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NOYES
MALE CONTINENCE

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U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Public Health Service

MALE CONTINENCE;
OR
SELF-CONTROL IN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE.

A LETTER OF INQUIRY ANSWERED BY J. H. NOYES.

LETTER OF INQUIRY.

New York, July 20, 1866.

EDITOR OF THE CIRCULAR:

Dear Sir:—I have taken your paper for several months past, and although I do not agree with what you promulgate as the principles of enlightened Christianity, yet 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 on the last page of 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 but one. Of course I am well aware of the tricks of the French women, by which male continence is effectually secured on all occasions, but such a barbarous means of procedure cannot possibly be employed by you. The only means I am acquainted with, however, is entirely artificial, and is liable to the charge of abusing the organs, which should above everything else be held sacred and kept sound. If you should have time, I would like to have a detailed account of your process, which could not but be interesting to any professional man.

Hoping that your Community will soon be purged of what I deem errors, and that in the mean time you may prosper,

I remain yours, &c.,

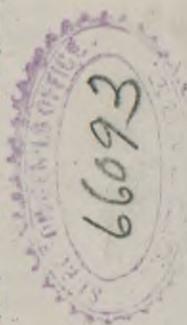
ANSWER.

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 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



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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 any thing 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. I would have men seek and hope for discovery in this direction, as freely as in the development of steam power or the art of printing; and I would have them 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, and most busily in the wrong quarters. 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 recommends 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 advertized in obscure but intelligible terms as embryo-destroyers or preventives of conception.

Then what a variety of mechanical tricks there are for frustrating the natural effects of the propagative act. You allude to several of these contrivances, in terms of reprobation 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.

Besides all these disreputable methods, we have several more respectable schemes for attaining the great object of limiting procreation. 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 has Paul's authority in its favor; (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.:

1. Those that seek to prevent the congress of the sexes, such as Malthus and the Shakers.

2. Those that seek to prevent the natural effects of the propagative act, viz., the French inventors and Owen.

3. 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; and yet 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 is not such a simple affair that it cannot be taken in parts. 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 reflex 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 *orgasm* 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 to refrain from furious 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—*may*, 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.

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 mentioned.

1. It does not seek to prevent the congress of the sexes, but rather gives them more freedom by removing danger of undesired consequences. 2. 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. 3. 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 congress of the sexes, to introduce it at another stage 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 every thing 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, as taught by us, 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 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 unwritten 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 sometime 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—as becomes a professor of "male continence."

Yours respectfully,

JOHN H. NOYES.

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