

From: Allan Eastlake, *The Oneida Community* (1900)

THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

CHAPTER I: *Historical*

IF Christianity is the highest evolution of civilisation, an organisation of social life that is based upon the fundamental principle of Christianity will be the highest type among the many attempts at socialism that have brightened the lives of thousands during the past century. Such an organisation, in so far as it attains harmony, realises Christ's ideal of "Kingdom of Heaven" no matter what its locality or creed may be, because harmony constitutes heaven, and no greater happiness is conceivable.

If John H. Noyes could harmonise his followers into a family of loving relations and happiness, it was not a fanatical proceeding, nor chimerical as some assume, when he founded the Oneida Community and declared it to be the Kingdom of Heaven. If he was too sanguine it was because he credited Christendom with some earnestness in seeking the happiness it craved, and with a higher cerebral development than his critics put in evidence. It was no fault of his that he lived before the people were ready for him, any more than Christ was to blame for trying to teach a people what they were unable to receive. Each was the product of ages and ages of evolution leading up to a civilisation that could call forth just such men at just such a time. It would seem no better than a fool's presumption for men to question nature's appointments, so long as they fail to comprehend her mode of regeneration, or even to understand how the ovum changes into caterpillar, then to chrysalis, and from that to butterfly, or where is the end of each life, and the beginning of another. There is no more chance in nature's production of a prophet or a seer, than there is in the evolution of butterflies from ova. He comes in response to a demand for just such teachers, but the demand results from ages of evolution leading up to the state of civilisation that creates the necessity; by parity of reasoning it will appear that the response cannot come by any chance or sudden impulse of nature, but that the coincidence of innumerable events and conditions is equally indispensable to the projecting of a prophet or a teacher among men, as to the development of the civilisation that makes the demand and is the result of as many ages of evolution.

It is easier to think of epochs being reached in evolution among other people than those now living, or in other countries and other times than the present; therefore, in Christ's day it was said that no man was a prophet in his own country, and since that time it has been held that the age of miracles (*i.e.* phenomena of Nature not understood by man) has been passed.

Selection of the Semitic Race as a chosen civilisation through which to introduce the Messiah appeared ridiculous to the people of A.D. But that it came about by chance, rather than in the purpose of primal Intelligence, would seem a more ridiculous idea, in face of the facts that under the influence of the Messiah has evolved the advanced civilisation of today and that after 1900 years of persecution and oppression, the Jews control the policies of all the nations of the earth, and are fast becoming the primogenitors of the coming population of the American continent.

After the lapse of another 1900 years it will be easier to understand the purpose of primal Causation in the American nation of to-day, and recognising the spiritual significance of events that now appear trivial, to place in appropriate niches her prominent reformers of this period. In His own good time Christ came and sowed the seed, and many have been, and still more will be, the messengers who from time to time will supplement His work and share His experience. The truth must be presented at different epochs and in different forms that are adapted to advancing civilization and to the demands of higher developments of brain. Presentations of truth that were well calculated to impress the animal man when he was entirely under the influence of the cerebellum would now be ridiculous and puerile, and

the same principle holds at every stage of consciousness, till the appeal to the cerebrum for recognition of truth must be as different from anything that could impress the back brain as light is from darkness. Simply a token, or an image that did not rise to the dignity of "graven," satisfied the soul of the savage, and a materialistic form of worship still satisfies many minds in nineteenth century civilisation, solely because they exercise no mind in the matter, but relegate thought on spiritual subjects to a paid priesthood.

Progression proceeded along the line of animal life, developing physique, thus providing the best and healthiest material for brain to feed upon. Under such fostering the first atom of grey matter gradually evolved, hinting at mental potentialities that are only transcended by the infinite possibilities of spiritual development. When men begin to realise their limitations in the line of mental achievements, they will be preparing suitable conditions for the recognition of nature's demand for regeneration j in other words, for the reception of Christ and of His messengers. OF THE LATTER, JOHN H. NOYES WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND CENTRAL. His message was "Salvation from sin" as the necessary and most logical test of regeneration. He heralded again the kingdom of heaven, that had been declared nineteen hundred years before as being then near "at hand (*in the invisible world*)," to be now a present possession *on earth*, wherein Christ is reigning with His people *in this sphere*, requiring only their recognition to enable them to enter in and share with Him the joy of nature's higher evolution upon the spiritual plane.

The Oneida Community marked an important era in the evolution of the Christian Church. It was "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace;" an expression of the spiritual condition of each individual member. If each member realized "The kingdom of heaven within," it can easily be seen that the consensus of their experiences constituted the kingdom of heaven that Christ predicted. The objection that the Oneida Community ceased to exist, and therefore could not have been the Christians' ideal kingdom, is not admissible, because the ideal Heaven is neither a place nor an organisation but a spiritual condition. During an entire generation the Oneida Community fulfilled all the requirements of an ideal home of harmony. The generation passed away, each and every member of it taking his spiritual conditions with him, to meet on another plane of life, in a family relation of which their happy communal environment here had been a type and foretaste, so that, in the most important sense, the Oneida Community still lives in the souls of those who have passed on to a posthumous life, as it does in this life in the hearts of thousands who have been made happier and whose lives have been brightened by what they have learned from the experience of the Oneida Community.

It could not be expected that the regenerated nature of the original members would be transmitted in its fullness to their offspring. It would be unlikely for any characteristics to become completely ingrained in one or two generations, because sudden developments are not according to nature's usual mode. If they were, Christ and His disciples would have procreated and peopled the world with a regenerated race. The change they sought was a slow development of the spiritual nature of man *leading up to* regeneration. In the same way, John H. Noyes and his community sowed a seed that is germinating in the hearts of thousands of people, and to-day there is no subject so dear to the people, or that will attract so fond attention as that which relates to the happy family relation on a higher plane and, incidentally, to the Oneida Community, as an object lesson and exemplar of the possibility of realising here the joy of *that* "sweet by and by."

Some time hence, when the practical life of the Oneida Community shall bear fruit, and when, through propagation by wise selection, the higher spiritual traits of character shall have become as easily and certainly transmitted as the worst are now, communal life will prevail, and it will be as difficult to introduce discord among people as now it is to promote harmony.