ROM Gilded Age to Progressive Era, *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* (1883–1907) carried the torch in the Midwest for American sex radicalism. The outstanding—and virtually the only—journal of sexual liberty in these times, *Lucifer* forms the middle link between pioneering sex-reform efforts and today’s liberationists, and to a great degree it defines the limits of social dissent in the late nineteenth century. Its closest relative, *The Word*, edited in Massachusetts by the anarchists Ezra and Angela Heywood, antedated *Lucifer* by a decade but expired in the early nineties. So iconoclastic a paper as *Lucifer* could not have survived without an indomitable editor and, perhaps, enough official persecution to ensure a following. The story of *Lucifer*, a personal but not a private journal, is the story of its editor-publisher, Moses Harman.

Born in western Virginia in 1830, Moses Harman grew up in the mammoth spring backwoods of southern Missouri. His parents, Job and Nancy Harman, moved the family from Virginia to Springfield, Ohio, in 1835. A year later they moved again, this time to a malarial site in Mercer County near the St. Mary’s River. Tales of gushing pure springs and fertile land in the hills of southern Missouri enticed the family to move once again, in 1838.

The zigzag 600-mile trek from Ohio to Missouri took nearly two months. Job settled the family near Leasburg in Crawford County, and, besides farming, he tried his hand at mining, land investing, and other schemes. A frontier bust wiped out his “little accumulation,” and the spring of 1840 found the Harmans settled on a squatter’s claim in the woods, a mile from their nearest neighbor,
without a team for plowing, and with no prospects of getting one. To survive, they made baskets of white-oak splints and traded them for corn.

Although he had only a few months of formal schooling during boyhood, Moses learned to read well. "Before reaching my tenth year... I read everything readable that I could get hold of in that back-woods settlement," he recalled. His bookishness, which was enforced by an accidental fall that made him a lifelong cripple, provided him the chance, at age sixteen, to teach school. Two years later it enabled him to enroll at Arcadia College in nearby Iron County, which, if only a high school, was the most advanced one around. "Father sent him to college because of his crippled condition, though poor and illy able to do so," wrote Joseph of his older brother Moses. The whole family sacrificed for Moses' education. Moses found most of his fellow students well-to-do, many of them the sons of slaveholders. He helped pay his way by doing odd jobs and by tutoring other students.

Moses, who by age twenty had been licensed to preach by the Methodist Church (South), repaid the family well, in terms of respectability, for its sacrifices. As an advanced student and circuit-riding preacher, Moses became, in Joseph's words, the "pride" of Crawford County. Joseph himself followed Moses' early example of piety and eventually became an important figure in the Seventh Day Adventist Church, helping to found the Loma Linda colony in California.

At twenty-one the new graduate of Arcadia took charge of the high school at Warsaw, Missouri. Outside of classes he made the acquaintance of local sharp-witted Universalists, who, before his stay was out, argued him out of his Methodist dogma and into the broader paths of their doctrine. Universalism became the midpoint on Moses' journey to rationalism. His increasing unease over the proslavery position of the southern branch of Methodism hastened his apostasy. Moses left Missouri in the mid fifties to travel, and probably to teach, in Indiana. About 1860 he returned to Missouri to enroll—and starve—for a term at the St. Louis Normal School. Afterward the schoolteacher returned full circle to Crawford County.

In the hills of the border state in the 1860s a man could express his opinion on the way to town and be hanged by a grapevine on
the way back; the outbreak of national civil strife only pitched the much-divided state into its own consuming civil war. Although Crawford and surrounding counties had a relatively small slave population in 1860—Crawford's population numbered 5,640 whites to 182 black slaves—the area was predominantly proslavery and Democratic. The split between Southern (Breckinridge) Democrats and Northern (Douglas) Democrats in the presidential election of 1860 degenerated into outright conflict between Secessionists and Unionists by the onset of the war. The conflict had a highly explosive, even theatrical quality. Before federal troops occupied Rolla in 1861, correspondents reported the ritual of struggle in Crawford County: roving bands of Secessionists galloped from settlement to settlement; at each place their leader made a stump speech while the others clapped and cheered. Local Secessionists would then be encouraged to help as they raised the Confederate flag. On this cue, Unionists would begin their counterdemonstration, parading, speaking, and cheering the village housewives who bore the stars and stripes to the public square. One Unionist correspondent tried to cheer up his St. Louis readers: in Washington and in Crawford County, things looked better than ever for the Unionist cause, he enthused, and Secessionists were making little headway anywhere in the area except, he added, in St. François, Iron, Madison, and Wayne counties.³

In short order after his return to Crawford County, Moses Harman earned notoriety for his abolitionist views. In democratic fashion the community met and voted to run him and a fellow abolitionist, Dr. Stephan S. Briggs, out of the county. Moses did eventually leave in order to try to enlist as a soldier, and Briggs later became a lecturer-in-residence at a communist colony not far away. Prevented from enlisting because of his lameness, Moses helped to recruit the regiment that came to be stationed in Rolla. He tried once more to serve, this time as a nurse, but again he was rejected.⁴

Although in 1863 Moses Harman resigned himself to teaching and, in fact, became Leasburg's first school teacher, the war was not over for him. Directly in the path of Price's raid of 1864, he witnessed the dumb fury of war as straggling soldiers shot straggling prisoners and routed local Union sympathizers. A raiding party captured him as he lay ill in bed. They threatened to shoot him
Moses Harman
From *Pioneers of Birth Control in England and America*

Ezra Heywood
From *Pioneers of Birth Control in England and America*

E. B. Foote, Sr.
From *Pioneers of Birth Control in England and America*

E. B. Foote, Jr.
From *Pioneers of Birth Control in England and America*
but, considering his illness and lameness, let him go free. A neighbor, Amos Scheuck, aged eighty and an invalid, was “shot in cold blood by these raiders within a few rods of his home and in hearing of his family,” Moses remembered. The old man had been a Union sympathizer.

After the war, Moses married Susan Scheuck, daughter of the executed man. Even at that time he may have had questions about conventional marriage, since before their marriage the couple made a personal contract that pledged certain voluntary standards of conduct based on love rather than duty. They settled on a farm and had two children, George and Lillian, and Moses continued to teach and to read whenever he had the time. In 1877 Susan died with her infant in childbirth.5

On a hot June Sunday in 1879 Moses Harman and his two children stepped from the train at Valley Falls, in eastern Kansas. Halfway between Atchison and Topeka, this town, once called Grasshopper Falls, did not appear particularly promising as the launching place for sexual reform. And Moses almost certainly entertained no grand visions of the future as he first surveyed the village. The settlement, which was carved out of a walnut grove above the Delaware River, was the standard attempt at civilization—stone and sunbaked mud and whitewash and planking. The lines of the buildings were not plumb, somehow, and the doorways looked low. The streets, like those of all western towns that expected to become St. Louises of the steppe, could accommodate five wagons abreast.

He knew that he could always get on by teaching school, anywhere that he moved. He would of course have to do that here in Valley Falls, although it did not quite satisfy his hunger for intellectual engagement. Maybe something else would develop—after all, was this not Kansas, the home of freedom, the household of abolition, of enlightenment? Moses’ cousin Noah, who was almost a prosperous farmer by local standards, welcomed them at the train.

As teacher at the district school, Moses became known, if not immediately liked, as a quiet but direct man. His tendency to follow his intellectual lights rather than community pressure perhaps suggested a private superiority that was somewhat out of place
in a state just entering its settlement boom period. Perhaps Valley Falls, with its small-town atmosphere punctuated by "perpetual Spiritual disputes," was not unlike the characterization in The Story of a Country Town (1883), written by a young, overworked editor in nearby Atchison, Edgar Howe. Like Howe, Harman rebelled against the smugness of the American village, but in a way that rather savored of spiritual contentiousness. Harman's reform zeal found a home, for awhile, in the postwar free-thought movement, a spurt of rationalist enthusiasm that was begun by militant anticlericalists, Boston Unitarians, and religious liberals.

Valley Falls's Republican paper, the New Era, grew quite lively as the churchgoers and the freethinkers exchanged volleys in its pages. Out of the local Free Religious Society, freethinkers organized a chapter of the National Liberal League and elected Noah Harman president. When the New Era became overburdened with the disputation, the league, fifty members strong, began a monthly of its own. The first issue of the Valley Falls Liberal appeared in August 1880; at first it had no formal editors, all league members being free to lend a hand in its publication. Moses Harman and another school teacher, A. J. Searl, however, directed the early issues.

Harman had eagerly entered the debate. Writing as "Rustic" in the New Era and the Liberal, he assailed the local spokesmen of "popular theology." His journey from the ministry to free thought provided him with powerful arguments and insights into his clerical opponents. He used a common free-thought tactic, presenting his cause as that of Science, of rational deduction from natural phenomenon; the foes of progress were the forces of superstition and enslavement—namely, dogmatic religion.

He had found new work, new friends, a new paper, and even a new wife during his first year in Valley Falls. At the age of fifty, Moses Harman launched on a new career as a free-thought publicist.