

THE DAYS OF MY YOUTH

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FOREWARD FOR "World's Folks"

Before recording the memories of my childhood, perhaps, for the benefit of any readers not acquainted with its history, I should preface those memories with a brief account of the Oneida Community, its purpose and the circumstances which led to its founding.

John Humphrey Noyes, as a young man, during his exhaustive Biblical studies at the Yale Theological Seminary, became convinced that he had found proof that the second coming of Jesus Christ had occurred during the generation of the Apostles. If this was true, as he believed, then it followed that men, instead of living in a state of sin, might, through prayer and right living, become perfect as Jesus had enjoined. The millennium was at hand! Sin no more! Selfishness, of all sins, was at the root of all human evils. Possessiveness was the base of all selfishness. Therefore possess nothing--or possess all things in common. He carried this logic even further: marriage, always deemed most holy of sacraments, was, in his view, a selfish institution. It, too, must be abandoned.

So strong were his convictions that he began preaching his new doctrine, calling it Perfectionism or Bible Communism, and, to follow the word by the deed, he began an experiment in communal living among the members of his home family and a few near neighbors who had been converted to his belief.

This new system of Perfectionism seemed to bring great peace and happiness to its followers but it proved to be anathema to the inhabitants of Putney, the small Vermont town where they lived, and the communists were asked to leave. Just at the crucial moment, a Mr. Jonathan Burt, who had become a convert through Mr. Noyes's publications, invited him to come and see how well the sharing principle was working among the group which had recently joined the Burt family at the Indian sawmill on Oneida Creek. John Humphrey Noyes promptly accepted the invitation, came, was deeply impressed and felt it was the hand of providence that this group should become the nucleus of the large community he had envisioned.

From this point on, the story of the building of a Community home and the addition of many eager new members is the well-known history of the Oneida Community. This, it is not my purpose to recount. There remain, however, certain foot-notes, as it were, which I can add to this history.