of ownership was an indispensable means of the highest kind of education. The solitary man gets no polish from contact with his neighbors, and is at liberty to be as much of a brute as he may choose. Alone, he can make neither harmony nor discord, and he remains, in a social sense, utterly uncultivated. Under the ordinary régime where each individual has his private possessions, he they more or less, people must stand in the relation of neighbors, and are compelled to practice some of the amenities of civilized life. But it is only in communism, where each one owns all the property, that the true civilization of Heaven can be attained. These numerous owners are under a sort of compulsion to study the art of agreement and harmony, though I would not claim that harmony could be secured in a community composed of men and women unmodified by the gospel of Christ.

In the second place, communizing property in this way is economical. One kitchen and dining-room can furnish board for three hundred persons vastly cheaper and better than sixty or seventy small kitchens and dining-rooms with their numerous fires, cooks and waiters. Moreover, in so large a hive, each individual can find the place in which his special talent or genius can produce the largest and best results for the general good, without the irksomeness of uncongenial occupation. It will be found

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\* It must be borne in mind that according to the New Testament and the Oneida Community, sin does not consist in the transgression of specific rules of external conduct (not one of which possesses *unconditional* validity) but in selfishness of intention or will, and righteousness does not consist in undeviating conformity to external rules, but in obedience of the will to the spirit of perfect love of God and His creation.

almost as inevitable as a law of nature that a body of people who live together in harmonious communism will, in the course of time, become wealthy. They cannot help it. The Oneida Community claimed that the text "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," had a special and literal application to them. Why need any member of the Oneida Community while laboring contentedly in his allotted sphere, be anxious concerning the things which he should eat, drink or wear? All those things were attended to in a large way by the machinery of communism and he could receive them as he did the air and the sunshine, and in the same way that the birds do without anxiety lest they fail.

*Inq.*—I understand also that you did not confine this method of owning and sharing to mere material goods, but you applied it also to the affections, and discarded the old institution of marriage.

*Com.*—Yes, you are putting the same old question about which the whole world is so curious. Well, it is a vital matter and it is not strange that any innovations that touch it, should be closely scrutinized. Would that they were *more* closely scrutinized and more earnestly! For the sake of clearness in bringing to light the principles of the Oneida Community in the matter of the distribution of love, let us change places for a while. Let me be the catchist and you do the answering. Tell me what is the use of Marriage?

*Inq.*—The use of Marriage! Why! Why! The uses of marriage are so numerous and so momentous that it is not easy to decide which of the uses to first name. First and obviously it is a protection to women and children.

*Com.*—How so?

*Inq.*—It makes a man responsible for his actions to a woman. Marriage provides for the maintenance and education of children. If there were no marriage the strongest and wickedest men would do all the breeding, and society would go to ruin in one generation.

*Com.*—You say that marriage makes a man responsible for his actions to a woman. Please tell me how much of a guarantee the man will be able to afford, that he will furnish the needed support to the woman and children?

*Inq.*—Of course he pledges the whole of his property and all his personal power to procure by his industry the means of supporting them.

*Com.*—Very true. But does it ever happen that these guarantees are insufficient, and these acts of love are the occasion of distress and hardship to the women and children?

*Inq.*—Of course it does. Men die and so shirk their responsibilities, or they come to poverty through hard times or sickness, or their own folly or incompetence; and the women and children suffer.

*Com.*—You will have to admit then that marriage is not *in all cases* a *perfect* remedy for the evils that grow out of acts of love?

*Inq.*—Well, supposing that I do admit it, I am sure that marriage is vastly better than nothing.

*Com.*—Certainly. But let me ask one more question. Supposing that one hundred men were to pledge their lives, their property and their honor for the support of an equal number of women and their children, would it not be a stronger guarantee than that of a single man for the support of a single woman and her children?

*Inq.*—Of course it would.

*Com.*—Very well. Free love in the Oneida Community did not mean freedom to gratify a so-called love for a limited period, nor freedom for a man to take a woman's person and keep his property to himself, nor freedom to burden a woman with his offspring and leave her without care or help, nor freedom to beget children and cast them on the street and into the poor-house. The Community was a *family* as distinctly separated from surrounding society as ordinary households. The tie that bound it together was as permanent and at least as sacred as that of marriage. Every man's care and the whole of the common property was pledged for the maintenance and protection of the women, and the support and education of the children. Whoever will take the trouble to follow the track of the Community from the beginning, will find no forsaken women or children by the way. In this respect, therefore, as in so many others, it was a very long way in advance of marriage and ordinary civilization.

*Inq.*—Well, admitting that, still, taking the micro-

scopic or concrete view of the coming together of the sexes in complex marriage, it presents to my mind anything but a pleasant picture. Flirting with one person to-day and another to-morrow, is the most outrageous medley of unfaithfulness which the imagination can conceive.

*Com.*—To be logically consistent, you ought not to admire dancing. The professed object of the modern fashion of dancing is the attainment of pleasure by an intricate system of mixing up men and women in a great variety of graceful ways, and the really consistent advocate of conjugal jealousy will not allow his wife to dance with another man. Such feelings may be *natural*, but to call them *good* or *moral* is a complete misuse of terms. It is to use those terms in the *opposite* sense to that in which they are used in every other connection,

You are applying the microscopic lens to communistic society. Let us focus it on a well-matched pair. For once the course of true love runs smoothly. What joy and enthusiasm beams from their countenances! They have discovered in each other a vast continent of new and hitherto hidden wealth. It is the veritable paradise of God. And withal, this glorious love has in it such a beautiful humility! The man says to himself: "It is a miracle beyond all human conception that such a pre-eminent charming person should condescend to notice me and, above all, to love me." The woman says to herself "How can I make myself worthy of the notice, much more the love of such a man?" They marry. For a whole month they are a fair representation of human beings at the highest point of life, enthusiasm and happiness. Then may come a crisis of disillusion. A cynical pessimist looking on might say, "Ah, they are coming out of their fool's paradise." Others with a wisdom derived from experience would say, "Of course such a flood-tide of happiness must have its ebb. It is a natural law, and if they are wise they will comfort themselves by cherishing the memory of what was a taste of heaven."

Now is not such an experience of conjugal love a good thing? If there can be discovered a method of repeating it, or, (provided the final effect on the capacity for happiness is a beneficial and not a depressing one), even of lengthening it, would it not be a valuable discovery?

*Inq.*—Perhaps sō. I dō not know. At all events it does not seem reasonable to hope that this result can be achieved while human nature is what we find it.

*Com.*—Perhaps you say truly, "While human nature is what we find it," but please to observe that human nature which has made personal acquaintance with God, and which has the Christ-life developed in the heart, is *not* the same as the human nature of those who are yet strangers to Him. It is only fair and reasonable to expect better things of the new kind of human nature. But returning to our microscopic work, let us see if we cannot to some extent analyze this glowing phenomenon of love. One element that we discover in the experience of these young people is its novelty.

*Inq.*—Of course. Having experienced it, how can it ever be new again?

*Com.*—Let us see. There is a text bearing on this point, and it is found in 1st Cor. 2:9. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." According to Paul's philosophy we have a right to expect more glorious things than the ordinary experience of lovers. The Oneida Communists believed that the christianized human heart has infinite capabilities of love; that instead of being worn out by one honey-moon, such an experience gives it the better preparation to scale yet greater heights of happiness. They believed that the doctrine that the human heart can love only in one direction is contradicted by nearly all human experience and is as foolish as it would be to say that because a person likes the Sistine Madonna of Raphael he must be indifferent to the Madonna of the Chair, or because he likes a particular symphony of Beethoven he cannot enjoy any other music whatever. They claimed that however necessary the preventing laws may be, that vainly attempt to confine love to pairs, they are nevertheless state prison laws adapted only to a sin-ridden world. They quoted Christ's saying "The children of this world marry and are given in marriage, *but they that are accounted worthy* to attain to that world, and the resurrection of the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage," as applicable to their case. They held that the law of marriage is necessary to the subjects of sin, the sons of this world, but

was no part of the law that should govern the heavenly or vital society of which they were members.

*Inq.*—I have heard a newly coined phrase used in connection with Communism. The phrase is "Male continence." Will you please to explain it?

*Com.*—Paul writing to the Galatians says in the fifth chapter, 22nd verse, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, *temperance*, against such there is no law." Observe that the last in this list of virtues is temperance. Referring to the marginal reading you will find that temperance is defined as self-control. Self-control stands opposed to the working of blind passion of every kind, whether of wrath or love; whether of undue generosity or of avarice. It implies power to do the righteous and expedient thing in all exigencies in spite of excitement and the allurements of passion. As applied to the passion of love it implies power in a man to stop the flow of passion at any point that good sense or expediency shall dictate. According to the views of the Oneida Communists the merest common sense shows the wisdom of checking the flow of amative passion before it reaches the point of exposing the man to the loss of virile energy, or the woman to the danger of undesired child-bearing. They claim that it is the attainment of this temperance or self-control that raises this passion in man above what it is among the brutes. They claim also that it is by this means that the mutual happiness of lovers is prolonged indefinitely. A further claim is that only by this means can the passion of love be elevated to its proper place, by the side of music and poetry, in the spiritual life of man.

In former times, a degree of proficiency in fencing with the sword was an essential part of the education of all who aspired to a place in what was regarded as the higher ranks of society. Just so in the Oneida Community the power of self-control was a necessary attainment for all the men who might hope to be regarded with favor by the women, and this power was designated by the name of male continence.

*Inq.*—Thank you for this explanation. But this objection to the practice that you describe occurs to me. If the coming together of the sexes ends merely in the



enjoyment of the two parties, and does not result in the propagation of the species, is it not contravening one of the natural laws? Bear in mind that a careful provision for the propagation of the species is the most fundamental law that presides over all things that possess either animal or vegetable life. To tamper with that law seems to me but little short of sacrilege.

*Com.*—Well, let us closely scrutinize this natural law and see how far it is sacred. It must be judged by its fruits as much as any other claimant to sanctity. The wild ancestor of our modern potato bug lived in the region of the Rocky Mountains. He was apparently a quiet, modest, frugal character, living on certain wild plants and injuring no one. But in due time the white man appeared and with him the inevitable potato patch. Then by virtue of this sacred power of propagation, he swooped down on every acre of potato-planted land on the continent in unnumbered millions, rushing eastward at the rate of some leagues a year, leaving devastation and mourning in his track, and finally rushing with headlong folly a continuous cloud of insect life into the Atlantic Ocean. Are we profaning the great and holy law of propagation when we distribute paris green on our potato vines to save them from this devourer?

*Inq.*—Of course mankind is justified in controlling and directing everything in nature so far as he can, by the command to Adam that he should have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

*Com.*—I am glad to hear you cite that law. Shall we say then that man may interfere with the law of propagation in the case of potato bugs, and yet it is a sacrilege to meddle with it in his own person? The evil that the potato bug inflicts, even if it were to cause the utter extinction of the potato plant, would be inconceivably small, when compared with the evils which man and womankind are now suffering from the unrestrained and misguided power of the propagative instinct in human society. Ask the woman who is in the agonies of bringing to birth her tenth child if there is not something wrong in the institution that gives man the power to impose upon her the herculean task of bearing children

through the whole of the best period of her life at that life's imminent risk?

But the charge that dwarfs all others which can be brought against the appalling propagative instinct in man is that it renders nugatory every attempt at reform in modern society. The threatening attitude that it assumes towards all schemes for the elevation and improvement of human beings suggests to my mind the apocalyptic great red Dragon that stood before the woman ready to devour her child so soon as it should be born. Take Mr. Bellamy's project for abolishing poverty as an illustration. Assume that his scheme is a success—that every man, woman and child in a nation, is in the midst of environments adapted to the best and highest development of his or her whole nature, physical, intellectual, and spiritual, and that yet the passion of amativeness with its propagative results, remains as it is this day. How long could such a nation maintain its high standard of living? Would not these favorable conditions surrounding men and women, stimulate the work of reproduction, as they always have done, to such an extent that society would soon be compelled to come down from its high position, and poverty and hunger come in again as the perennial alternatives to war and pestilence in restraining human increase?

Malthus is the great apostle of pessimism. He demonstrates with unassailable logic, that the procreative power in human nature is always such as to produce, save at the rarest intervals, and for the briefest periods, an excess of population beyond the capabilities for the time being of the earth to furnish the means of a comfortable subsistence. Poverty, war and pestilence are from age to age the death-checks which destroy this everlasting redundancy. He stands like Giant Despair with his huge maul ready to dash the life out of any scheme that modern philanthropists may hope to bring to a happy issue for the amelioration of the human race. Where is the champion who has the courage and strength to successfully grapple with and vanquish him? I answer that man was John H. Noyes, and his weapon of victory was male continence as practised in the Oneida Community. Listen to the words of the great curse that was pronounced upon woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow

and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee." The work he did was nothing less than deliverance from that curse. It is male continence that has made possible the application of the science of stirpiculture to the work of improving the human family.

*Inq.*—What do you mean by that term?

*Com.*—Webster defines stirp as stock, race or family, and of course stirpiculture means the science and art of improving stocks, races and families. This science has long been applied to the work of improving domestic animals, but the curse of uncontrolled conception under which woman is laboring has hitherto been an insuperable barrier in the way of applying this science to the work of improving the highest of earth's productions, which is man.

*Inq.*—How so?

*Com.*—While the present fashion of choosing mates prevails, there is small hope that science or even common sense can have any influence in the work of controlling or inspiring the all important business of launching the next generation under the most favorable auspices. Can you imagine that young people will ever consent to mate together in exclusive marriage for life, with sole reference to the cold laws of science and the requirements of a generation yet unborn? So long as blind passion controls the work of propagation, science must step aside and have no voice or hand in the work.

*Inq.*—Yes, but how is free love going to improve matters and give science an opportunity to take charge of it?

*Com.*—With the Oneida Communists, the sexual passion was differentiated.

*Inq.*—Please explain.

*Com.*—Differentiation means development of parts, or growth of one thing into two or more and at the same time rising into a higher plane of existence. The sexual passion may be said, at the present time, to be in its undifferentiated state. The amative part of it is identified with the reproductive part among men as well as among the brutes, and they cannot be dealt with separately. But under the rule of male continence and free love there is nothing that stands in the way of applying the highest stirpicultural wisdom in selecting parents for the

on-coming generation. Beecher once said that the surest way that a man could take to improve himself was to select for himself the most perfect and well-matched parents. There appear to be some inherent difficulties in the way of a person doing this work for himself. It is evidently a more appropriate work for his uncles and aunts.

*Inq.*—I do not propose to be carried away and enchanted by your glowing description of the Oneida Community. You are giving me an outline of its doctrines and theories, rather than a description of its every-day life. I have observed many sects and associations of people and have never yet seen them succeed and flourish without law of some kind and a force behind to make it effective. Were there not police regulations of some kind in your community?

*Com.*—I do not wish you to get the idea that the practical life of the Oneida Community was all honey and roses. In fact, it was established with the distinct purpose of educating its members in the science and art of righteous living and thus attaining to the happiness resulting from such education as its ultimate end. As for police regulations, certainly we had an institution that secured order quite as effectually as the best of police organizations. That was called a system of criticism.

*Inq.*—Please explain.

*Com.*—It was a system of truth-telling based on the idea expressed in Christ's saying "If ye continue in My word ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." The communists believed that wherever the truth was spoken with a sincere desire to honor and give place to it, an executive power goes with it that is capable of carrying out its behests.

*Inq.*—Yes, but even admitting that, the question still remains as to who shall do the truth-telling. The usual way by which order is secured in carrying on any enterprise, is to give one person power to do all the ordering and truth telling that is required, and in this way securing united and efficient action. But this truth-telling often goes by the name of scolding. Was scolding your regulator?

*Com.*—Scolding as Webster defines it is to find fault with rude clamor, to chide harshly and coarsely. That

is one way of speaking the truth, and a very common way; but Paul mentions another way when he says, "Speaking the truth in love." In another place he says, "Speak ye truth, each one with his neighbor: for we are members, one of another." Putting these exhortations into practical form the communists adopted a system somewhat as follows. The Community as a body, claimed the right to express its mind freely to any member when there seemed to be occasion for it, and it was expected that every member would make the assembly free to do so without reply. This was *mutual* criticism because in time the turn of every member to give criticism as well as to receive it came round, when it was the appointed business of the meeting. You can see how this method completely reverses the ordinary methods of truth-telling. In the case of the preacher it is one man talking to many. In the case of lawyers and legislators the method is not essentially different; but in the case of a criticism meeting it is just the reverse—an assembly talking to one man. One man's talk may easily be mistaken or prejudiced and lacks force because it is scattered or sprinkled over an assembly. But the talk of a whole assembly concentrated on one person is much more likely to be truthful and just and at the same time carry with it a power that accomplishes tangible results. Truth-telling about persons is ordinarily done behind their backs and does not benefit them, or if done in their presence it is spoken in the high heat of passion, taking the form of a scolding quarrel full of mutual accusations. Another common method of truth-telling is for one party to submit to the scolding of another party, in which case a secret grudge remains with the recipient of the scolding.

*Inq.*—Speaking of grudges; did not some of your members nurse secret grudges against the whole body after getting a public tongue-lashing?

*Com.*—Certainly there were such cases, but please to remember that this truth-telling was regarded as a work of *love*, and not of recrimination and reproach. Moreover, the capacity of a person to receive criticism was a test of his fitness to live in community. If he could not endure kind and loving truth-telling, it was better that he should leave. Then again, fault-finding criticism was only half

of the work. Praise for good qualities or deeds was the other half. In a deliberate criticism assembly, people were quite as free to speak of a person's good qualities or deeds as of the evil ones and the healing qualities of praise went along with the wounding of fault-finding.

*Inq.*—Thank you for your frankness and your patient explanations. The extreme novelty of the principles and practices of the Oneida Communists tends to daze one who hears of them for the first time, and he needs to reflect considerably before he can be said to have a clear impression of them. But there is one very important matter that we have not yet discussed and I am glad that I happen to think of it before we part. It is this: By what *authority* did the Communists propose to introduce such startling changes into human society? Before I yield my allegiance to any scheme of doctrine or practice, I must be sure that it is preceded by a "Thus saith the Lord." Where is the chapter and verse in the Bible that authorizes these stupendous innovations? On the contrary are there not many passages in the Old and even in the New Testament that condemn some of the Communists' principles entirely? Some of these passages, being in the New Testament, cannot be explained as being part of the old Jewish law that is abrogated.

*Com.*—I am not sorry that you have presented this objection. For the sake of clearness please answer me this. When Christ came into the world, what authority did He give for claiming to be the Son of God, and for changing the law of God as laid down in the Bible? According to Matthew's report in the 5th chapter, in five successive cases He prefixes His discourse in this way. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of olden time" thus and so; and then with the most complete assumption of authority He adds "But I say unto you" thus and so. Could not His hearers say to Him, "Point out the chapter and verse in the Law and Prophets, that gives you authority to make these high-handed changes. We want a 'Thus saith the Lord' to precede every innovation that is presented before we can give it our sanction?" Were not Christ's hearers justified in presenting these objections to His discourse?

*Inq.*—Not wholly. There are hints and prophecies of the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament. For

instance Moses said unto the Fathers, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me: Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you."

*Com.*—Very well, that is probably the plainest reference to the coming of Christ that there is in the Old Testament. But you must admit that many of the references to Christ by the Prophets of old, were very obscure, and required the inspiration of Christ's followers to discover and interpret them. Now the question that I wish to propound to you is, had not the Oneida Communists as much authority, or more, from the New Testament for their tenets, as Christ had from the Old Testament?

*Inq.*—I cannot say. If so bring it forward.

*Com.*—In John 17th Christ prays that the same relation may exist between Himself and His disciples that existed between the Father and Himself, and this relation is described in these words. "All the things that are Mine are Thine, and all the things that are Thine are Mine." There is the most perfect communism. Again, on the day of Pentecost one of the first effects of the baptism of the Spirit was to make communists of all who received it. "And all that believed were together and had all things common, and they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all, according as any man had need." Paul made himself a medium of exchange between the churches for the purpose of evading the famine, and the principle that actuated that work was Christian communism. Surely this that he writes to the Corinthians is nothing less. "Your abundance being a supply at the present time for their wants, that their abundance may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality." These I say are hints that justify communism certainly as closely as any hints in the Old Testament justify the innovations that Christ made.

Now, Mr. Inquirer, will you please to tell me why Christ came into the world in such a quiet, unexpected way? Would it not have been a great deal better if the exact date, as well as His parentage and the place of His birth had been foretold, so as to banish all possible doubt concerning His office and mission?

*Inq.*—Such an arrangement would have been a great

mistake. Even with the obscurity that surrounded His birth, the hints that the Jewish Scriptures gave concerning it, excited the furious jealousy of Herod, costing the lives of Bethlehem's babies.

*Com.*—Very true. Then again, Christ with His great task of saving the world, needed protection from His would-be friends probably as much as from His enemies. Self-seeking and office-seeking friends, believing in the glory and riches of His coming kingdom, prompted by the low motives of securing the loaves and fishes, were ready to crowd around Him in such embarrassing numbers as to defeat His plans.

If it is true, as we seem to agree, that Christ did not rely mainly but only incidentally on the prophecies concerning Himself for the work of convincing the world, the question arises on what was His main dependence as a means of doing this work? We have a clear intimation of what it was in His often repeated phrase: "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." It implied that many in his miscellaneous audience were destitute of ears, or in other words, were incapable of being benefitted by His discourse, because of their unbelief and hardness of heart. Another class—those that had ears—those who were His sheep, were the hearers who had an instinctive affinity for the words that He uttered and the spirit that put them forth. To them His words were spirit and life. It was those only that He expected to attract.

Now when you demand of me proof texts, chapter and verse to sanction the claims of the Oneida Community, I reply: 1st, That I have cited and can cite as many texts from the New Testament, proving that the spirit of communism and that of Christianity are identical, as can be cited from the Old Testament to prove the genuineness of Christ's claims.

2d. I claim that the most convincing proof of the truth and worth of the Community principles is to be found in the innate attraction that good people feel for them when they are announced. Such people may be under a cloud of error and prejudice that prevents their assenting to those principles; but they cannot help being instinctively attracted to them.

*Inq.*—Well, admitting that communism is the order of the kingdom of Heaven—that there are no rich and poor



there, how does that justify the communists in interfering with the institution of *marriage* in this world?

*Com.*—The communists claim that that question is very easily answered. Please tell me what is the first petition that Christ taught His disciples?

*Inq.*—It is a prayer for the coming on earth of the kingdom of Heaven. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven."

*Com.*—Bearing in mind the fact that the all-absorbing ambition of the communists was to discover and reduce to practice in this world the principles of the kingdom of Heaven, they naturally inquired if marriage was one of the institutions of the kingdom of Heaven. They found a sufficiently explicit answer in Luke 20:24: "The sons of this world marry and are given in marriage: but *they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world and the resurrection of the dead*, neither marry nor are given in marriage."

*Inq.*—Well but, after all, that seems to be only a sort of negative statement concerning the sexual relations in the kingdom of Heaven. I do not see how it justifies your system of free love.

*Com.*—Just at this point, for the sake of saving some fruitless discussion between us, I will propose that whenever you will demonstrate to my satisfaction that the passion of love between the sexes will be utterly annihilated—torn out of human nature before people can enter the kingdom of Heaven, and that that kingdom is after all, a great asexual community, then I will admit that the Oneida Communists made a great mistake in endeavoring to control it and use it as a means of happiness and unity.

*Inq.*—I have no wish to contend for Shakerism, or a celibate Heaven. But notwithstanding all that you have said in favor of communism of property, and even admitting that it may ultimately be a truly Christian institution I do not see that the example of the Primitive Church justifies your system of free love. As I said before, the writings of the Apostles all lean in the other direction. Why were not the Apostles and primitive believers as enthusiastic communists and free lovers as the Oneida communists? Surely they were seeking to introduce the kingdom of Heaven on earth with as much earnestness as any one in this age possibly could?

*Com.*—There you touch upon a point of the utmost importance and one that in the minds of modern religionists is enshrouded in almost impenetrable darkness. I may have some difficulty in making the views of the communists clear to you, but I will commence by declaring that the Oneida communists and the Apostles and primitive Christians were aiming at and striving for precisely the same thing.

*Inq.*—I do not see how you can make that out. It is true that at the time of the first influx of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost a brief and temporary community was instituted, but it was soon scattered to the four winds and there is absolutely nothing said about gathering into communities after that, in the New Testament.

*Com.*—Nevertheless I hold that practical Christian communism was the great end and purpose for which the Primitive Church lived and labored. I do not say that the Oneida Community and the Primitive Church travelled the same road, but I believe that their goal was the same. A party living in New York going to the world's fair at Chicago cannot of course travel the same route that a party from Denver would travel, though both parties are bound for the same place. *The Primitive Church looked forward to a great event that was to occur with the life-time of that generation* AND THAT EVENT WAS NOTHING LESS THAN THE GATHERING TOGETHER IN ONE GREAT COMMUNITY OF ALL OF CHRIST'S SINCERE FOLLOWERS. It was not death that they were looking forward to, but in the place of it, a resurrection, a change similar to that which Enoch experienced when he was translated. The following is the most graphic description of the momentous event which was to be the consummation of their whole lives' earnest aspirations. "We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye,"—1st Cor. 15:52. "For this we say unto you by *the word of the Lord*, that we that are alive, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep; for the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive that are left, shall together with them *be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air*, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."—1st

Thess. 4: 13-17. Do you not believe that a glorious community was formed in the heavens after that triumphant finishing of their arduous career on earth?

*Inq.*—Well, but do you really believe that all of this great miraculous transaction actually occurred to the primitive believer?

*Com.*—Believe it? Certainly. Do you not notice that Paul prefaces this last declaration with the solemn assurance "*But this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.*" How are you going to believe any of his sayings or writings if you do not believe that? Then again the whole of the 24th of Matthew is devoted to a prediction and description of the event and is full of the most earnest warnings to watch for it. In the 34th verse Christ makes this solemn declaration, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away." What stronger oath do you want than that? With this great prize before them and under a constant pressure to watch, what would naturally be their morality or deportment while waiting? Would they attack the institutions of marriage and slavery and agitate the questions of woman's rights and universal suffrage? On the contrary, it was their wisest policy to walk softly and to disturb the institutions of this world as little as possible. It was heaven's plan that those old institutions—those prison laws should still control an uncivilized world and help in the work of preparing it for another and a universal resurrection at the end of the Gentile times. Hence we have Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians, "This I say brethren the time is shortened, that henceforth, both those that have wives may be as though they had none, and those that weep as though they wept not, and those that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and those that buy as though they possessed not, and those that use the world as not abusing it (or using it to the full); for the fashion of this world passeth away. But I would have you free from cares."

The Oneida communists believed that these were the very substantial reasons why the primitive believers uphold all of the world's institutions, such as marriage, slavery, obedience to human governments etc., notwith-

standing the wickedness and oppression that they sheltered and perpetuated.

*Inq.*—So they would not take the morality of the primitive Christians as their model.

*Com.*—No. *The morality or religion that consists in copying the outward behavior or morality of any person or sect is a legal or mechanical morality or religion and there is no real gospel Christianity about it.* There was plenty of that kind of religion in the world before Christ came. When people were gazing with wonder on the manifestations of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter arose to explain and said, "This is that which hath been spoken of by the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days saith God: I will pour forth My spirit upon *all flesh* and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy" etc. The gospel or good news that Christ brought into the world consisted in the pouring out of the Spirit upon *all flesh*, and not in limited amount upon a prophet here and there. The latter would have been no special good news. It would have been something as old as the world. But an out-pouring upon people *en masse* will cause them to act from spiritual impulse or inspiration instead of from a wilful effort to imitate some model that addresses their outward senses. The Communists held that the greatest fault that was to be found with the religion of the world at large was its *legality*—its votaries gazing at the outward form of the Primitive Church, and endeavoring to imitate it while they were living under almost entirely different circumstances. One very manifest characteristic of the Primitive Church, was an intense aspiration and looking forward to the great transference to the Spiritual world, which was to signalize their deliverance from bondage and their evil surroundings in this world. Christians of later times of a lower grade, who were the heirs of the foolish virgins that were left behind when the spiritual and wise part of the Primitive Church took its flight, mistaking this flight for the change that takes place at death, have with the purpose of imitating the Primitive Church, adopted a legal ascetic religion that gives no hope of salvation from sin in this life and only a hope of salvation of the soul and the consequences of sin after death in another world. All this suggests the

idea of a distant and faint echo of the vigilant watch and lively hope for and expectation of the coming of Christ so appropriate to, and characteristic of the Primitive Church. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Rev. 20:6. The Communists believed that that glorious company, made up not only of the Apostles and followers of Christ in the Primitive Church, but of the Patriarchs and Prophets of old and their true followers constituting the 144,000 and the innumerable company so often mentioned in the Apocalypse, are now reigning over both this world and Hades, the abode of the dead, and that the duty of all true Christians of this age is to recognize their authority—study their fashions and institutions—obey their inspirations, and join them in their present advanced civilization, rather than to attempt to imitate their infancy while they were living on the earth.

There is my answer to your objection that the Oneida communists did not attempt to imitate and adopt the precepts and practices of the Primitive Church while on the earth eighteen hundred years ago.

*Inq.*—With such exalted ideas of their mission they must have looked down with some contempt upon other religious sects.

*Com.*—Not exactly. They believed that the present condition of the world in its religious, political, social, and commercial aspects, is according to the ordering of a wise providence. I can best illustrate their views, by reference to the work of raising, equipping and putting into the field a great army. The first thing to attend to is the commissary department, the furnishing of tents, barracks, arms, accoutrements, clothing and rations. Certainly the arts of wealth-production have pushed forward in their work with a speed within the last few years that is utterly unprecedented in the world's history. The next step is to induce people to enlist as soldiers. This work often requires a wise and crafty policy. The heavens do not seem to favor the use of press-gangs and other methods of enforced enrollments. This army is too be made up wholly of volunteers. It is a note-worthy fact that enlistments are most lively during hard times.

Contented and prosperous people do not want to fight. It is therefore heaven's policy not to make this a comfortable and easy world while there is so much evil in it. On the contrary it is a wise policy to permit mankind to suffer in various ways from the oppression of the enemy that they may be induced to enlist in heaven's army. Putting people under law and increasing their intelligence are two of the best methods of showing them their shortcomings and augmenting their discontent. The communists believed that this has been the leading policy that has controlled the nations since the time when the church of the first born came into office, and that the final outcome of it will be, that in the case of every individual in whom is a spark of the love of truth and righteousness there will ultimately be a willingness to enlist as a soldier of Christ.

*Inq.*—But what precisely do you mean by this phrase “enlisting as a soldier of Christ?”

*Com.*—I mean getting a perfect assurance that one is a child of God, and is saved from sin, and confessing the same before the world, or in other words **ATTAINING AND PROCLAIMING A GOOD CONSCIENCE.**

*Inq.*—Please tell me further, precisely what this great army is going to do when there are enough soldiers enlisted and drilled.

*Com.*—It will make an assault upon the old Babylon of selfish institutions that have come down to us from our fathers. It is going to welcome into this world the holy city New Jerusalem into which there shall in no wise enter anything unclean, or that maketh an abomination and a lie.

*Inq.*—It looks as if you community people had tried to set up such a city and failed.

*Com.*—Certainly we tried and we succeeded for the time being in a crude way, in reducing to practice the principles of the kingdom of Heaven. We succeeded through the period of one generation, so far that we felt justified in proclaiming that the kingdom of Heaven had come. I believe that testimony was true—that the Oneida Community was an object lesson—for future study and imitation, presenting a true outline of Heavenly institutions, and furnishing invaluable help to future builders whenever the world is advanced enough to tol-

erate them and their work. It was an anticipative and imperfect miniature of the kingdom of heaven on earth, even as the Transfiguration was a transient foregleam of the kingdom which Christ set up in the heavens after His second coming.



