

Aquarian Evangelist

**The Age of Aquarius as It Dawned
In the Mind of
Levi Dowling**

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Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this extended essay was published in 2008 as an Occasional Paper in Volume XI of the *Theosophical History* journal, under the editorship of James Santucci. I am grateful to Jim for making it possible for me to revise and expand it here and to publish it online.

The last decade has ushered in a New Age of possibilities for historical research through online databases of newspapers, books, and genealogical data. The first edition of this essay was the product of shoe-leather and 3 x 5 card note-taking effort—mainly, compiled from time logged at the Library of Congress and extensive correspondence with the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. This new edition incorporates much that I have been able to net out of the ocean of cyberspace since then, especially in newspaper databases and in the books and journals collected together and available on the site of the International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals (IAPSOP). I thank Marc Demarest for suggesting that I undertake writing a new edition and for all his help as I have done the additional research for it.

The new material available nowadays online has allowed me to fill in many gaps in the narrative of Levi Dowling's life and in the background of his Occult associates; more than that, it has provided glimpses of how others—not just his family and admirers—saw the man and his work. It has whittled down the doubt I had when I first assayed him, about his motives. Then, I allowed that he could have been simply a man who went off the rails and plunged into the Occult, which is to say, he could have been under the delusion that his visions were real. After looking at new material, I am more inclined to see him as a habitual operator of schemes, none of which were successful until he hit on the idea of rewriting the life of Jesus Christ.

—John B. Buescher

In the beginning of what became the standard edition of *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, the first book that announced to a wide audience the arrival of the Age of Aquarius, the publisher spoke of the seer named “Levi” who had produced it. She revealed only the barest facts of his life. Indeed, she wrote, “Regarding the personality of Levi we are permitted to write but little.” Then, after a few more brief words about him, she abruptly drew the curtain of mystery back around him:

Further references to the personality of Levi are, seemingly, unnecessary. It matters but little who he is; his work in the transcription of the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, stands unimpeachable. The lessons of this book all bear the stamp of the Nazarene, for no man except the world’s greatest master could have touched the high chords of divine Love and Wisdom which characterize the pages of this marvelous book.¹



Levi H. Dowling

The publisher—who was in fact Levi’s wife Eva—diminished his role in the creation of the book in order to suggest that he was only the clear channel through which the full story about Jesus had been revealed to the world. On the other hand, referring to him only as “Levi” also mythologized him, elevating him above the mundane world, where people have family names and ordinary histories. And it deliberately turns the reader aside from trying to use “Levi’s” background in evaluating his text.

Pursuing Levi back down into that world disregards his wife’s wishes. In light of his book’s influence over the past century, however, it is surprising that no one has done this

¹ Eva S. Dowling, in Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ; The Philosophic and Practical Basis of the Religion of the Aquarian Age of the World and of the Church Universal; Transcribed from the Book of God’s Remembrances, Known as the Akashic Records* (E. S. Dowling, Los Angeles and London: L. N. Fowler, 1911), 11. The first edition was published in 1911. The second, revised edition—from which all subsequent ones derive—was published in 1912. Most of the book’s latest editions were published by DeVorss & Company, Los Angeles.

before. Is it too late to make the effort now, as the last memories of the Age of Aquarius—even as a caricatured object of nostalgia—fade away after a much shorter era than the two thousand years it was supposed to endure?² Is it too late to look at its first prophet now, before the last Aquarian UFO-naut packs it in and heads out to the Pleiades?

Sunday School Entrepreneur

Levi H. Dowling, the book's author, was born in a log cabin in Bellville, Richland County, Ohio, on the morning of May 18, 1844, the son of William Dowling and Rachel (Biggers) Dowling.³ Levi's family and friends often called him "Lee," and he generally referred to himself that way.⁴

His father William was an enthusiastic early minister of the Church of Christ, the movement founded by Alexander Campbell that was meant to be a restitution of the original, ancient Christian church before it was fragmented into sects. He ministered to congregations of the Church of Christ in Mansfield (a few miles north of Bellville), in Ashland, and in West Point, Ohio.⁵ From Mount Gilead, Ohio, he wrote to Alexander Campbell in 1833, saying that,

² Let us acknowledge, however, that keepers of the millennial Aquarian Age flame have found various systems of exegesis in order to explain the dawn of the Age of Aquarius as occurring anywhere from two hundred years ago, to six hundred years in the future. But, according to some, it has already died, killed either by Hell's Angels at Altamont or by Charles Manson or by Marshall Applewhite, or at the moment that a child of hippie parents registered as a Young Republican.

³ William Dowling, of Scots-Irish descent, was born August 28, 1800, in Pennsylvania; he died December 12, 1873, in Kendallville, Indiana. Rachel Biggers was born on March 7, 1803 in Washington County, Pennsylvania; she died June 18, 1882, in Kendallville and was buried there at Lake View Cemetery; see Frances Dingman Chapter, DAR, *Noble County Indiana Tombstone Inscriptions* (Kendallville, 1935), 275.

⁴ Affidavit of Mahala L. Weaver, December 4, 1911; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File (Application 973.948; Certificate 734.797); Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; National Archives Building (NAB), Washington, D.C.

⁵ Albert Adams Graham, compiler, *History of Richland County, Ohio; (Including the Original Boundaries.) Its Past and Present, Containing a Condensed Comprehensive History of Ohio, Including an Outline History of the Northwest; a Complete History of Richland County; Its Townships, Cities, Towns and Villages, Schools, Churches, Societies, Industries, Statistics, &c.; a History of Its Soldiers in the Late War; Portraits of Its Early Settlers and Prominent Men; Miscellaneous Matter; Map of the County; Biographies and Histories of Our Patrons and the Most Prominent Families, &c., &c.* (Mansfield, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Company, 1880), 474-475, 681. See also, A. J. Baughman, *History of Richland County, Ohio, from 1808 to 1908*, volume 1 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1908), 446; and, for William Dowling's preaching in Ashland, "History or Origin of the Disciples in Ashland and Vicinity," *Ashland Press*, December 27, 1888. When they lived in Bellville, the Dowling children attended school in the

The good work of converting souls to the gospel of the Son of God is still progressing among us, and the sectarians are greatly discouraged in this place. The disciples are all alive to the great concerns of eternal life. The ancient gospel was first preached in this place by your unworthy servant, who was the first that was called in this place of the ancient order; but thanks be to God who giveth the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our number is now very considerable.⁶

To understand his son Levi's much later revelations about Jesus, it needs repeating that William's conviction was that he saw himself as the first to preach "the ancient gospel" in places that had known only corrupt sectarian creeds.

During Levi's early years, his family lived in Mt. Gilead, and then near the town of Kendallville, Indiana. The 1860 Federal Census shows young Levi, age fourteen, living on a farm with his parents and some of his sisters. Living on adjacent farms were Levi's older brothers William Worth Dowling and John Biggers Dowling, who were already married and were raising families.⁷ Levi attended school in Kendallville, where his older brother William taught for two years.⁸

town of Jefferson; see "School Records of Jefferson Twp., Richland County, Ohio, Dist. No. 1, 1843," *The Pathfinder: Quarterly Newsletter of the Ashland and Richland County Chapters, Ohio Genealogical Society*, vol. 2, issue 4, October 1983, 29.

⁶ *Millenial Harbinger* (Bethany, Va.), vol. 4, no. 7 (July 1833): 326; see also Alexander Hall, comp., *The Christian Register; containing a statistical report of the Christian Churches in Europe and America* (Loydsville, Ohio, 1848), 6. And, for William Dowling's ministry at Mount Gilead, see *History of Morrow County and Ohio* (Chicago: O. L. Basin, 1880), 302, 308, 311.

⁷ Lisbon post office, Allen township: "The Disciple Church was first started at Lisbon; but before it was completed it was taken down, and the material was conveyed to Kendallville, where it was used in building the present church"—Weston A. Goodspeed and Charles Blanchard, eds., *Counties of Whitley and Noble, Indiana; Historical and Biographical* (Chicago: F. A. Battey, 1882), part 2, 133. Levi's siblings: William Worth Dowling (1834-1920, b. Ohio) (m. Julia, b. 1839, Ind.) and John Biggers Dowling (b. 1832, Ohio) (m. Rebecca, b. 1830, Ohio; Grace Eggleston). His other siblings included Josephine E. (m. William W. Glosser) (1847-1933), Miranda (m. David Lash), Melinda (m. Horace Taber) (1827-1894), Matilda C. (m. John W. Berry), and Mahala L. (m. Samuel Weaver). See [William Worth Dowling,] "Emigratus," *Front Rank* (St. Louis), October 7, 1911. (The article is unsigned, but on a copy that Eva Dowling submitted to the Bureau of Pensions and is now in her pension casefile, she has written that it was authored by William Worth Dowling. Its final sentiment, too, makes it clear that he wrote it.) Information on Levi's sisters and their marriages also comes from Noble County marriage records, obituaries, and cemetery records, and from "Early Marriage Records, 1844," *The Ohio Liberal* (Mansfield), vol. 11, no. 49, March 19, 1884.

⁸ Goodspeed and Blanchard, eds., *Counties of Whitley and Noble, Indiana*, part 2, 129-130.

“Levi was always a student of the deeper things of life,” says the brief and cryptic biography set at the beginning of *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ*. “At the age of thirteen, in his first public debate, he took the negative side against a Presbyterian Elder on ‘The Everlasting Punishment of the Wicked.’ He began preaching at the age of sixteen.”⁹ If there is evidence that Levi ever had any other formal training in theology or ministerial work, no one has uncovered it.

According to one of his friends, he never did believe in “impossible hells,” and he took his point of reference from the Campbellite search for a primitive and pure religion underneath what was supposed to have been an encrustation of dogma and sectarianism. His father “had instilled into the young man’s life, by the Spirit of the Living God, the great need of a reformation and the emancipation of the people from the creeds and confessions of faith, into the truth as set forth by the life and testimony of Jesus.”¹⁰ How far his journey away from creeds and confessions would eventually take him, no one could have guessed at the time.

At the age of eighteen, Levi briefly became pastor of a small church.¹¹ In a ceremony presided over by evangelist and preacher William T. Horner, Levi married a neighbor, Sylvia Ann Demmon, in the town of Allen, just south of Kendallville, on November 12, 1863. She had been born March 16, 1844, one of her parents’ nine children. Her father was Leonard Demmon; her mother was Nancy (Boughey) Demmon.¹² Levi and Sylvia soon had a baby, named Frankie, who would live only a year.

⁹ Eva S. Dowling, “Who Was Levi?” in Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 7. More biographical details are in the article, “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling; Levi—the Akashic Seer,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 305-314. A brief biography of Dowling is in J. Gordon Melton, ed., *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology; A Compendium of Information on the Occult Sciences, Magic, Demonology, Superstitions, Spiritism, Mysticism, Metaphysics, Psychology Science, and Parapsychology, with Biographical and Bibliographical Notes and Comprehensive Indexes*. 5th edition (Detroit, Mich.: Gale, 2001), vol. 1, 443-444. He is also listed briefly, as “Lee Dowling,” and described as “clergyman, physician, author, poet,” in Thomas William Herringshaw, *Herringshaw’s Encyclopedia of American Biography of the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: American Publishers’ Association, 1898), 312. See also *Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, Strange New Gospels* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 25-30, and Per Beskow, *Strange Tales about Jesus: A Survey of Unfamiliar Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 75-80.

¹⁰ Recollection of James Wishart in “In Memoriam: Levi H. Dowling,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 308.

¹¹ Eva Dowling, “Who Was Levi?” *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 7.

¹² Frances Dingman Chapter, DAR, *Marriage Records of Noble County, Indiana, 1859-1875* (Kendallville, Ind., 1942). Sylvia’s parents: Leonard Demmon was born June 14, 1814, in Chesterfield, Massachusetts; he died on February 9, 1899, in Kendallville, Indiana; Nancy Boughey was born July 19, 1820; she died on February 15, 1908, in Kendallville. Sylvia’s brother was Professor Isaac Newton Demmon (1842-1920). He taught school,

Toward the end of the Civil War, still living in Kendallville, young Levi “assisted in recruiting a company of volunteers,” and enlisted in Company S of the 152nd Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He was mustered in on March 16, 1865. His brother William wrote that, “Like the sons of most pioneer preachers of that day, he expected to devote his life to the ministry, and had ‘exercised’ his gifts’ on numerous occasions. As a consequence of his ability as a speaker soon after reaching the field, he was appointed a chaplain, and was perhaps one of the youngest men who ever held such a position.”¹³ Levi did in fact later claim that when he was commissioned—his chaplain’s commission gave him the rank of Captain—he was the youngest chaplain in the U. S. Army.

The regiment left Indiana for Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, where it was assigned garrison duty, and was posted in Clarksburg, West Virginia for the few months until the end of the War.¹⁴ The regiment lost no personnel from combat, but forty-nine by disease—a smallpox epidemic had spread through the region.¹⁵ A few days before Levi was mustered out, his wife Sylvia brought their young infant, Frankie, to visit him in Clarksburg. “Both took sick,” Levi later wrote. The child died on August 27th, and Sylvia died on the day he was mustered out, August 30, 1865. Levi took both bodies home with him.¹⁶ He buried them in Kendallville.¹⁷

Later that year he went to Indianapolis and there enrolled as a student at Northwestern Christian University (now Butler University) during the single academic year

1860-63, then attended Northwestern Christian University, 1863-66, was Sergeant in 132nd Indiana Infantry during Civil War; entered the University of Michigan and graduated in 1868; was Professor of Greek at Mount Union College, Alliance, Ohio, 1868-70; Professor of ancient languages, Hiram College, 1870; Principal of Ann Arbor High School, 1873-76; Assistant Professor of English at the University of Michigan, 1876-79, and of English, 1879-1881, when he was elected to the full chair of English and Rhetoric. He published on library matters and bibliography. Harvey Clelland De Motte, *The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans*, vol. 3 (Boston: The Biographical Society, 1904), 209-210.

¹³ W. W. Dowling, “Emigratus.”

¹⁴ Samuel E. Alvord, *Alvord’s History of Noble County* (Logansport, Ind.: B. F. Bowen, 1902), 138; Frederick Henry Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, Compiled and Arranged from Official Records of the Federal and Confederate Armies, Reports of the Adjutant Generals of the Several States, the Army Registers, and Other Reliable Documents and Sources*, 3 vols. (Des Moines, Iowa: Dyer Publishing Company, 1908).

¹⁵ Goodspeed and Blanchard, eds., *Counties of Whitley and Noble, Indiana*, part 2, 109, 116.

¹⁶ Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File (Application 1364.603; Certificate 1144.608); Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; National Archives Building (NAB), Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ Affidavit of Mahala L. Weaver, December 4, 1911; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File (Application 973.948; Certificate 734.797); Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.



of 1866-67.¹⁸ It was where Isaac Newton Demmon, his brother-in-law (by his marriage to Sylvia), taught. During this time, his older brother, William, also a Church of Christ preacher, was teaching at the University and was actively building up the Second Christian Church in Indianapolis, a mission of the First Church to African Americans in the city. William was also helping preach

at the Fourth Christian Church there, in its mission Sabbath School.¹⁹ Levi began helping him publish Sunday School literature, lesson plans and songbooks, and a children's religious newspaper.

Levi also published *The Christian Almanac for the Year of Our Lord and Saviour 1867* in Indianapolis. It was simply a listing of Church of Christ ministers and where they were serving, as well as statistics about the Church.²⁰ In addition, he worked with famed hymn composers George Frederick Root and Philip Paul Bliss in editing *The Crown of Sunday School Songs*, which one reviewer, soon after its publication, would describe as "the new singing book that is taking our Sunday-schools by storm."²¹ Levi wrote many of the lyrics, which he set to already-established tunes. Levi and William together published a weekly newspaper, *The Morning Watch*, issued in Indianapolis, beginning in 1867, "for the Sunday School, Family and Church." Levi also published a hymn collection, *The Palm of Victory*,

¹⁸ W. W. Dowling, "Emigratus," says this study was "supplemented by further studies at a college farther East."

¹⁹ William Robeson Holloway, *Indianapolis: A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City, a Chronicle of Its Social, Municipal, Commercial, and Manufacturing Progress, with Full Statistical Tables* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Journal Print, 1870), 222-223; also, David J. Bodenhammer and Robert G. Barrows, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 416.

²⁰ Brief comments on *The Christian Almanac* are in *Discipliana* (Indianapolis) (July 1947): 24. It appears that much of the statistical information Dowling included was unreliable, and the *Gospel Advocate* opposed its publication; J. Edward Moseley, *Disciples of Christ in Georgia* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1954), 212-213.

²¹ Published Cincinnati: J. Church, 1871. For the comments of the reviewer—who does not seem to be Levi himself—see "Indiana Sunday-School Convention," *The Morning Watch* (Indianapolis) (September 1871): 130.

especially for Sunday Schools. William would continue to publish such material for the next three decades.²²

To conduct the religious publishing business, Levi moved from Indianapolis in 1868, to Chicago, where he lived until 1871, then briefly to Bloomington, Indiana, and then on to St. Louis, where his brother headquartered their business.²³ Also, on June 16, 1868, while living in Chicago, Levi married again, to Kate S. Mayo, in that city. William wrote of Levi that, “During this time, he traveled extensively organizing schools, introducing the then new International Lesson system; holding institutes and conventions; forming teacher classes and, in fact, ‘blazing the way’ and formulating the plans which Sunday-school evangelists have been largely following ever since.”²⁴ The “International Lesson system” evolved out of the National Sunday School Convention that met annually in Indianapolis, which, in 1871, adopted a uniform lesson plan.²⁵

Levi and his brother made a business of setting up Sunday Schools, by preaching at a church and encouraging the establishment there of a Sunday School for adults and for

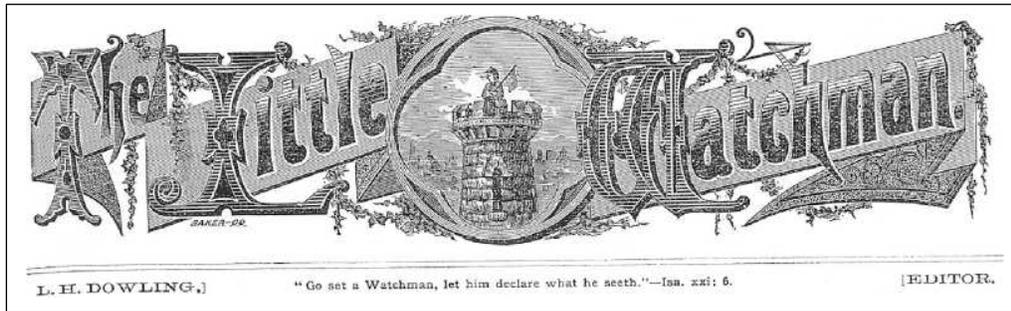
²² For example, William published (all by the Christian Publishing Company in St. Louis, Missouri) *The Christian Lesson Commentary, for the Use of Teachers and Advanced Students*; *The Lesson Helper: An Aid for the Senior Classes on the Bible Study*; *The Guide Book: A Manual for Sunday-School Workers in Organizing, Managing and Teaching* (1887), *The Bible Hand-Book: an Aid in the Study of the Word of God, and a Guide to Its Treasures of Wisdom* (1887), *The Choral Festival: A Book of Concert Services and Class Exercises and Recitations for Sunday Schools and Young People’s Societies* (1889), *The Christian Psalter: A Manual of Devotion Containing Responsive Readings for Public Worship* (1890), *The Helping Hand: A Manual of Instruction for the Y. P. S. C. E.* (1891), *The Easy Book: Containing a Series of Bible Lessons for Little Learners, the First Year’s Course* (1903), *The Normal Instructor: A Series of Normal Bible Studies for Teachers, Classes, Institutes and Assemblies* (1894-1901), and *Living Praise: A Collection of Sacred Songs for Sunday-Schools, Young People’s Societies, Evangelistic Meetings, and All Occasions of Church Work and Worship* (1906).

²³ Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.; see also John M. Bramwell, “Proceedings of the Indiana Christian Missionary Society,” *The Christian Record* (Bloomington, Ind.), August 1872, 359, which reported Dowling as living in Chicago in October 1868. The minutes of the “Annual Missionary and Sunday School Convention,” reported in *The Christian Record* (Bloomington, Ind.) (August 1872): 375, lists him as the State Sunday School Agent for the Illinois Christian Missionary Association.

²⁴ W. W. Dowling, “Emigratus.”

²⁵ See “Being Dead Yet Speaketh: Willliam Worth Dowling,” *The Christian* (St. Louis) (March 25, 1920): 317; and “A Condensed Record of a Very Busy Life” [of W. W. Dowling] (St. Louis: n. p., n.d.), pamphlet at Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tenn. For an example of one of Levi Dowling’s “International Lesson-Thoughts,” see “Memorial Stones,” the lesson for Sunday, January 17, 1875, printed in *The Christian* (St. Louis) (January 14, 1875).

children. They then trained the teachers, demonstrated model classes for different aged pupils, and provided standardized lesson plans, hymnals, and teaching materials.²⁶



William and Levi also published a series of children’s Sunday School newspapers from Indianapolis and Chicago—William had begun the first one in January 1865 and named it *The Little Sower*—with the titles *Little Thoughts*, *The Little Watchman*, *The Little Ones* and *The Little Chief*.²⁷ These were not small run papers—the number of copies printed of *The Little Sower* for its monthly issue of July 1871, for example, was 118,500.²⁸

Some of the teaching books Levi published included *The Sunday School Hand-Book for 1873*, and a series of materials arranged for “Dowlings’ Sunday-school Banking System.” These included *The Sunday School Accountant’s Record Book*, *The Church and Missionary Banking Systems*, and *Dowling’s Sunday School Reward System*—all meant to organize and increase the efficiency of the management of the Sunday School. In light of Levi’s later publications, it is interesting that he also published at this time, *The Life of Jesus*, which was described in a review this way:

This is a series of Sunday School lessons issued in sheets—four lessons on each sheet, designed to present a harmony of the Gospels, or a connected view of the life of Jesus, accompanied with such information as will aid the student in understanding the

²⁶ See recollections of James Wishart, 307, in “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling; Levi—the Akashic Seer,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 305-314.

²⁷ *The Christian Standard* (Cleveland) (March 19, 1870): 93; also, on the career of William Worth Dowling (and a portrait engraving of him), see *The Christian-Evangelist* (St. Louis) (November 23, 1899): 1484; and “Being Dead Yet Speaketh—William Worth Dowling: June 15, 1834-February 8, 1920,” *The Christian* (St. Louis) (March 25, 1920): 317.

²⁸ *The Morning Watch* (Indianapolis) (August 1871): 128.

text ... They will be found to add to the interest of Sunday School instruction, and to facilitate the preparation of the teacher.²⁹

It was one of many Gospel “harmonies” that were created especially for use in teaching children. Such works were sometimes more than a tabular comparison of Gospel passages. Their authors often created the text of the narrative themselves as a framework to support the Gospel passages. In other words, as a film scriptwriter would put it, they wrote “continuity” to connect one event to another. This, it seems, is highly significant for understanding what Levi Dowling was trying to do later in his life with *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*.



Levi also indulged a fondness for writing poetry. An example of what he was capable of is this selection from a longer poem, entitled “Preach Christ Crucified”:

Beware of division, contention and strife,
But hold the sweet spirit of unity dear;
And sacrifice nobly each power of life,

²⁹ *The Christian Standard* (Cleveland) (October 1879): 317. For notices of his other published material, see *The Christian Standard* (January 11, 1873): 13, and (April 25, 1874): 133.

To the cause of the Savior, with meekness and fear.

Press on to encounter the fierce “man of sin,”
Whose armies are marshalling now for the fight;
Be prayerful and vigilant, then you will win,
For Jesus your captain will guide you aright.

You will meet with discouragements here, very true,
In preaching the gospel of infinite love;
But keep the reward of the faithful in view,
And you’ll gather with joy in the kingdom above.³⁰

Levi traveled throughout the Midwest, preaching and organizing Sunday Schools throughout the 1870s.³¹ He became the Church of Christ’s Sunday School evangelist, general agent, and superintendent for the State of Illinois.³² He did not shy away from applying pressure to his Sunday School missionary troops, when it came time to ask for financial support, as is evident in his first missive to his charges across the State:

We ask every Christian Sunday School in the State to adopt the following financial plan: Lift quarterly collections that will average at least *five* cents from every member of the Sunday School, teacher or officer ... Now, brethren, come up to this work, and let us do something worthy of the name that we bear.³³

While resident as pastor of the Church of Christ in Waukegan, he printed and distributed cards to the residents encouraging those who had been baptized only by

³⁰ “Preach Christ Crucified,” *The Gospel Echo* (McComb, Illinois) (January 1870): 25.

³¹ See Frederick Snyder, “The Missouri State Meeting,” *The Christian Record* (Bloomington, Ind.) (November 1873): 499.

³² Recollections of James Wishart in “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 307; also, Nathaniel S. Haynes, *History of the Disciples of Christ in Illinois, 1819-1914* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1915), 453.

³³ *The Gospel Echo* (McComb, Illinois) (September 1871): 440.

“sprinkling” to come to him for a *real* baptism, by immersion, as adults.³⁴ He also became a vigorous and well-known advocate of Temperance and Prohibition. In 1878, Dowling was said to be about to begin editing a Temperance tri-weekly paper from Topeka for the National Christian Temperance Union. It began in April as *The Temperance Messenger*. It is unclear whether it ran longer than its first issue. He also organized a Kansas State Temperance Society that same year.

Homoeopathic Healer and Prohibitionist Preacher

Nevertheless, soon afterwards, Levi’s path of success, which he had trod alongside his brother, turned away. Most importantly, in May 1877, his wife Kate had left him, “wholly disregarding her duties,” and never returned.³⁵ Perhaps partly as a consequence, Levi turned aside from religious publishing or working with his brother. We may, perhaps, also see in his search for something new, a disillusionment with the conflict within the Church of Christ, which would eventually result in 1906 in the division between the conservative Church of Christ and the progressive Disciples of Christ. The more conservative faction within the Campbellite fold distrusted attempts to establish institutional organization—such as the complex system of Sunday Schools in which the Dowlings were a moving force—as a falling back into denominationalism. They also distrusted, as a hindrance to pious simplicity, the use of complex musical and instrumental settings in church services—and the Dowlings were intensely committed to hymns and the marketing of music for use in worship.

In 1880, Dowling took charge of the First Christian Church of Ottumwa, Iowa, and, through his ministry (or, rather, because of it), the congregation over the following year was split into two factions, with the minority dissenters leaving the church along with

³⁴ A copy of the card, “Have I Been Baptized?” is in the archives of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

³⁵ Levi Dowling, Affidavit, May 1, 1882; Levi Dowling, Plaintiff vs. Kate S. Dowling, Defendant, Circuit Court of the City of St. Louis, June Term 1882; “Fresh Litigation,” *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, 2 May 1882. No information about their married life, why Kate left him, or about what became of her has turned up.

Dowling.³⁶ The circumstances of his departure from the Church of Christ pastorship are cloudy, but it was during this time that Dowling struck off into a new career path, that of homoeopathic physician, having begun lecturing (based on medical knowledge he had gained in some way that does not show up in the public records) at the newly formed Hering Medical College of St. Louis. There he was given a faculty position (for reasons that will be made clear in a moment) at the ever-fragile Oskaloosa College teaching pathology and therapeutics.³⁷ That did not last. Dowling moved to St. Louis, where he received his M. D. degree from Hering Medical College in March 1882, and, the following year, when the College merged with the Homoeopathic Medical College of St. Louis (which was just then re-organizing itself), he found a position on the faculty there as professor of chemistry and toxicology.³⁸



While he was living in St. Louis and teaching there, he formally divorced Kate, his wife of fourteen years, in October 1882.³⁹ He had not bothered to do this before. The

³⁶ Harrison Lyman Waterman, *History of Wapello County, Iowa*, volume 1 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1914), 180. "Dr. Dowling is vim, force, wit, sense, judgment, discretion and push combined," *Weekly Oskaloosa Herald*, 17 February 1881. See Anna D. Patrick's remembrance of Dowling, "In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling," *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 306.

³⁷ *Waterloo Iowa Courier*, 6 October 1880. Hering Medical College was founded by a small group of homoeopathic physicians who believed that the pristine principles of Samuel Hahnemann (the founder of Homoeopathy) had been adulterated and corrupted by later homoeopathic practitioners. They wanted to restore Homoeopathy to its original purity; their motives were, in that sense, similar to that of Alexander Campbell's when he declared his movement a simple return to an unadulterated and uncorrupted Christianity.

³⁸ W. W. Dowling, "Emigratus"; also, "Medical News," *United States Medical Investigator* 15.7 (1 April 1882): 360; William Harvey King, *History of Homoeopathy and Its Institutions in America* (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1905), vol. 1; besides chemistry and toxicology, Eva lists physiology, histology, and electricity as subjects he taught—see her "Short Sketch of the Author," in the introduction to Levi D'Guru, *Complete Course in Biopneuma: The True Science of the Great Breath; Opening the Golden Gate unto the Healing of All Diseases, the Forgiveness of Sins and Divine Illumination*, 2nd edition [bound with *Self-Culture: A Course of Lessons on Developing the Physical Unfolding the Soul & Attaining unto the Spiritual*] (Los Angeles: E. S. Dowling, 1921). The *Directory of Deceased American Physicians, 1804-1929* lists him as an allopathic practitioner (which was certainly incorrect), with licenses in Illinois (1883), Colorado (1890), and Michigan (1900).

³⁹ Divorce Decree, Circuit Court, City of St. Louis, October Term 1882, Wednesday, October 11, 1882, Levi Dowling vs (58853) Kate S. Dowling; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. See also, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June-July 1882, for publication of the notice of court action filed against Kate. The granting of the divorce was reported in the *St. Louis Republican*, October

immediate occasion for Levi's filing for divorce was clearly his intention to marry someone else. He went back to Oskaloosa to marry Eva M. Sellers on November 9, 1882, and then brought her to St. Louis.⁴⁰ Eva was born in Albia, Iowa in 1844. Her father was James Crawford Sellers; her mother was Aby Ann (Read) Sellers.⁴¹ Eva was the oldest of five children. It was her first marriage.⁴² The ceremony occurred less than a month after the St. Louis Circuit Court issued its decree divorcing him from Kate. The service was conducted by a friend of her family, the Reverend George H. Laughlin, another Church of Christ minister and Sunday School teacher, who was President of Oskaloosa College.⁴³ Eva's father, James, was a successful life insurance agent, and was the secretary and a trustee of the Board of the College (and so, no doubt, secured Levi's position on the college faculty). He was also a deacon and elder in the Church of Christ and a fervent Prohibitionist.⁴⁴ Before settling in Oskaloosa, he had been a teacher. Eva was also an educator; she had been the principal of the Douglass private school in Ottumwa. Levi and Eva established their residence in St. Louis, where they stayed until 1884, with Levi on the faculty of the Homoeopathic College there.

For the fall term of 1883, Professor Lee H. Dowling was Professor of Physiology at the Homoeopathic College of Missouri in St. Louis.⁴⁵ In June 1883, he had organized a science club at his residence on Cass avenue in St. Louis.⁴⁶ An example of a lecture to the

12, 1882. On Levi's places of residence, see Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁰ *Weekly Oskaloosa Herald*, 23 November 1882, quoting the *St. Louis Republican*.

⁴¹ James Crawford Sellers was born January 14, 1828 in Garrard County, Kentucky. He died in 1874 in Kendallville. Aby Ann Read was born in Putnam County, Indiana. She died in 1876, also in Kendallville.

⁴² Eva, Alice (m. Dr. Smith Augustus Spillman), Adelle ("Dell," "Della") (m. Edward A. Brown), Caroline ("Carrie") (m. Henry Willey Comstock), and James C. (Jr.).

⁴³ Affidavit of Josephine E. Glosser and Olivia Alexander, December 4, 1911; Affidavit of E[lizabeth] M. Hammond, November 28, 1911; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁴ A biographical sketch and etching of James C. Sellers is found in Manoah Hedge, *Past and Present of Mahaska County, Iowa: Together with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Prominent and Leading Citizens and Illustrious Dead* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1906), 180-183 and in *Portrait and Biographical Album of Mahaska County, Iowa* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887), 212-13.

⁴⁵ "Dr. Kent Talks to Homeopathic Students of the Rival Regulars," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 9 October 1883.

⁴⁶ "North St. Louis," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 5 June 1883.

club was noted in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in July as a local attorney's "reading of a paper upon the philosophical phenomena preceding death."⁴⁷

It is difficult to say what the true extent of his medical studies were. Hering Medical College and the Homoeopathic Medical College of St. Louis were in a great state of flux at precisely the time that he was associated with them. The list of faculty members at the Homoeopathic Medical College of St. Louis reported by the school for its 1882-83 term even lists Dowling as having a Ph. D., not an M. D.⁴⁸ Perhaps that discrepancy was eventually noted.

In 1884, Levi separated from the College (again, the reasons for his quitting the college were not noted) and moved south of St. Louis to the small city of Ironton, Missouri, where he and Eva planned to establish a high school, with Levi as principal. While in Ironton waiting to find support for their planned school, "Dr. Lee H. Dowling," acting as Deputy Supreme Protector, organized a lodge of the fraternal Knights and Ladies of Honor in December. But the Dowlings found more support for their planned school in Belleview, ten miles north, and so they set up the school there, in January 1885.⁴⁹ The school enrolled twenty-five students, but lasted only a single semester, at the end of which the Dowlings—principal and assistant—left the city suddenly, and departed with Levi under a cloud, for certain actions in both Ironton and Belleview. First, there were financial irregularities with the Knights and Ladies of Honor, as the Ironton paper explained:

Unfortunately for all concerned, the principal was *not* of the right sort, the school is no more, and he dwells far away from the scene of his late venture. If one-half alleged against him is true—and the allegations come from those whose truthfulness and honesty have never been questioned—he is a scoundrel against whom other communities ought to be warned. ... while here [in Ironton, before choosing Belleview in which to start his school], he organized a lodge of the Knights and Ladies of Honor, which is still in existence. There are about fifteen members, not one of whom, after

⁴⁷ "The Popular Science Club," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 21 July 1883.

⁴⁸ William Horning King, ed., *History of Homoeopathy and Its Institutions in America*, vol. 2 (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1905), 382.

⁴⁹ "Belleview High School," Ironton, Missouri *Iron County Register*, 22 January 1885.

their experience with him, would trust him in any pecuniary transaction, or take his word for anything. He lied and misrepresented to every member, and finally left the lodge with the treasury depleted and his own pockets well lined. “N[o]. G[ood].” is about the mildest epithet some of the members apply to him.⁵⁰

There was something else, however, in Belleview, concerning a note he had written to one of the school’s students:

One day toward the latter end of Dr. Lee H. Dowling’s term of High School a note was picked up off the floor of the school room. The finder of the note—one of the pupils—placed it in the hands of her father, and the result was the closing of the school and the hasty exit of the Doctor. The note was intended for a young lady pupil, evidently, though their [sic] was neither address nor signature. Its contents, though evidently improper, coming as they did from a married man and a teacher, positively contained nothing that could in any way compromise the character of the person for whom they were intended. They simply developed the rascality of the sender. ... we have secured the note, had it carefully examined by experts, *and now pronounce it the handwriting of Dr. Lee H. Dowling, beyond the shadow of a doubt.* We have compared it with a letter written to us by the Doctor, and the conclusion arrived at was inevitable.⁵¹

The paper concluded:

As to his Belleview escapade, we desire to say little, except that in his unseemly and hasty flight he confessed his guilt. If an innocent man, he would certainly have remained until the cloud upon his character had been dissipated. No! no! Mr. Lee H. Dowling will not do; and we warn the public against his peculiar methods—after having waited long and patiently for his vindication at his own hands, according to his

⁵⁰ “As to Mr. L. H. Dowling,” Ironton, Missouri *Iron County Register*, 16 July 1885.

⁵¹ “Local Brevities,” Ironton, Missouri *Iron County Register*, 30 July 1885.

own request. Having failed to vindicate his character, he cannot blame us for coming to the conclusion, after a lapse of two months, that he has no character to vindicate.⁵²

By October, Dowling and his wife had moved to Oskaloosa, where Eva's family lived, and advertised they had just established the Albia Academy and Training School in nearby Albia, Iowa, with courses in music, painting, drawing, penmanship, shorthand, telegraphy, and typewriting.⁵³ Then, in December 1886, Dowling "formerly principal of the Iowa Normal and Business academy," was engaged to teach pedagogy at the Wyandotte Academy in Kansas City, Kansas.⁵⁴

In April 1887, Dr. Lee H. Dowling began advertising as a homoeopathic physician in Kansas City, Kansas.⁵⁵ Whatever work he did in that capacity must not have been overwhelming, for he was also the manager of a "health gymnasium" where his wife Eva taught lessons in exercising with Indian clubs. Even with that, he seems to have had time to engage in real estate speculation. In April he advertised for "working men and women" to invest in a tract of land about to be platted, with the idea that investors would not necessarily be settling there but would be able to make "the big money" by selling the plots later.⁵⁶ In November, the Dowlings, as principal and assistant (perhaps the only teachers), opened a "University Preparatory School" in Wichita.⁵⁷ That school, too, appears to have been an extremely short-lived one.

**Working Men
And Women.**

**And Others Wishing to lay by a Good
Round Sum for a Rainy Day, But
Whose Means are Limited.**

A WORD WITH YOU: A company is being formed for the purchase of a tract of land on the new Cable line between Riverview and Chelsea Park to be platted at once and put on the market. In this enterprise

THERE IS BIG MONEY.

Everybody knows that the men who plat additions are the men who make the big money, and here is a chance for you to get on the Ground Floor in a money-making scheme.

TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS

Down and \$25 per month, for a few months, will give you two and a half lots of this land, well worth this day \$1,250. You may take as many shares as you like, and if you cannot alone raise \$25 per month, you can get two or three friends to unite with you in raising the amount.

THE IRON IS HOT

And now is the time to strike. Make the point at all hazards, and thus lay the foundation for a fortune. The contract will be closed at once. For further particulars call without delay at the office of

HEALTH GYMNASIUM,

LEE H. DOWLING, South of Dunning's Opera House,
Manager. WYANDOTTE, KAS.

⁵² When the note was first found, rumor spread among some in Belleview that it had been forged; see, "A Letter from Belleview," *Iron County Register*, 12 February 1885.

⁵³ "Dr. L. H. Dowling," *Oskaloosa Herald*, 15 October 1885.

⁵⁴ "Wyandotte Academy," *Wyandotte Gazette*, 3 December 1886.

⁵⁵ "Dr. Lee H. Dowling," Kansas City, Kansas *Daily Gazette*, 12 April 1887; "Collier's Body Found," *Kansas City (Missouri) Times*, 20 June 1887.

⁵⁶ "Working Men and Women," Kansas City, Kansas *Daily Gazette*, 25 April 1887.

⁵⁷ "A University Preparatory School," *Wichita Eagle*, 20 November 1887; "A New Private School," *Wichita Beacon*, 19 November 1887.

Dowling, as his brother would later put it, then “entered into the temperance field as a lecturer and publisher for the Prohibitionists.”⁵⁸ At the beginning of February 1888 until mid-May 1889, Lee H. Dowling reached back into his portfolio of work history. He drew out his experience in editing and publishing religious newspapers and materials, and began *The Leader*, a weekly secular newspaper, issued first from Wichita, then, when it was accepted as the official organ of the Kansas State Prohibitionist party, issued from Topeka. In the first issue, he also advertised that he would also edit a paper, *The Young Folk’s Treasure*, aimed at Sunday Schools and aimed especially at “the gospel of Temperance and Prohibition,” but this does not appear to have materialized.⁵⁹ He also announced the establishment in Wichita of “Dowling’s Business Academy.”⁶⁰ The paper’s editorials were not universally well-received, even by other newspaper editors in the state who may have shared its political views, as one of them put it:

If Lee H. Dowling, editor of the *Leader*, was only half as good at elocution or writing as he is at using blackguard adjectives in the *Leader*, he might possibly assist the third party candidates. As it is, both his speeches and editorials show lack of education as well as brains, and would lead one to infer that he is simply the graduate of a brothel.⁶¹

The sentiment was echoed by the editor of the *Emporia News*, who accused him of having libeled a local politician, and added that, with Dowling writing and speechifying for the third-party Prohibitionists, “the republican party will make votes by having the services of such an ignoramus engaged by the third party people. He will make republican votes wherever he addresses an intelligent audience, and that includes all Kansas.”⁶²

During the time he was editing *The Leader* in Topeka, he worked closely with James McDonald Wishart, a master mechanic and fertile inventor of a grain drill, a hay stacker, and a benzene self-heating clothes iron. Through the years, Wishart would continue to invent and patent other things and make a fortune from them, such as a locking window

⁵⁸ James Wishart, “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 307.

⁵⁹ “Young Folk’s Treasure,” *The Leader*, 2 February 1888.

⁶⁰ “A Business Academy within the Reach of All,” *The Leader*, 16 February 1888.

⁶¹ *Emporia News*, 23 August 1888.

⁶² “Emporia News,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, 8 August 1888.

sash, a water heating system that used the sun to warm water and circulate it through a room, and an improved rocker device for separating gold from ore tailings.

When Wishart was living in Topeka, he owned the Topeka Manufacturing Company and devoted himself to the Prohibitionist cause, along with Dowling. Wishart was also a Church of Christ minister and enlisted Dowling as a fellow preacher for the cause. Wishart would soon move to California and manufacture and sell his gold ore machines there, but while he was still in Topeka, he formed the Leader Improvement Company with Dowling and in May 1889, they set about projecting a real estate development project, "The Leader Villa," comprising six city blocks on the west side of Topeka north of Huntoon Street, where "Prohibition Does Prohibit." Saloons would be off-limits there. The

The Leader Villa

West Side Circle Railroad.

TOPEKA, KANSAS.

A City of Forty-five thousand Active, Energetic and Progressive People.

WHERE PROHIBITION DOES PROHIBIT.

But Not a Single Saloon

A Railroad Center.

GREAT CITIES OF THE WEST

Manufactories.

HAS A GOVERNMENT BUILDING

JUST PLACED ON THE MARKET.

THE LEADER VILLA

LEADER IMPROVEMENT CO.
813 Kansas Avenue,
TOPEKA, KAS

project never found the required investors, but it appears to have been the first foreshadowing in Dowling's life of the idea of founding a colony of elite, progressives bound together by ideological conviction, an idea that would come to full flowering not far in the future; he would try to do it repeatedly.

In November 1889, "Evangelist Dowling," who had helped organize the Lindale Church of Christ in North Topeka, and had been ministering and preaching to the congregation, tried to bow out of those responsibilities during a series of probably controversial discourses he was giving on "The Christ of Prophetic History," but the church

elders pressed him to stay and he assented.⁶³ He held the post as pastor through the end of 1890.⁶⁴

Wishart described Dowling's activities as combining his preaching and pastoral skills with the healing arts, a natural combination at a time in which the religious movements of New Thought and Mental Healing were being born:

He preached to the delight and edification of all the congregation, and in less than two weeks from the beginning of his preaching, we built a large tabernacle in Topeka in which we held our meetings, for more than two months, preaching every night. It proved to be the largest and most successful meeting ever held in the state of Kansas by any Christian workers. Preaching at night and visiting the sick through the day and administering to their ailments ... By his faithful and devoted work many were encouraged and lifted out of beds of sickness and placed in the pathway of health and strength.⁶⁵

In this work, Eva assisted her husband, as a kind of deacon, nurse, or teacher, depending on the line he was pursuing.

By November 1891, the Dowlings had moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, where Levi offered "Dr. Dowling's Electro-Thermal baths to cure nervous debility, rheumatism, paralysis, female weakness, etc." He used the bath rooms at the Hotel Felix, with Eva handling the female patients.⁶⁶

On February 5th, 1892, while engaged in this work, Eva gave birth to their son, Leo Worth Dowling.⁶⁷

By March 1892, he had relocated his office and treatment rooms to a corner building at Tenth and Edmond streets.⁶⁸ The Dowlings also organized a Working Girls'

⁶³ "Lindale Church of Christ," *Topeka Daily Press*, 23 November 1889.

⁶⁴ "Annual Meeting of the Church of Christ," *Topeka Daily Capital*, 9 February 1890.

⁶⁵ "Recollections, James M. Wishart," *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 307-308.

⁶⁶ "Free Electric Baths," *St. Joseph News Press Gazette*, 14 November 1891.

⁶⁷ Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. Also, St. Joseph, Missouri, City Directory 1892, listing for "Lee H. Dowling."

⁶⁸ "Not Gone, Nor Likely to Go," *St. Joseph Gazette Herald*, 13 March 1892.

Entertainment Association in St. Joseph, with a philanthropic view to keep young, single women off the streets and out of the bars at night by rehearsing and performing skits and musical numbers. They had their first performance in December, and it included a skit performed by Arthur Seymour, an actor with the Eden Musee vaudeville troupe, which simulated mind reading (via “muscle reading”):

A young man pretended to stab a gentleman in the audience with a knife and afterward concealed the weapon. The test was for the mind-reader, who was blindfolded, to find the knife, and afterward the gentleman who it was pretended had been stabbed. Mr. Seymour seized the sanguinary youth by the back of the neck and one of his wrists and rushed him off the stage into the audience. They rushed across the parquette circle to one of the boxes and turned up one of the aisles. Then the mind-reader hesitated, whirled his companion around and darted to the box again and found the knife. In instant he had the young man in another aisle, moving slowly. Suddenly he stopped in front of a gentleman and asked him to stand up. The request was complied with and Mind-reader Seymour placed a finger on the spot that had been touched by the point of the knife-blade a few minutes before. The test was a success.⁶⁹

Dr. Dowling’s treatments in St. Joseph were unorthodox, for he now considered himself a ground-breaking medical experimenter. He was nicknamed the “Electrical Wizard” and he subjected his patients to “electric and phenic acid [phenol] baths, electro magnetic treatments and electric medicines,” especially to “cure” paralysis.⁷⁰ In a series of column-length puff pieces run on the front page of the *St. Joseph Herald*, made to look like a genuine interview by a disinterested reporter, but perhaps written by Dowling himself, Levi justified his view that morphine, quinine, and calomel were useless medicines that he never used. He said there were no incurable diseases, but that all ailments were caused by chemical salts imbalances that could be resolved with “electrical” treatments. He also

⁶⁹ “An Artistic Success,” *St. Joseph Herald*, 12 December 1891.

⁷⁰ “‘By Thunder,’ An Electric Storm Cures a Paralytic and Gives the Doctors a Pointer,” *St. Joseph Herald*, 20 March 1892.

hinted at life extension—“Even the Ravages of Death to Be Stayed by the Strong Hand of Science.”⁷¹

In one remarkable example of these “interviews,” entitled “Electric Love: The Philosophy of Affinities—Why We Love One and Despise Another,” Dr. Dowling explained that diseases were caused by electromagnetic imbalances, but that they could not be cured by charlatans “who stand on the street corners and other public places with electric machines to give people ‘shocks’ for a nickel.” Proper treatment could only be given by a trained anatomist and electrician (like himself). The “blushing reporter” (as the article described him) then asked about “electric medicines,” which he said he had read about in medical literature. What were they? he asked. Dowling pulled out a case full of them and explained:

These are rendered magnetic by long shaking. This may be done by machinery or by hand, but the hand work is much the better. Homoeopathic physicians usually think that this shaking process simply breaks up the molecules of the medicinal substance into atoms, and thus makes them sufficiently minute to be carried by the capillaries to the diseased parts. This is a mistake. Of course the shaking breaks up the particles considerably, but it is not the “breaking up” that renders the medicines so potent. The shaking makes them highly magnetic, and the more vigorous the shaking the more concentrated electricity do we have in the medicinal molecules. That is why the “high potencies,” as the homoeopath calls them, act more quickly when indicated than the low. ... Electrical medicines are prepared for transmission over the delicate electric wires of the body—the nerves. As soon as they come in contact with the mucus membrane of the tongue they go to the nerve depots, get aboard the tiny electric cars in waiting, and with the speed of lightening they hurry to the diseased parts to render help. Electric remedies go by lightening express, while ordinary drugs go by slow freight.⁷²

⁷¹ “Death’s Bludgeons,” *St. Joseph Herald*, 6 December 1891; “No End of Wonders,” *St. Joseph Herald*, 22 November 1891.

⁷² “Electric Love,” *St. Joseph Herald*, 20 December 1891.

Given Dowling's original and outré applications of electricity on his clients, and given the direction of his later development into an Occult seer, it is fair to observe that during Dowling's residence in St. Joseph, the pastor of the Unitarian church there was Jesse Charles Fremont Grumbine, who had already published *Evolution and Christianity* in 1887, which urged its readers to seek out the "higher religion" behind (above?) Christianity. Grumbine would soon break even with the liberal Unitarians. In 1890, in Chicago, he had founded the "Order of the White Rose," supposedly a Rosicrucian branch, and in 1893, having moved from St. Joseph to Boston, he would come out as a fully-fledged Spiritualist and found his mail-order



J F C Grumbine

lesson operation, the "College of Psychical Sciences and Unfoldment." When Grumbine was not organizing love cults, evading the law, pastoring wholly unorthodox "churches," or giving lectures, he would publish works under his White Rose imprint, including *Clairvoyance* (1897), *Psychometry* (1898), *The Spirit World* (1909), *Telepathy* (1910), *Clairaudience* (1911), and *Melchizedek* (1919).⁷³

Even by the time Grumbine opened his mail-order "college," his lessons were focused on breathing exercises that, as one reviewer pointed out, would induce a self-hypnotic state in which visions were likely to occur, as well as the development of "psychometric" and clairvoyant powers of "seeing" into the far distance in time and space. It is highly unlikely that Dowling did not encounter Grumbine (and his "scientific" explorations of the mind) in St. Joseph.

Anna D. Patrick, one of Levi's early devotees from back when he was preaching in Ottumwa in 1880, who became an enthusiastic member of the Luxor Lodge of the Theosophical Society in Lincoln, Nebraska, remained Dowling's fan through the years and eventually moved to Los Angeles and became one of his associates, would later remember:

⁷³ For an example of his brushes with the law, see "Damnably Villain, is J. F. C. Grumbine Founder of the White Rose Cult," *Sunday Washington Globe*, 13 October 1901.

In 1894 Levi was in the silence, and the [ethereal] Masters of the council of wisdom came to him saying: "The hour is come when the good news of peace must be preached in all fullness." "Thou art Levi a teacher of all things." "Wait no longer, go, and as you go say to the children of men turn from your evil ways, overcome the hellions of the threshold: Hypocrisy, Prejudice, and Unbelief. Put away forever every evil passion, habit, and desire, and prepare for the marriage supper of the Lamb, the time is near, the Empire of Peace is at hand."⁷⁴

In May 1894, the peripatetic and restless Dr. Dowling was residing in Excelsior Springs, Missouri and was soliciting the opinions of the members of the medical profession and of the state's newspaper editors and the public on whether the State Board of Health of Missouri "ever benefitted the masses or the profession," a clear sign that his opinion was

<p>Dr. Dowling treats with marked success all Diseases of the Skin, Nerves and Lungs. No. 10 West Wayne Street.</p>	
<p>Rheumatism Cured. Gottfreid Hartman, of Green, Iowa, writes: "Dr. Dowling cured me of a most distressing case of Rheumatism, after I had been given up by five eminent physicians. Had been confined to my bed more than a year.</p> <p>A Radical Catarrh Cure. KENDALLVILLE, Ind., July 1.—Dr. Dowling, of Fort Wayne, has a radical catarrh cure that will destroy all disease germs in the nose and throat in a single day. Have seen it tried many times. S. W. S.</p> <p>A Strange Case. EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, Mo., Oct. 2d, 1893. —Let me say a word to you. For at least three years I was a nervous wreck. My nerves were seemingly almost destroyed. My head continually pained</p>	<p>me, and my brain was so far gone that it appeared loose in the skull. Some two months ago I was very bad off, and was falling off in flesh. I thought that death would come to my release in a few days. At that time I was induced to go to Dr. Dowling for advice. He said he could help me and I began treatment, but I confess I had no faith, but in less than a week I began to improve. In three weeks I had gained twenty pounds, and now I am in better health than I have been for a quarter of a century. Dr. Dowling's Electro-Magnetic treatments have done wonders for me and they will do so for you. If you want to know more about it come and see me.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">DAVID McKIBBEN, Proprietor Pacific House.</p>

that it had not and ought to be abolished.⁷⁵ He set up a temporary practice in Excelsior Springs, offering "Electro-Magnetic treatments," but there is no evidence that he advertised. During that year, when he was "in the silence," he may have used his time in Excelsior Springs for his own mental health, taking advantage of one of the specialized bath houses and health hotels, which promised to cure everything from ulcers to drug and alcohol addictions.

In May 1895, Dr. Lee H. Dowling took out a license to practice medicine in Fort Wayne, Indiana.⁷⁶ It appears that he had moved for a short time to Kendallville, Indiana, where his brother William was living, but not finding a suitable clientele there, perhaps, moved to Fort Wayne. He advertised himself as a dermatologist and fronted his advertisements with a claim to remove moles by treatment

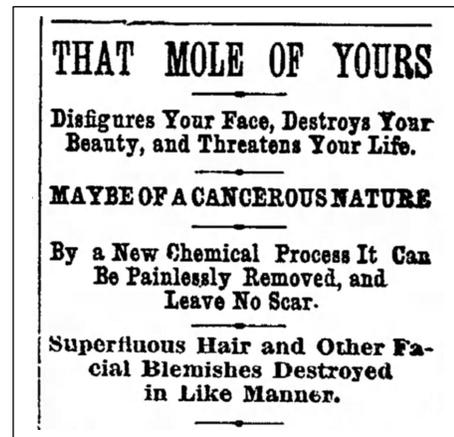
⁷⁴ Anna D. Patrick, "The Visions of Levi, the Seer and Teacher," *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 306. [Sarah Ann (Garretson) Donahue Patrick (1849-1942), the wealthy widow of a wholesale cigar merchant in Lincoln, Nebraska]

⁷⁵ "The State Board of Health," *Medical Brief* (St. Louis) 22.5 (May 1894): 555.

⁷⁶ "Other Court Notes," *Fort Wayne News*, 28 May 1895.

with “newly discovered oxidizing agents” that “destroy at once the hair bulbs, and by this process all superfluous hair can be quickly and permanently removed from the face.” Not only that, but—somehow—he could cure consumption as well. His office was at 10 West Wayne Street.⁷⁷ Eva used her time in Fort Wayne by opening up the Fort Wayne Magazine Exchange, a membership-based lending library of “all the leading magazines of England and America.”⁷⁸

In Fort Wayne, Dr. Dowling opened a practice specializing first in rheumatism, paralysis (strokes), nervous debility (depression), nervous dyspepsia (gastritis, ulcers), bronchitis, catarrh (inflammation of the mucus membrane, flu, allergies, hay fever, colds) and consumption (tuberculosis). His ads in the local paper assured readers that “His methods of treatment are new and his success is, usually, all that can be asked.”⁷⁹ He also advertised himself at the same time as a dermatologist and a “diligent student of Bacteriology.” On the basis of this self-appraisal, he opened “Dr. Dowling’s Mole Cure Parlors,” where he promised to use “newly discovered oxidizing agents” to destroy the hair bulbs at the base of moles, preventing the possibility that the moles might become cancerous. He presented his case to his readers by telling them about the observations of an expert—undoubtedly Levi Dowling:



Recently, on a day when the streets of Fort Wayne were crowded with people to see a big show parade an expert took occasion to gaze. In a short time 6,500 persons passed by, and of this number 2,740 were so notably marked with Moles that it took no opera glass to see them.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “Tumor Painlessly Removed,” *Fort Wayne Weekly Sentinel*, 19 June 1895; “That Mole of Yours,” *Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette*, 30 May 1895; “Dr. Dowling’s Credentials,” *Forty Wayne Journal Gazette*, 9 June 1895.

⁷⁸ “Do You Want Anything More to Read?” *Fort Wayne Evening Post*, 23 November 1895.

⁷⁹ *The Fort Wayne Sentinel*, 31 May 1895; see also, “Praise for a Fort Wayne Doctor,” *The Fort Wayne Gazette* 31 May 1895, quoting the New York medical journal, *The Germicide*.

⁸⁰ “That Mole of Yours Disfigures Your Face, Destroys Your Beauty and Threatens Your Life; May Be of a Cancerous Nature; By a New Chemical Process It May Be Painlessly Removed, and Leave No Scar; Superfluous Hair and Other Facial Blemishes Destroyed in Like Manner,” *The Fort Wayne Sentinel*, 25 May 1895.

Homoeopathic medical practitioners have often described their system as the result of having turned away from the “regular” or “allopathic” medicine. They have seen themselves as deliberately rejecting unnatural treatments—such as non-vegetable medicine—and doing for medicine what the Protestant reformation did for Christianity, turning it away from false “priestcraft” and away from a conspiracy against the primitive truth. Homeopathy had the same allergy to orthodox dogma that Dowling would have grown up with as a devout Campbellite.

New Thought Visionary

While the Dowlings lived in Fort Wayne, the city had a thriving Spiritualist Society and professed clairvoyants who practiced astrology and held séances. It was also home to the Annie Besant Chapter of the Theosophical Society. The Fort Wayne chapter would soon change its name to the Lotus Circle of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. It sponsored well-attended public discussions, complete with visiting lecturers from the national headquarters of the Society.

The Spiritualist society was called the “Occult Science Society,” of which Dowling was a member.⁸¹ Apparently, this did not prevent him from appearing on the membership rolls (along with Eva) of the West Creighton Avenue Christian Church in Fort Wayne at the time of its founding in 1896. At least one minister in the city, however, David W. Moffat, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, had preached against the Fort Wayne Occult Science Society in particular—and the belief in Spiritualism in general.⁸²

⁸¹ For the Theosophical Society chapter, see *The Fort Wayne Daily Gazette* (June 1, 1895): 8 and the Fort Wayne City Directory for 1893-94; the Fort Wayne City Directory for 1896 makes clear that Dowling’s colleague in the Occult Science Society, fellow physician Hiram Hurford Van Sweringen (the Society’s Vice-President), became the Secretary of the First Spiritual Society of Fort Wayne when the Occult Science Society reorganized under that name in 1896; for the Occult Science Society, see “Spiritualism,” *The Fort Wayne News* (March 28, 1896): 4. In 1895, one of the most active spirit mediums for the Society was Eli Wilmot Sprague, a nationally-known figure among Spiritualists, who wrote his memoirs, *A Future Life Demonstrated; or, Twenty-Seven Years a Public Medium* (Detroit: Eli Wilmot Sprague, 1908).

⁸² *Spiritualism; as Viewed by Rev. Dr. D. W. Moffat, H. V. Sweringen, and L. O. Hull* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Fort Wayne Occult Science Society, 1894), copy in the archives of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1894, the invisible Theosophical sages had come to Dowling with an initiation and a commission—“The hour is come when the good news of peace must be preached in all fullness,” they said, and “Thou art Levi, a teacher of all things.” Dowling could therefore think he could turn the organizational and marketing skills he had developed as a proselytizer for the Sunday School movement, for Prohibition, and for Homoeopathy to work for a New Dispensation. Eva was his supporter and a “close student,” it was said, of his new revelations. One of the tendencies of New Thought interpretations of Jesus’ activities was to focus away from his sacrifice on the Cross, and onto his moral teachings and, especially, onto his healing of people’s bodies and minds. This corresponded well to the trajectory of Levi’s own career, from preacher to healer, and could convince him that he, among all the dwellers on Earth, might have been especially well prepared to receive a supernal commission to commence an entirely New Age.

From Indiana, the Dowlings moved to Michigan. Without more evidence, it is impossible to say why, but perhaps it was no coincidence that the Michigan governor in 1895 had vetoed a medical registration bill passed by the state legislature that would have “prevented most clairvoyant doctors from practicing the art of healing,” for which the Michigan State Spiritualists had thanked him.⁸³ In 1898, the Dowlings were living in Saginaw, where Dr. Dowling, “Physician and Surgeon,” advertised that chronic diseases were his specialty, especially cancers, tumors, and cataracts, all “removed without pain” and without cutting. The Dowlings rented a house at 515 South Jefferson Avenue in Saginaw, but Anna Patrick would later recount another of his visions, in 1899, when “Levi was taken into the great Councils on other planes, and there it was revealed to him how he should organize councils on this plane, Councils of Wisdom, of Execution, of Light, of Strength. Every detail of the work was shown to him, even to the white robes that should be worn by each member of the councils when they were in session.”⁸⁴ In June 1900, “He left the city without giving [the owner] any previous notice,” and stuck his landlord with paying the water bill.⁸⁵

⁸³ “State Spiritualists’ Meeting,” *Detroit Free Press*, 14 August 1895.

⁸⁴ Anna D. Patrick’s account of “The Visions of Levi, the Seer and Teacher,” in “In Memoriam: Levi H. Dowling,” 306.

⁸⁵ “Petition,” *Saginaw News*, 4 August 1900.

By 1901, Dowling had moved to Battle Creek, ground zero in Michigan for food reformers, medical cranks, Spiritualists, Occultists, and psychic healers. It would have been most unlikely that he would not have made the acquaintance there of James Martin Peebles, an old stalwart of the Spiritualist movement, born in 1822, with a storied past and a gigantic ego who had taken up the practice of his own brand of “eclectic” medicine and had established the Peebles Sanitarium in the city. As for Dowling, he formed around himself a group he called the “Christopathian Brotherhood.” He instructed them in a form of disciplined breathing that he claimed would bring them into touch with the Holy Spirit. He told them it would give them physical health and allow them to become psychic healers. They issued his little treatise, said to be authored by “Levi D’Guru,” under the none too modest title, *Biopneuma: Complete Course in Biopneuma: The True Science of the Great Breath; Opening the Golden Gate unto the Healing of All Diseases, the Forgiveness of Sins and Divine Illumination*. One critic wrote:

Leigh H. Dowling will introduce you to his “Psycho-Centric System of Healing.” Dr. Dowling is also, he tells us, the author of the “Complete Course in Biopneuma, the True Science of the Great Breath.” If you haven’t the money to pay Dr. Dowling for sterilizing this great breath, cloves are generally recommended, though they are sometimes considered suggestive.⁸⁶

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⁸⁶ “Health While You Wait,” *Nebraska State Journal*, 1 January 1903.

One of the members of the Christopathian Brotherhood was an Armenian immigrant, Arden Dearbeyne, whom the *Homer*, Michigan newspaper described this way:

From youth he possessed psychic powers. He seemed by this power commanded to come to this country. He found his way to Battle Creek and has become a member of the Christopathian Brotherhood, a new sect organized there about one year ago. Dearbeyne is not a spiritualist, but claims the power of "soul flight," and that he can visit his old home in Asia and see what his friends are doing. He also claims to visit Mars and other planets, and tells of the people and what they are doing in the other worlds. People who have had sittings with him have had him visit the home of friends at a distance and relate what was transpiring at the time. It is claimed that what he related was afterward verified by corresponding with those friends and finding out what they were doing at that particular time.⁸⁷

Not content with Battle Creek, the Dowlings moved to Grand Rapids in 1902. In August 1903, "Dr. Leigh H. Dowling" and a party of twelve students from the "College of Mystics," in Grand Rapids, spent a month at "Sunshine Cottage" at Highland Park (now part of metropolitan Detroit).⁸⁸ It was probably his training session for budding Occultists, and perhaps a sustained pep rally for his effort to organize a group of followers who would commit to moving to the West Coast, where Dowling had become convinced that he must go and establish a "White City." He may have previously scouted out possible sites. He and some of his followers did leave for the Coast then, but his wife and son did not accompany him there at first, but stayed with her parents in Iowa, until March 1904, "where they expect to make their future home."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ "Predicted a Disaster," *Homer Index*, 5 March 1902. Dearbeyne would go on to become a highly successful commercial real estate dealer in Gary, Indiana, and then Pensacola, Florida.

⁸⁸ "Highland Park," *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 August 1903. The Grand Rapids City Directory for 1902 has him listed as Lehigh H. Dowling, physician; the 1903 Grand Rapids directory lists him as Leigh H. Dowling, physician.

⁸⁹ "Local News Items," *Ottumwa Tri-Weekly Courier*, 12 March 1904.

The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius

In late 1903, Levi “finally retired from the medical profession to resume literary work,” his brother wrote. This was his summary of the Dowlings’ move to Los Angeles.⁹⁰ There, in the City of Our Lady of the Angels, Levi’s “years were spent, in the practice of medicine; in philosophical and psychological research; in lecturing and in writing and publishing magazines and books along the line of the ‘New Thought.’” So wrote William later, and then—in a statement that came as close as one could expect, in an obituary written by a brother, to criticism of one’s brother—“This work rather put him out of touch with those with whom he had affiliated in earlier days.”⁹¹ Little wonder, for Levi finally came to believe that he was a medium for an entirely new truth about Jesus Christ. William, however, wrote, “In the midst of all these, however, he never lost faith in the Bible, nor in Jesus as the Divine Teacher and Redeemer.”

That is one way to put it, but the Jesus that Levi encountered “in the silence” was radically different from the one described by scripture and tradition. “Orthodox Christian ecclesiastics tell us that Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ were one,” says the introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel*, “that the true name of this remarkable person was Jesus Christ. They tell us that this man of Galilee was the very eternal God clothed in flesh of man that men might see his glory. Of course this doctrine is wholly at variance with the [real] teachings of Jesus himself and of his apostles.”⁹²

In June 1904, Dowling, now in Los Angeles, convinced a set of wealthy backers to purchase an 800-acre plot of unimproved land just east of Hermosa Beach



Eva and Levi Dowling
(Abbaguru), 1904

⁹⁰ In Los Angeles, the Dowlings lived at 1344 Kellam Avenue, then at 1040 South Olive Street, then at 503 South Figueroa Street.

⁹¹ W. W. Dowling, “Emigratus.”

⁹² Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 8-9.

and north of Redondo for \$65,000. His group was composed of “members of an ancient organization known as the ‘Gnostics.’” They sought to establish a university and a polytechnic institute, as well as a planned “colony of intelligent progressive citizens” there.⁹³ By October, the nature of the “colony” was more fully described to the public:

The real location of paradise, according to the “Gnostics,” is at “Mount Carmel by the Sea,” a sandy Eden just back of the little beach town of Hermosa, north of Redondo. The Gnostics, a so-called religious order, which professes to have the real secret of Christian faith, has decided to make this its chief site, and the order has gone forth in the mysterious edict of “Abbagura” [i.e., “abba-guru,” glossed as “father-teacher”] chief among the faithful. The plans are published in a booklet by “The Imperial Council of the Empire of Peace.”

The Mount Carmel by the Sea Company has been formally incorporated as a stock concern under the laws of California, with a capital of \$200,000, divided into shares of \$10 each. Dr. Levi Dowling of South Figueroa street is chief director. Other directors are: Mrs. I. J. Barrett, Robert F. Berryman, Winston P. Hyatt and Clarence Howard Luther. These come from different “seas” [sic?] of faith—from the Imperial Jasper, Sapphire, Chalcedonian and Emerald “sees.”

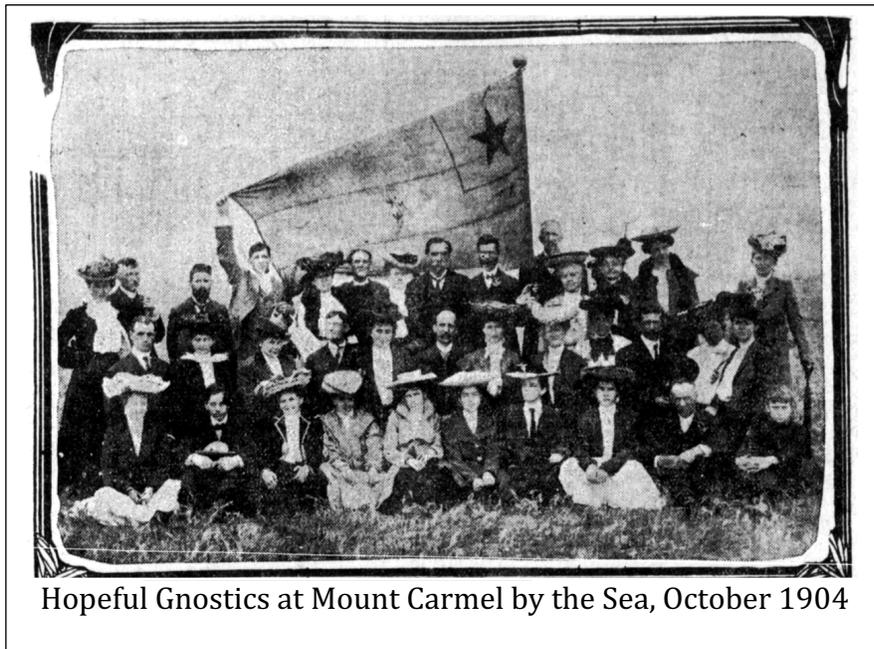
“The new revelation” says that under the direction of the masters exoteric an interpreter of esoteric design has been chosen, and that he will lay the “foundations of the White City and Temple.” Biblical directions for the purchase of the Hermosa tract are said to be found in the prophecy of Zacharias. According to the statement of the Gnostics’ new book, “the higher powers have authorized” the interworld association of Gnostic masters to proceed with the work of establishing a universal empire of peace.⁹⁴

The *Los Angeles Herald* gave more details:

⁹³ “Developments for Hermosa,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1904.

⁹⁴ “Gnostics Have Located Paradise in California,” *Santa Rosa Republican*, 6 October 1904.

Levi Dowling ... will be to the people of the settlement what [Alexander] Dowie is to the Zionists or Catharine Tingley to the Theosophists. He will be the head instructor in their polytechnic high school also. Mount Carmel-by-the-Sea ... is to be subdivided into acre lots, the plan is to give to each family an acre. Between sixty-five and one hundred acres have already been apportioned to members of the creed, and this section will be called the "White City" of the Gnostic people. As yet there are only a handful of Gnostics here, people who are associated with Dr. Dowling in the planning of their new city. These came with him last spring from Grand Rapids. While their project is as yet in its infancy, they have already determined to commence work next fall upon the erection of a polytechnic high school in which all the studies taught in the most up-to-date academies will be included.



Hopeful Gnostics at Mount Carmel by the Sea, October 1904

A larger university was also envisioned, which, in time, thought Dowling, would be as large as Stanford. He explained to the reporter who the Gnostics were:

The Gnostics are a community of persons who are desirous of living along the higher lines of religion and intellectuality, and are scattered all over the country and the whole globe. We have come to the Pacific coast under instructions to found a home for the order. Our people are associated with those who are aiming at the highest ideals in life, embodying the business advantages and manufactories of a self-supporting community. In our settlement we will have a portion set aside for business and another for homes. ... I

have been connected with the movement now materializing on the Pacific coast, which has been foremost in my mind, for the past forty years.⁹⁵

This plan fell through for lack of investors. Out of the 800 acres negotiated for, the Gnostics sold only 30, at \$80 per acre. By the beginning of 1906, the *Los Angeles Record's* article, "Gnostics Still Mingle with the Common Herd," related that the group was calling a halt to the project and trying to sell off the already acquired thirty acres. The article explained that the vision had been to build a great "'White City' in which there would be no such thing as death and intellectual progress would be at a Nancy Hanks gait."⁹⁶ It explained that "The scheme was to build factories, homes, stores and all, so that the Gnostics would not have to mix with people who did not know as much as they did." It went on to explain Dowling's "Gnostic" faith:

It is along the lines of spiritualism, inasmuch as the members believe they can confer with the dead. At twilight, the Gnostics sit with folded hands for half an hour, with feet firmly on the ground, and quiver, with the idea that they rest and see things. They "pass out of their bodies," is the way the Gnostics put it. They do not believe in a personal God. Life, the sky and sun, the power that animates everything, is God. Man is God. Brahma is in the air they breathe, and in everything good they know, even to a blade of grass. There is no such thing as death to the Gnostics. When the body dies and goes back to earth, the soul takes a new body. There are different stages of intellectual perfection, they believe, and when a man reaches the highest plane, he becomes a "master," and his spirit is free to go where it pleases, with body unseen. Now the colony of Gnostics is lost, and none of the members of the association evince any eagerness to try again.⁹⁷

By that time, Dowling had opened up a "School of Occult Sciences" at his home on Figueroa Street and was offering lessons on memory aids, healing methods, and public

⁹⁵ "Gnostics Plan Extensive Buildings for the Order," *Los Angeles Herald*, 19 June 1904.

⁹⁶ Referring not to Abraham Lincoln's mother, but to a famous racehorse named after her.

⁹⁷ "Gnostics Still Mingle with the Common Herd," *Los Angeles Record*, 6 February 1906.

speaking. The admission price for each lesson was 25 cents, or \$5 per month. By June, he had gathered a kind of congregation into a “Church of Humanity,” which met at a rented portion of Mammoth Hall at 517 South Broadway in Los Angeles. Advertisements for it in the *Los Angeles Herald* declared, “No creed, no confession of faith, no discipline, everyone eligible to membership. Universal helpfulness the watchword.”⁹⁸ But of course there were definite beliefs, as the *Los Angeles Record* had already described, and there were “practices” as well, some of them without cost (sitting still for half an hour, for example) as well as some of them with an admission price. Dowling, now its “minister,” would lecture there on such subjects as “Decline of Dogmatic Christianity and Rise of the Religion of Humanity” and “How to enter the silence, the gateway to the homes of the departed.”

In July 1906, from out of his congregation at Mammoth Hall, he had established a smaller group of initiates into an esoteric inner order:

The Ancient Order of Mystics had a grand initiation at Woods Hall on Wednesday night, thirteen members taking the mystic degree of Sapiaentia Terrestrium.

This order is not one of modern origin. It has been known in organized form for many thousands of years. In the days of Jesus it was known as “The Children of Light,” and the Nazarene Master and his disciples were members of it. Once he said: “Walk ye in the light that ye may be Children of Light.”

This order is really the occult phase of Christianity, the exoteric phase being the church. In this city the Church of Humanity has been organized to reach the masses with the gospel of the higher life. Dr. Levi Dowling is the minister of the church and speaks every Sunday night at Mammoth Hall, 517 South Broadway.⁹⁹

By mid-1907, his lectures were beginning to foreshadow the book he would publish the following year, with titles such as “Jesus in Persia, teaching the Magi.”¹⁰⁰ Toward the end of 1907, Dowling was speaking on such subjects as “The Transfiguration of Jesus, a Triumph of Science: Spiritualization of matter a Human Possibility,” which seems to have

⁹⁸ “Everybody’s Church,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 10 June 1906.

⁹⁹ “Grand Initiation, A. O. of M.,” *Highland Park News-Herald and Journal*, 14 July 1906.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, the ad for The Church of Humanity, *Los Angeles Times*, 24 August 1907.

been a treatment of “spiritualization of matter” as the reverse of Spiritualists’ long-time exhibition of the “materialization of spirits.” Supposing, it would seem, the possibility of mastering teleportation.¹⁰¹

By mid-1908, while pastor of the Church of Humanity in Los Angeles, Dowling was claiming that he had “discovered” the “records” of the lost years of Jesus (prior to the beginning of his mission with his baptism by John in the Jordan River and his forty-day fast in the desert).

A wire service reporter said that Dowling made his “discovery” “by means of spiritual pictures” and then observed, “Doctor Dowling’s explanation as to how he came by the discovery he claims to have made are somewhat hazy, dipping into the Occult, but he declares the seers know and appreciate his work.”¹⁰² The wire service reported Dowling’s summary of his “discovery”:

After confounding the elders in the Temple, Jesus spent six years in Orissa, in what is now India. After many trials in that section, He went into Nepaul. Escaping the wrath of the natives of that section by miraculous conversation of many of them, Jesus made His way into Thibet, where He remained some time. From there the country of the Ladaks was visited preparatory to a long journey to Persepolis, the ancient capital of Persia. There Jesus met the three wise men, who followed the Star of the East to His birthplace.

And now his footsteps were set toward his native land. He passed through Assyria and Greece to Egypt, where He visited the school in which His mother received her education at Zoan. This is where His flight from Herod began. The next objective point was the Temple of Heliopolis, the great temple where the Egyptian Brotherhood was located. Here He spent four or five years, passing through the seven great tests.

¹⁰¹ “Church of Humanity,” *Los Angeles Express*, 11 January 1908.

¹⁰² “‘Lost’ Years Accounted For; California Divine Claims to Have Traced Jesus During ‘Lost’ Period,” Mount Carmel, Illinois, *Daily Republican Register*, 19 May 1908.

Next he went to Alexandria, where He met the seven sages of the world. And then began His ministry.¹⁰³

Following up on the wire service story, a reporter for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* asked several local clergymen what they made of Dowling's "discovery," a Baptist, a Methodist, a Rabbi, and a Catholic priest. Their replies ranged from "there is no evidence for that" to the Catholic priest's blunt judgment that, "The Thibet theory is silly and puerile, indicative only of ignorance of the subject."

This book of the hidden records of Jesus, Dowling came to believe, was actually the "White City" that he had been mystically commissioned to build, not a physical place. That seems to have been made clear when his "Gnostic" real estate project at Hermosa had failed.

It is unclear how many of Dowling's Grand Rapids followers had accompanied him to Los Angeles, and, after the failure of the "Gnostics" projected real estate project, how many of them continued with him, and followed him into his re-configuration of his cult now called the "Aquarian Commonwealth."¹⁰⁴ But at the new organization's first annual convention in Los Angeles in October 1910, three hundred people attended, and the Aquarians received many letters of congratulations from either mail-order members or well-wishers from around the country and abroad. It is also unclear how numerous were those who felt themselves seriously bound to the Aquarian Commonwealth, although there were probably more than a handful who accepted official positions in the group. Some of them appear to have been local Los



Leo Worth Dowling, 1904

¹⁰³ "The Unknown Life of Christ; St. Louis Churchmen on the Strange Discovery Claimed by Rev. Dr. Dowling of Evidence Showing That the Savior Was in Thibet and India Between His Appearance in the Temple and the Commencement of His Mission," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 14 June 1908.

¹⁰⁴ "The Aquarian College of Teachers and Healers," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1911.

Angeles businessmen or plain wealthy patrons. But some of them Dowling had known from his earlier days in the Midwest.

One of them was James Wishart, the inventor and businessman who had worked with Dowling back in Topeka. By this time, Wishart had moved to California and was selling his gold ore processing machines throughout the West under the name of the “New Age Gold Plant.”

Another was Dr. William C. Watson, “from Detroit,” whose background is unusually difficult to trace, but who, by 1910, was the vice-president of the Citizens Savings Bank in Pasadena, who also had another residence in the town of Avalon on Catalina Island. The only “Dr. William C. Watson” in evidence anywhere in the public records before that was a physician who travelled through Ohio and Michigan for decades, specializing in hunting up wealthy old widows near death and marrying them, inheriting their money after they passed away soon afterwards.¹⁰⁵ That Dr.

Watson seems to have disappeared from the Midwest in 1906. Perhaps it was not the same person.

Another previous associate was James Peebles, the ex-Universalist minister, Spiritualist and eclectic physician from Battle Creek, who had moved now to Los Angeles, after he had been found guilty of the federal charge of mail fraud and obtaining money under false pretenses for practicing “absent healing.” Peebles served as President of the Aquarian Commonwealth for a while and taught some of the classes the group offered at its “Aquarian College of Teachers and Healers.” He offered this testimonial for Dowling:



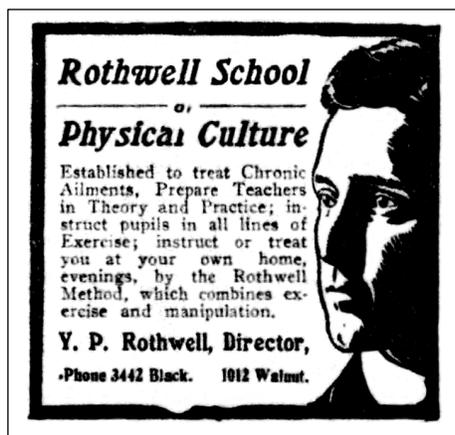
Dr. Nellie Beighle

¹⁰⁵ “Thirty Years as a Traveling Physician Made Him Familiar with Aged Widows Who Possessed Rich Estates,” Lima, Ohio *Times Democrat*, 30 January 1906; “Detroit Doctor Mixed up in the Suit against Dr. Watson,” Adrian, Michigan *Daily Telegram*, 1 February 1906.

The Universe knows no loss. The lives of all great souls are recorded in eternity. This was the case of the man Jesus, the Christ, and the mystic LEVI, the soul of candor and spirituality, through concentration, meditations and spiritual unfoldings was, like Paul of old, intromitted into the fields of Paradise, or unto those other spheres of immortality, where he transcribed and transmitted to earth, the beautiful, inspiring and uplifting teachings of this Aquarian Gospel. There was no miracle in this, in the old sense of that word, but a dispensation on the part of the gods to give us clearer views, and more of the marvelous realities that characterized the life of the Nazarene.¹⁰⁶

Nellie Beighle, another old-line Spiritualist medium, was also prominent associate. She too had had a run-in with the law when she had been prosecuted for practicing medicine without a license for her offers at psychic “distance healing.” In the *Aquarian New Age Magazine*, she advertised her *Book of Knowledge—Psychic Facts*, which the *Philosophical Journal*, the San Francisco Spiritualist newspaper, reviewed as “teeming with information regarding Psychic facts, proofs of immortality and the overflowing stream of revelation received by all sorts of men and women, many of them famous in the world’s history.”

Another associate of Dowling’s from his Kansas days also showed up in Los Angeles and was made the “registrar” of the Aquarian College, collecting donations, tuition fees (\$50 per year to attend all the lectures), and the \$10 per year charge for membership in its

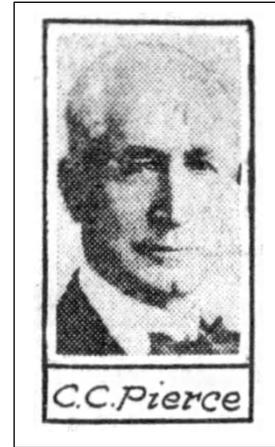


“Circle of Success” via mail, or granting “diplomas of graduation” from the College. This was Younger Pitt Rothwell, a gymnast and instructor of the newest systems of physical education at various colleges and clubs in Missouri and Kansas when the Dowlings had been trying to organize schools there. Rothwell had accepted a good job as the head of the Vancouver Athletic Club in 1906 but had unexpectedly quit after a year there and moved to Los Angeles. He allied himself with the Dowlings, but he also

¹⁰⁶ *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (October 1910): 8.

found seasonal work in the city, directing various groups' programs of outdoor exercise for children, and teaching fencing and other sports, as well as physical education pedagogy, at his "Academy of Physical Culture."¹⁰⁷

Some ex-clergymen also identified themselves with the Aquarian Commonwealth. One was Charles Clark Pierce, who, at the time of his joining, was the ultra-"ecumenical" pastor of the Memorial Baptist Church in Los Angeles. The *Los Angeles Evening Express* quoted him, pointedly, as declaring that "Every man has a right to disclaim what he honestly does not believe, and God will not condemn him for it. We have no right to force our peculiar views upon others. We have a right to investigate the things we are told to believe."¹⁰⁸ Before resigning his position with the church (for unspecified reasons), he offered a "credo" to the Aquarian Commonwealth, which included this soporific testimony:



I believe that smiles are better than frowns, laughter better than silence, love better than hate, kindness better than coldness, commendation better than criticism, sympathy better than selfishness, and that an encouraging word or a kindly, helpful deed given to any struggling soul is worth more to bring it to God than loads of creeds or tons of theology.¹⁰⁹

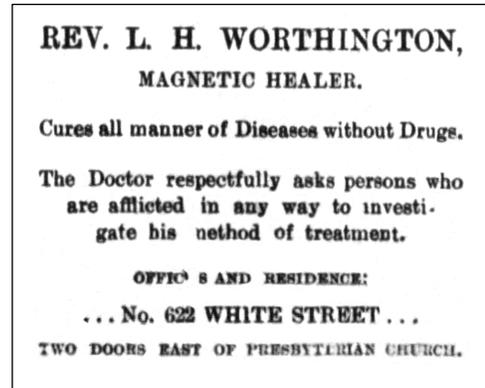
Another ex-clergyman among the Aquarians was Lawson Hill Worthington, who, before moving to Los Angeles, had been ousted from the Methodist church in Grand Junction, Colorado, but had remained in place for a while, advertising his services as a "magnetic physician" and his office as "two doors down from the Presbyterian Church." The

¹⁰⁷ Rothwell's father had been a respected, long-time professor of (Baptist) theology at William Jewell College in Columbia, Missouri.

¹⁰⁸ *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 16 May 1889.

¹⁰⁹ "Credo," *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (April-May 1911): 209. Pierce was Phi Beta Kappa at Colgate University (1888) and went on to the school's Theological Seminary. After his association with the Aquarians, he would later develop a deep interest in Japanese culture, while making his living in partnership with his brothers, who owned a funeral parlor in Los Angeles. His own memorial service was conducted at the Wilshire Boulevard Congregational Church in 1925.

Directory of Deceased American Physicians, in its listing of Levi Dowling, reported that Dowling had been granted a license to practice in Colorado in 1900, but no evidence of his residence there has turned up. One explanation for this seeming anomaly might be that Dowling, while still living in Saginaw, Michigan, may have gone West to search for a new location (ultimately deciding for Los Angeles), but that he may have encountered Worthington, along the way, in Grand Junction and thought about lingering there. In any event, Worthington eventually moved to Los Angeles and became an Aquarian.



One other ex-clergyman had a history perhaps as colorful as that of James Peebles. He was Thaddeus Vincent Jakimowicz, who had emigrated from Poland to the United States



as a Roman Catholic priest, assigned first to duties in Omaha, then transferred to St. Joseph's Polish Catholic parish in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania. There, in 1896, Fr. Jakimowicz was caught in a series of scandals involving his misuse of parish funds for his own purposes, and sexual improprieties with women in his parish. He was laicized and excommunicated by his bishop, but then tried to set up his own "Catholic" church

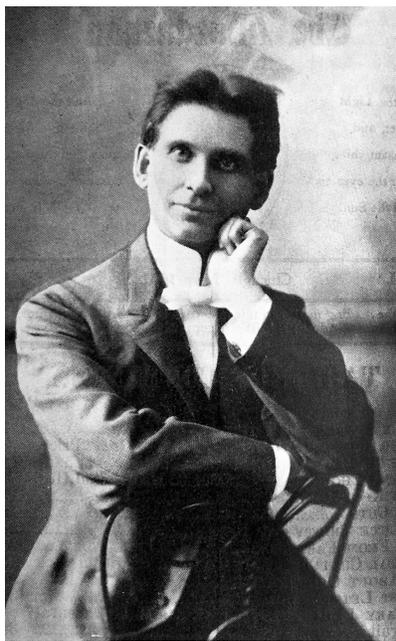
in Mount Carmel, causing a temporary schism among the Polish residents.

Next, Jakimowicz decided to join the Baptists and to go on the lecture platform for them as a missionary against the "Romists." The Baptists, however, hesitated and then turned aside from that plan when they concluded there were actual grounds for suspecting Jakimowicz of scandal. The ex-priest next took the step of getting married, as a way to rub his apostasy in the face of the Catholic Church (the marriage would not last; nor would others he would undertake). Around 1903, he was recruited into the leadership of the

“Independent Catholic Church” based in Chicago, in an effort to get the Episcopal Church to grant suffrage to the Independent Catholics, but that ended shortly. His pitch to the Episcopalians was that he had come to the United States from Poland to preach liberty of conscience and freedom from Rome to the Poles, and he compared the situation to that of the English under Henry VIII.

In Chicago Jakimowicz became affiliated with the Mazdaznan Order started and headed by Otoman Zar-Adusht-Hanish (Otto Hanisch), a true scalawag, cult leader, and sexual sociopath of the first water, who made his headquarters in Chicago. Jakimowicz had become a convert of sorts, and a self-adduced expert on breathing techniques for inducing ecstatic states.¹¹⁰

By mid-1909, Jakimowicz had moved Los Angeles and had incorporated the



Otoman Zar-Adusht-Hanish

“Mazdaznan Order of Our Redeemer of Los Angeles.”¹¹¹

He gave lectures on hygienics during the weekdays, as well as giving private lessons on “breathing secrets ... healing and harmony.”¹¹² Jakimowicz and the original incorporators of the Los Angeles branch, however, almost immediately were undercut by Hanish himself, who claimed the property they had bought and, inciting a factional conflict within the Los Angeles group, managed to take it away from them.¹¹³ Jakimowicz, however, kept his own notional branch of Mazdaznan going, with himself as leader and teacher. It was a sign of the essential flux of Occult groups that Jakimowicz, even while continuing on as head of the branch (at least in

name), became a close associate of Dowling in the Aquarian Commonwealth, especially focusing on teaching breath exercises to its members.

¹¹⁰ For a succinct outline of Hanish’s career, see Pat Deveney’s summary at <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/sun-worshiper/>

¹¹¹ “Mazdaznan Order ...” *Los Angeles Express*, 2 June 1909.

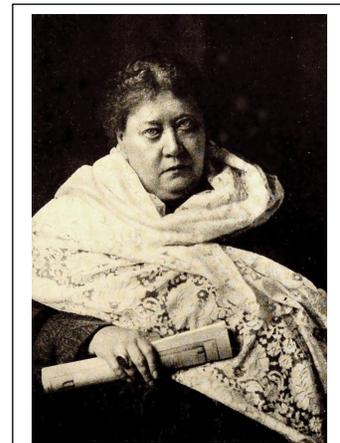
¹¹² “Mazdaznan Services,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1910.

¹¹³ “Prince of Peace Causes Trouble; Mazdaznan Congregation is Divided,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 8 July 1909.

Dowling and Jakimowicz, even in 1909, were thinking of establishing multiple Aquarian churches, and advertised as such—The Aquarian Churches of Los Angeles (Founded upon the Christ as revealed in the Aquarian Gospel)—though they met together at the same time and place in a “union service” on Sundays at Mammoth Hall, 517 South Broadway, with each “pastor” giving a talk.¹¹⁴

Levi’s new scripture, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, not only told the “whole” truth about Jesus, but it also announced the passing of the world from one grand Age into another—from the “Piscean Age” into the “Aquarian Age.” It was “the philosophic and practical basis of the religion of the Aquarian Age of the World and of the Church Universal.” In an oracular voice, *The Aquarian Gospel* prophesied, “And then the man who bears the pitcher will walk forth across an arc of heaven; the sign and signet of the Son of Man will stand forth in the eastern sky. ...The wise will then lift up their heads and know that the redemption of the earth is near.”¹¹⁵ Christian millenarianism—which saw the “New Age” as a single final break in history and a culmination of time—was transmuted here into an acceptance of an eternal cycling of ages. This “New Age” is just one in a never-ending succession of ages.

The “New Era” beloved of the Christian utopian radicals and Spiritualists of the nineteenth century was often called a “New Age” once it had become transmuted by Spiritualists and Freethinkers like James Martin Peebles and by Theosophy founder Helena Blavatsky. Peebles portrayed Jesus in his 1869 book, *Seers of the Ages*, as merely the appropriate seer for just one age out of many. The ages, then, were cycles, which Blavatsky—reflected in her associate Alfred Percy Sinnett’s fanciful 1883 work, *Esoteric Buddhism*—explained as the long cycles described in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, which were predictable through astrological calculations. In her 1888 tome, *The Secret Doctrine*, and in her 1889 essay, “The New Cycle,” she prognosticated a new age—a post-Christian one—to



Helena Blavatsky

¹¹⁴ “The Aquarian Churches of Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1909.

¹¹⁵ Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), chapter 157, verses 29-30.

begin around that time. Theosophist Gerald Massey had made clear that the Age just ending—the Christian era—was the Piscean one.¹¹⁶ Levi and Eva, therefore, had little left to do to conceive of the coming Age as the Age of Aquarius. In fact, it amounted to little more than taking a hint from a footnote of Helena Blavatsky's own vamp on Massey's description of the Piscean Age and its consequences:

There are several remarkable cycles that come to a close at the end of this century. First, the 5,000 years of the Kaliyug cycle; again the Messianic cycle of the Samaritan (also Kabalistic) Jews of the man connected with *Pisces* (Ichthys or "Fish-man" *Dag*). It is a cycle, historic and not very long, but very occult, lasting about 2,155 solar years, but having a true significance only when computed by lunar months. It occurred 2410 and 255 B.C., or when the equinox entered into the sign of the *Ram*, and again into that of *Pisces*. When it enters, in a few years, the sign of *Aquarius*, psychologists will have some extra work to do, and the psychic idiosyncrasies of humanity will enter on a great change.¹¹⁷

Eva's introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel* explained that Jesus was not God, as the Christian tradition maintained, but merely an enlightened human being—although he was also the ideal sage and annunciator of the Piscean Age. Jesus was the man; Christ was the God (consciousness) in him. On the other hand, we learn, *Levi* was the annunciator of the Aquarian Age, which the world has just entered, and which will be a joyful fulfillment of the blessed Millennium spoken of in the Book of Revelation and elsewhere. Levi's Age, therefore, by implication, will be superior to Jesus'.

In light of Levi Dowling's years of experience in explicating the Bible, it is difficult not to see another detail of the book as deliberately significant. Eva—undoubtedly giving

¹¹⁶ Gerald Massey, *The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ* (London: The Pioneer Press, 1921), 30 [This is one of Massey's lectures that were circulated privately, but not published until 1921]. Massey had already explored these themes in *A Book of the Beginnings, Containing an Attempt to Recover and Reconstitute the Lost Origins of the Myths and Mysteries, Types and Symbols, Religion and Language, with Egypt for the Mouthpiece and Africa as the Birthplace* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881). Aleister Crowley, supposedly in 1904, had channeled *The Book of the Law*, a verse of which (verse 34, chapter 3), had indicated that a new eon had just begun. I have no idea whether Dowling would have had any access to Crowley's "news."

¹¹⁷ H. P. B[lavatsky], "The Esoteric Character of the Gospels," *Lucifer* (November, December 1887; February 1888), footnote 5.

voice to Levi's own exegesis—explained that “It is conceded by all critical students that the sun entered the zodiacal sign Taurus in the days of our historic Adam when the Taurian Age began.”¹¹⁸ In other words, Adam was the annunciator and representative of the Taurian Age, just as Jesus was of the Piscean Age, and Levi was of the Aquarian Age. But Levi had another astrological identity. He was, after all, born in Bellville, Ohio, on the morning of May 17, 1844, as Eva tells us in the preface to *The Aquarian Gospel*. That makes him a Taurus. Thus, Levi was in effect a “Second Adam,” the title that the Christian Church had always reserved for Jesus. Levi would restore to humankind what Adam had lost (Jesus, if he was born on December 25th, was only a Capricorn). In other words—Jesus was down, Levi was up; Pisces was outdated, Aquarius was up to the minute. All of that aside, perhaps here is the place to note that, in fact, if the Age of Aquarius begins when the vernal equinox starts to occur in the constellation Aquarius, it will not actually begin for another six hundred years. The equinox slowly shifts from one constellation to another because of the Earth's precession. These days, the vernal equinoctial point (where the celestial equator intersects the ecliptic) is in Pisces. Hopeful apologists for the Aquarian Age character of the present day, however, have sometimes allowed for premonitory effects of the coming age beginning to appear in the present (“Coming events cast their shadows before”).

If we may imagine Jesus asking Levi Dowling, “And who do you say that I am?” his answer now would have pleased every “Christian Gnostic” from the first century onward:

“WAS JESUS OF NAZARETH A MAN OR A GOD?”

Surely this question has been answered. Jesus was man; Christ was the Divine Love—the Love of God, and after thirty years of strenuous life the man had made his body fit to be the Temple of the Holy Breath and Love took full possession, and John well said when he declared:

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

¹¹⁸ Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 5.

I am so glad that Jesus was a man. If he had been a God he could not have been a “pattern for the sons of men.” As man he demonstrated the possibilities of man, for what he did all men may do, and what he was all men shall be.

CHRIST IS THE GOD—is God the Son; he is the universal King. Once Jesus said [in the *Aquarian Gospel*] to the people in Capernaum: “I cannot show the king unless you see with eyes of soul, because the kingdom of the king is in the soul. And every soul a kingdom is. There is a king for every man. This king is Love, and when this love becomes the greatest power in life it is the Christ; so Christ is king. And every one may have this Christ dwell in his soul, as Christ dwell in my soul ...

“The man of God is pure in heart; he sees the king; he sees with eyes of soul. And when he rises to the plane of Christine Consciousness he knows that he himself is king, is Love, is Christ, and so is Son of God.”¹¹⁹

This “Christos” was a supreme wisdom, imagined as the Holy Spirit, a principle that infuses itself in various high initiates from age to age. Jesus became an initiate at his baptism. He was not a “savior,” but rather an exemplar, who showed us what we should all strive to become. He did not atone for our sin; the only sin is ignorance of the secret wisdom. He was not God, but only “a God,” loosely speaking, insofar as he had become a kind of supernal being. Dowling had gone far beyond being enmeshed in the toils of denominationalism, as the Campbellites had thought they intended to do, to find the pure gospel of Jesus. He had stared into the “Silence” of his mind and had discovered there not only the “lost years” of Jesus, but a “lost Jesus” as well. Dowling had always been a prolix, if execrable, poet. One of the poems he wrote for Sunday School classes back when he was a worker and preacher for the Church of Christ was entitled, “Mary’s Lamb. A Speech for a Little Girl”:

Mary had a little lamb,
 Its fleece was white as snow;
 But then it wasn’t Mary’s lamb

¹¹⁹ *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (October 1910): 5.

You think about, I know.

The lamb loved Mary very well,
And she loved it a — heap;
It grew, and grew, and grew, and grew
To be a great big sheep.

One morning Mary took a walk,
The sheep was by her side;
And Mary, precious little dear,
Just thought she'd take a ride.

She got aboard, but didn't know
Just how to guide her pet;
You see he was a great fat thing,
And not her "Lambie" yet.

The sheep looked 'round and gave his tail
A most an awful switch;
The next we saw of Mary Jane
She was crawling from the ditch.

And now, see here, you gentle folks,
I rise to make it plain:
You better hear just what I say,
I may not speak again.

If you have hobbies, great or small,
A prancing by your side,
If you don't know just what you are

You'd better walk than ride.¹²⁰

Levi Dowling had a hobby, it seems safe to say. It had grown so very huge, but then he rode it anyway. And he had fallen off into the ditch.

The editor of *The Aquarian Gospel*—this was, primarily, Eva Dowling—described how Levi had come to produce the volume. “This book was transcribed,” she wrote in the introduction, “between the early morning hours of two and six—the absolutely ‘quiet hours.’”¹²¹ She did not say whether she was awake during those hours to witness it. It was first copyrighted in 1908 (But can “The Book of God’s Remembrance” be copyrighted?) and first published by the “Royal Publishing Company” (probably the Dowlings themselves) in 1909 and sold by mail order, advertised in *New Thought* and *Spiritualist* newspapers and journals. It was also published in London in 1909 by the literary agent and publisher C. F. Cazenove, and then by the publishing company established there years before by American phrenologist Lorenzo Niles Fowler. The first American edition was soon sold out, and a second printing was immediately issued.

Califorgnostification

To suggest some of the influences on Dowling’s *The Aquarian Gospel* is not to say that he copied it from anything he read (but leaving aside, for the moment, the question of “copying” it from some divine archive). It is simply to draw the outline of the religious context of the time. His Aquarian followers said that he had several decades of experience in meditation on “metaphysical speculative systems” or that he was a “Gnostic” from the time of his youth. Dowling, however, was probably fairly unaffected by the Occult until a few years before he and Eva and Leo moved to Los Angeles. Indeed, his brother said as much, and his business activities until then suggest the same thing. So, we might well look to Los Angeles itself as the final alchemical retort from which Levi finally came out publicly

¹²⁰ “Lee H. Dowling, M. D.,” in Thomas W. Herringshaw, *Local and National Poets of America* (American Publishers Association, 1890), 284.

¹²¹ Eva S. Dowling, “Who Was Levi?” in Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 7.

as a seer. It was there that he wrote about an “Interworld Brotherhood” that controlled human evolution and all the affairs of creation.¹²² “Of course all Occult students know that the physical body of man has nothing to do with the true man, the individuality,” he wrote, demonstrating his transit away from Christian orthodoxy toward Blavatsky’s notion of the “reincarnating ego.” “This is a garment of flesh which the master can put on and lay aside at will,” wrote Levi, dependent again on Blavatsky’s idea of “astral projection” and Theosophist Charles W. Leadbeater’s development of that idea.¹²³

Blavatsky had predicted that the higher “Coming Race” that was to evolve in the new cycle, would do so first on the West Coast of the United States. Her prediction would stimulate would-be leaders who reckoned that they had already evolved to move to the West. In time, this would include Theosophist Katherine Tingley—who wound up in San Diego at Point Loma—as well as renegade Theosophist and con man Edward Arthur Wilson—who, in 1927, would locate an Aquarian Foundation on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Blavatsky herself mentioned, vaguely, the period around 1900. Because Levi was preparing himself to act on his commission from the mystic sages to be a teacher, he had an ideological predisposition to move to California to prepare for a revelation of the new truth.¹²⁴



Katherine Tingley

The religious ferment in Los Angeles at the turn of the century was intense. One outgrowth of it was the modern charismatic Pentecostal movement, which began with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. But the climate of Southern California also

¹²² Reflecting here the Annie Besant-Charles Webster Leadbeater Theosophical doctrine of the “Inner Government of the World.”

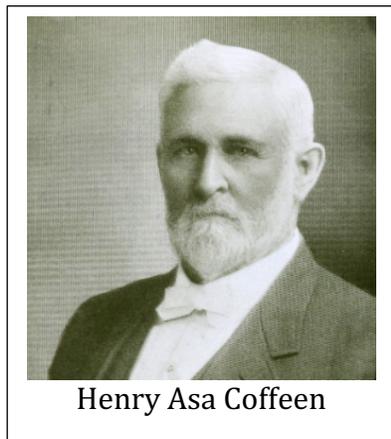
¹²³ *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 294.

¹²⁴ For H. P. Blavatsky on “the Dawn of the New Cycle,” see *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. xlv, and “The New Cycle,” *La Revue Theosophique*, March 21, 1889. This was supposed to occur in 1898. Later Theosophical exegesis moved the event to the period from 1961-81. On Edward Wilson, see James A. Santucci, “The Aquarian Foundation,” in *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of New Age Religions*, ed. James R. Lewis (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004): 243-70. [An earlier version was published in *Communal Societies* 9 (1989): 39-61]; and John Oliphant, *Brother Twelve: The Strange Odyssey of a 20th-Century Prophet and His Quest for a New Word* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Twelfth House Press, 2006). The original edition appeared as *Brother Twelve: The Incredible Story of Canada’s False Prophet* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).

drew to the area many advocates and practitioners of fringe health treatments—including homeopathy, osteopathy, “chromotherapy,” fasting, the “raw fruit cure,” and more—and Levi Dowling was one of these advocates. A frankly entrepreneurial and speculative spirit also pervaded the region, affecting everything from real estate, mining, water rights, and agriculture to politics and religion.

Los Angeles was a refuge for those who were averse to dogmas and creeds. It was and still is a place that embraces the paradox already proclaimed by New Thought believer Frederick Pease Fairfield in 1908—“It is a truth,” he wrote, “which is coming with the New Age and which will become its chiefest pillar. That truth is Truth is Many Sided, and No Statement of Truth is Adequate, and Truth Consists in Opposites.”¹²⁵ It was a dream factory suited to a spiritual salesman like Levi Dowling.

One registrant of the 1908 copyright on *The Aquarian Gospel* (besides Eva Dowling) was former Wyoming Congressman Henry Asa Coffeen, who also wrote the introduction to the first edition. His moves over the course of his career roughly paralleled those of Levi’s.



Henry Asa Coffeen

Both of them were born in Ohio around the same time.

Coffeen’s family moved to Indiana when he was young, then to Illinois. After college, he became a member of the faculty at Hiram College—the college of which George Laughlin, who married Levi Dowling to Eva Sellers, was at one time President. Coffeen then moved to Wyoming. One could guess that Coffeen and Dowling were acquainted and kept in close contact in their later years. Perhaps his copyright means that he underwrote the publication expense of *The Aquarian*

Gospel.¹²⁶ In any event, Coffeen and Dowling were fellow Theosophists. Coffeen wrote that Dowling “took up the study of the inner and psychic nature of man” in 1881 but gives no

¹²⁵ *The New Age* (Boston) (November 1908): 352. This magazine is to be distinguished from the one of the same name that was the official magazine of Scottish Rite Freemasonry.

¹²⁶ Coffeen was born in 1841 and died in Wyoming on December 9, 1912. For more on him, see Leonard Schlup, “I’m Not a Cuckoo Democrat,” *Wyoming Annals* 66.3 (Fall 1994): 30-47. In his introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel*, 14, Coffeen wrote that he intended soon to publish his own ideas on the science of clairvoyance under the title *Basis of Higher Consciousness*, but I have found no record of him having done so.

more information about what that supposedly entailed.¹²⁷ That would be the time when Levi took up the study of medicine.

To most people, his *Aquarian Gospel* has looked like fiction, but Levi gave it to the world as a true transcription from the grand Cosmic recording library—as he called it, in Theosophical terms, the “Akashic records.” *Ākāśa* is the normal Sanskrit term for “space” or “sky,” but Theosophy founder Blavatsky and her associates, long before Dowling had produced *The Aquarian Gospel* and had become “The Akashic Seer,” had narrowed its meaning as an English loanword. They used it to signify something like the Ether or cosmic plenum that was without form, but that served as the ocean out of and into which all things flow.¹²⁸ In this, she was apparently influenced by translations of such ancient Indian philosophical texts as the *Chāndogya Upanishad*, which described it as the primordial element, the medium through which all things are propagated.¹²⁹

Levi was the New Messenger who, despite and also because of being a “mere” instrument, was better able than the past Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—to read the record without obscurity. His gospel was therefore presented as more faithful to the ultimate truth than the Bible accounts of Jesus’ life. From Levi’s point of view, we might think of it as a grand Gospel harmony, which reconciled the received Gospels, but also other scriptures and scientific and archaeological discoveries as well, all together into a single threaded narrative. Levi had received telepathically a huge and timely Lesson Book from the Great Sunday School in the Sky, in “The Book of God’s Remembrance.”

By “transcribing” it, he did not tell Jesus’ story with the voice of Jesus himself, but with the viewpoint of what literary critics call an “omniscient narrator.” Nevertheless, its viewpoint does not reproduce God’s own omniscient remembrance—the master record. It would be rather surprising, for example, if a universal master record—God’s memory, as it were—was stored in English. Or that it was limited at any point in a narrative to noticing one thing happening instead of all the other infinite things that were happening too.

The text of *The Aquarian Gospel* is rather more like the narration of someone who is not actually omniscient but is nevertheless able to float around events at will—like a

¹²⁷ Introduction to Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 9.

¹²⁸ Edgar Cayce would also subsequently claim to have become a reader of the “Akashic Records.”

¹²⁹ *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 5.1.1.

spirit—and read people’s minds. It was as if Levi had been watching a heavenly documentary film, narrated by a Revelating Angel, and wrote down what he had heard and seen in his vision. In fact, Eva Dowling’s preface to the first edition of *The Aquarian Gospel* explained that Levi had simply made a copy of the collected series of the records of Jesus’ life. These had been originally made on “etheric films” in what she equated with the Book of Life that is referred to in Revelation 20:12. She also made this album synonymous with the Book of Remembrance mentioned in Malachi 3:16.

According to Eva, Jesus, like every other human born into this world, had his own “recording messenger” and “life-companion”—a kind of combination guardian angel, Spiritualist amanuensis, and documentary film producer—“who is commissioned to light up the way and record every event.”¹³⁰ These days, Los Angelenos actually *pay* for such services—from publicists, personal trainers, and life coaches. How appropriate that Jesus’ “recording messenger” and “life-companion” should have arranged the first full public screening, as it were, of his life, in the city of Los Angeles in 1908, the same year that the first movie was made there.

The Lost Years of Jesus in Asia

Much of *The Aquarian Gospel* describes Jesus’ adventures during the years between his early boyhood and the time when his public ministry began, years that were not described in much detail in the traditional Gospels. In Levi’s role as a Sunday School director, these years of Jesus’ youth would often have been the object of Levi’s imaginative reconstruction for Levi’s young charges, as an image of the Great Exemplar. Another reason for *The Aquarian Gospel’s* focus on Jesus’ youth lay in the fact that these years had become a magnet for speculative reconstruction. Also, in the decades prior to the turn of the century, Anglo-American culture had turned its attention to childhood and its innocence, and had shifted its focus away from the public, masculine sphere to the domestic sphere, under the guidance of the mother, as a place to experience the sacred.

¹³⁰ Preface to Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 7.

Insofar as *The Aquarian Gospel* was presented as a report of Jesus' formative years, one of its precursors in the Occult literature circulating at the time was Theosophist Franz Hartmann's 1888 admitted allegory, *The Life of Jehoshua, The Prophet of Nazareth; an Occult Study and a Key to the Bible, Containing the History of an Initiate*, which Dowling had certainly read.¹³¹ Hartmann depicted Jesus as traveling to Egypt to learn magical secrets and being initiated into a secret brotherhood there. Dowling's book has Jesus journeying to Egypt, Greece, Persia, and to Far Asia—in particular, to India and Tibet. *The Aquarian Gospel* describes, in chapter 36, Jesus somehow being welcomed into a temple in Lhasa that in fact could not have been built for at least another five or six centuries (after Songtsen Gampo encouraged the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet):

Now, after many days, and perils great, the guide and Jesus reached the Lassa temple in Tibet.

And Meng-ste opened wide the temple doors, and all the priests and masters gave a welcome to the Hebrew sage.

And Jesus had access to all the sacred manuscripts, and, with the help of Meng-ste, read them all.

And Meng-ste often talked with Jesus of the coming age, and of the sacred service best adapted to the people of the age.¹³²

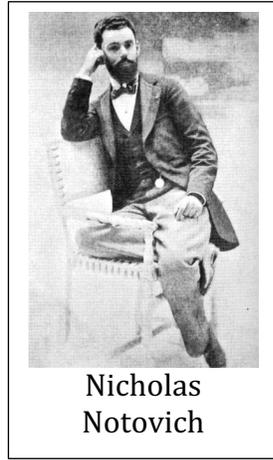
Dowling's wording in a couple of places in the section on India indicates that he had also read Russian journalist and hoaxer Nicholas Notovitch's *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, first published when Dowling was "in the Silence" in Excelsior Springs.¹³³ Nevertheless, we must credit Dowling for the invention of the sage "Meng-ste," who figures in his book as a Tibetan sage, but whose name, as it stands, is neither Tibetan nor Sanskrit nor Chinese. Presumably, Dowling here simply misspelled the name of the fourth-century

¹³¹ Published in Boston by the Spiritualist newspaper, *The Banner of Light*.

¹³² Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 74-75.

¹³³ *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ* (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1894), a translation of the original *La Vie inconnu de Jésus Christ* (1894). Contemporary skewerings of Notovitch included F. Max Müller, "The Alleged Sojourn of Christ in India," *Nineteenth Century* (October 1894): 515-522, and J. Archibald Douglas, "The Chief Lama of Hemis on the Alleged 'Unknown Life of Christ,'" *Nineteenth Century* (April 1896): 667-678, and his "Supplementary Note," 205-209, in F. Max Müller, *Last Essays, 2nd Series: Essays on the Science of Religion* (London 1901).

B.C.E. Chinese Philosopher Meng-tse, that is, Mencius (Mengxi).¹³⁴ Notovitch's work also described Jesus' trips to India and Tibet, as reported in an ancient book—It was, alas, subsequently lost before anyone else but Notovitch could see it (or perhaps it had been



Nicholas
Notovitch

hidden away again). Notovitch said he had discovered it at Hemis Monastery in Ladakh, and that it had been written by a Hindu merchant about the life of a contemporary of his, Jesus—or “Issa” as he was called in Notovitch's book. Jesus had somehow gone to India and studied Pali and thoroughly read the Buddhist scriptures (which would, in fact, not be written down in Pali for another four centuries). For that matter, one may wonder why Jesus would have gone to Tibet during his lifetime, for Buddhism would not be introduced into Tibet until six centuries after he lived. And one may also wonder how it

came to be that a Hindu merchant would have called Jesus “Issa,” using a name for him only invented by Muslims centuries later.

Notovitch had been “inspired” by the writing of a credulous civil servant in India, Louis Jacolliot, who, in his book, *The Bible in India*, had placed Jesus on the Indian subcontinent, by coming to the far-fetched conclusion that the word “Christos” was a corrupted cognate of “Krishna,” and that therefore the story of Jesus was entirely mythical, made up of borrowings from the Indian stories of Krishna.¹³⁵

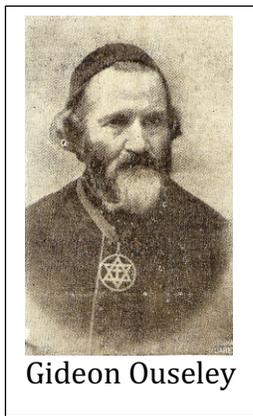
At the turn of the century, Tibet often appeared in the newspapers, as the victim and object of the geopolitical Great Game being played in Asia by England, Russia, and China, culminating in the British Expedition to Lhasa led by Francis Younghusband in 1903-04. But Tibet was also much on the mind of the Occultist community at the time because of the Theosophists' insistence that “mahatmas” had found a refuge there where they were maintaining a Brotherhood that protected great cosmic secrets through the Ages.

¹³⁴ For some more of Dowling's anachronisms, see Goodspeed and Beskow.

¹³⁵ *The Bible in India; Hindoo Origin of Hebrew and Christian Revelation* (London: J. C. Hotten, 1870), a translation of the original *La Bible dans l'Inde; Vie de Iezeus Christna* (Paris: Lacrois 1869). The influence of Jacolliot—as well as other attempts at world syncretism such as that of Godfrey Higgins in his *Anacalypsis*—was profoundly felt among spiritualists, who produced narratives of the Jesus-Buddha-Krishna figure they supposed to have been the original source of these and other stories—see, for example, the story written by trance medium Fanny Green M'Dougall, “Christna. The First Avatar,” *Brittan's Journal* (New York) (January 1874): 60-74.

Just a few years before, in 1901, an eccentric ex-Anglican English clergyman named Gideon Jasper Richard Ouseley had become a student of Theosophy. Ouseley claimed that a fragment of what he called “The Gospel of the Holy Twelve,” which he had “found,” was part of an independent and authentic Gospel.¹³⁶ Actually, it used bits of a genuine second- or third-century, harmonized compilation of two of the Synoptic Gospels, which has come to be called the “Gospel of the Ebionites.” It was also, said its preface, “preserved in the Monasteries of Thibet,” which should have been a tip-off that Ouseley had generated the scripture as a whole.

Nevertheless, Ouseley boldly claimed that the Gospel of which he had a fragment was the original Gospel, from which the traditionally recognized ones derived. He now



Gideon Ouseley

presumed to have recovered the complete text through his own spirit mediumship “in dreams and visions in the night” in which he saw manuscripts on a revolving lectern, which he read and then wrote down in the morning. Ouseley believed that the spirits of Emanuel Swedenborg and of deceased Occultists Anna Bonus Kingsford and Edward Maitland had “edited” the manuscripts that he had seen. The Gospel revealed Jesus to have been a proponent of Ouseley’s own favorite causes of temperance, vegetarianism, and anti-vivisectionism

(he owned numerous cats). Ouseley, in introducing it, wrote:

The early Christian Fathers did well their work of destroying the sources and records from which they gathered the information and data put by them in the Bible. But they failed to destroy it all. Some escaped, and as it is discovered here and there by patient research workers, it is astonishing to see how the world has been deceived by the Christian Fathers.¹³⁷

His German publisher—probably unwilling to disclose the book’s source in Ouseley’s imagination—said that it had been preserved—away from the clutches of early

¹³⁶ Ouseley lived in Brighton with his cats, “his only followers” (as his neighbors said). He later convinced a few people to join what he called “The Order of At-One-Ment and United Templars Society.”

¹³⁷ Ouseley, *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve*, introduction.

priests intent on corrupting it—by Essenes who carried it off to the mountain fastness of a Tibetan monastery, where it had been guarded.¹³⁸ Ouseley's text had Jesus traveling to Egypt to learn from the priests there. He then went to "Assyria and India and into Persia and into the land of the Chaldeans," teaching people to be kind to animals, visiting temples, speaking to priests, and healing the sick, before returning to Palestine to begin his public ministry.

Jesus' so-called "lost years" have been a matter of interest to heterodox writers, from as far back as the third-century Gnostic creators of the "infancy gospels." And at least the Gnostic *Gospel of James* (otherwise known as the *Protevangelium Jacobi*) influenced *The Aquarian Gospel* in its description of the boyhood of Jesus. Heterodox authors thought that Jesus' early life was "lost" and that it needed to be recovered again. That was, nevertheless, merely an instance of a larger "loss"—the culture's loss of faith in Jesus himself, due to the Higher Criticism of the Bible then in vogue, as well as the growth of materialism and atheism at large. It was because Jesus had been lost that a "quest for the historical Jesus" to find him again seemed like such an important intellectual issue. To many, the traditional Gospels no longer seemed to contain the largest truth. Perhaps that truth, they thought, was hidden in "lost" teachings of Jesus or in the "lost" portions of his life, in somewhat the same way that Protestants in general believed that the true teachings of Jesus had been lost in some early century and hidden by a corrupt priestly conspiracy.

Something similar happened in Buddhism. The authors of the Mahayana *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* lived several centuries and more after Śakyamuni Buddha. They nevertheless produced scriptures that presented themselves as having been enunciated by the Buddha at different times and in different realms and to different audiences (*smarter* ones, it is almost unnecessary to point out) than those described in the scriptures with which Buddhists were already familiar. But they had been hidden away until such time as

¹³⁸ Ouseley published it as, *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve, Known Also as the Gospel of the Perfect Life; translated from the original Aramaic and edited by a Disciple of the Master*, reprint (London: John M. Watkins, 1956). It was first serialized in newspapers in 1900, and was collected together and published in 1901, with enlarged editions published in 1903 and 1904. The German edition was published in Berlin in 1902 by Samuel Krauss, under the title *Das Evangelium des vollkommenen Lebens*.

people were psychically prepared, or advanced enough, so to speak, to hear them. And so, the Mahayana added them to its canon of scriptures.¹³⁹

This Mahayana Buddhist method for supplementing scriptures must have been known to anyone—like Dowling—who had delved into esotericism. A section of Levi’s “The Cusp of Ages” that Eva reproduced in her introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel* suggests this. In a reported dialogue between Levi and “Ramasa,” a Cherub, it offers a remarkably similar rationale for keeping secret its as-yet-unheard-of teaching about the passing of the Age of Pisces into the Age of Aquarius. “I heard the history of the Piscean Age from Piscean Cherubim and Seraphim,” Levi says. “And when I took my pen to write Ramasa said: ‘Not now, my son, not now; but you may write it down for men when men have learned the sacred laws of Brotherhood, of Peace on earth, good-will to every living thing.’”¹⁴⁰ Even more explicitly, Eva’s preface to the first edition said that, “Even after more than three years of intimate companionship with the Master the disciples were not ready to receive all the truth.” But now, “The world has at last risen to the plane of spiritual consciousness where men can grasp the higher meanings of the life and lessons of Jesus, and the Spirit of truth has torn away the veil, and a son of man”—Levi Dowling—“... has been permitted to enter the great galleries where all life histories are recorded and make a copy of these records.”¹⁴¹ She called Levi the “translator,” not the author, of the book.

Conspiracies of Biblical Proportions

Another probable influence on Dowling was the genre of “corrected” gospel stories published by American spirit mediums, beginning practically from the start of the Spiritualist movement in America in the mid-nineteenth century. In all of these, Jesus or his

¹³⁹ This allowance for what might be called “continuing revelation” still occurs in modern times in Tibet, with “treasure text” (*terma*) scriptures, being “found”—materialized—by people who claim for them an early, authoritative provenance. For an introduction to this subject, see Tulku Thondrup Rinpoche, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ Dowling, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 7. “The Cusp of the Ages” (author’s collection) was never published separately or in its entirety. It seems to have been one of the weekly teachings that Levi had “typewritten” and sent out to the Aquarian Brotherhood.

¹⁴¹ *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 7.

contemporaries take the opportunity to speak again, using spirit mediums as their instruments, to tell what they say is their real story. According to them, this had been lost due to the ignorance or deliberate deceit of the later followers or priests. Most of the stories made a point of demonstrating that Jesus' original teaching was not "superstitious" or "Papist."

In these renditions, Jesus was either simply nonexistent—a convenient fiction—or he was a simple moral teacher. Or he was a pious scribe, or a plain good man, a sort of ultra-Liberal Protestant, actually. Or—as appropriate for the later nineteenth century—he was an anti-clerical, working-class revolutionary who had tried to usher in a socialist paradise, or he was a purveyor of pantheistic, universal, cosmic knowledge, a mystic hierophant.

All of these "Jesuses" blamed the retrograde Church for telling the wrong story about him. The spirit medium Olive G. Pettis, for example, in 1894 published the *Autobiography by Jesus of Nazareth; Being His Historical Life Given by Himself through the Inspiration of the Scribe O. G. P.* She wrote in the introduction that, "Catholicism is but the device of heathen appointed priests in order to hold control and nothing more."¹⁴² Jesus' apostles, speaking through the spirit medium Alexander Smyth, reported that Jesus preached, in trance, to a crowd about progressive humanistic science, "Yes, my brethren, we have gone astray from the principles implanted in us by the God of Nature, and believed the false fabrications of a vile Priesthood."¹⁴³

The Aquarian Gospel's Jesus, too, is the image of a nineteenth-century, non-dogmatic, but somewhat eccentric Christian. Jesus' travels to India and Tibet are like those of a Victorian tourist on the Grand Circuit, or like those of an agent of the American Foreign Mission Society. Unlike other stories of Jesus in Asia produced by Theosophists and

¹⁴² Olive G. Pettis, *Autobiography by Jesus of Nazareth* (Boston: J. P. Cooke, 1894), 8. Modern Mary-Magdalenas-Secret-Apostle-and-Wife-of-Jesus boosters will be disappointed to learn that Mary affirmed, through Olive, that she had, indeed, been a prostitute (though naturally pure, and only driven into a brothel by the bestial lust of deceitful priests) and had no revelations to make through Olive about being either an apostle or the sexual consort of Jesus.

¹⁴³ Alexander Smyth, *Jesus of Nazareth; or, a True History of the Man Called Jesus Christ, embracing his parentage, his youth, his original doctrines and works, his career as a public teacher and physician of the people, also, the nature of the great conspiracy against him; with all the incidents of his tragical death, given on spiritual authority from spirits who were contemporary mortals with Jesus while on the earth* (Philadelphia: The Author, 1864).

Occultists, Dowling's does not show Jesus learning or practicing yoga or sitting at the feet of gurus waiting for instruction from them.¹⁴⁴ He may have "read all their books" in Lhasa, as *The Aquarian Gospel* put it, but we are not told that he found much of value, if anything, in them that he did not already know. He brings light to Asia, instead. He is, in fact, when it comes right down to it, decidedly non-relativistic in his outlook—even *judgmental*, one might say. Release the chains of your slaves, he tells the Brahmin priests. Stop worshipping idols and offering sacrifices to your false gods.

Levi Dowling's Church of Christ was part of a movement that appealed across denominational lines. It wished to restore the Church to its original purity, to jettison dogma, and to rely only on Scripture.¹⁴⁵ But Scripture is incomplete because it is open to a variety of interpretations. It is also dubious, if one is disposed to being suspicious, because it was so long in the hands of an already formed (and therefore suspect) Church, which had made choices about what to include in it and what to exclude from it. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discoveries of heterodox and Gnostic gospels, therefore, had the potential to undermine the Faith when that Faith relied on Scripture alone. The problem was expressed in a poem entitled "The Intelligibility of the Bible" that Dowling had years before had selected to publish in *The Morning Watch* in 1871. The poem had dramatized a debate between two speakers representing two approaches to Scripture. The first speaker says,

How precious is the Word of God,
Which He to man has given;
Its teachings are so plain a child
May learn the way to heaven.
And by the assisting grace of God,
May safely walk therein;

¹⁴⁴ An example of Jesus-as-yoga-student is in Nicolas Notovitch's *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ* (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1894).

¹⁴⁵ L. C. Rudolph, *Hoosier Faiths: A History of Indiana's Churches & Religious Groups* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 61; see also, Commodore Wesley Cauble, *Disciples of Christ in Indiana; Achievements of a Century* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Meigs Publishing Company, 1930), for a description of the intra-denominational tensions in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The Spirit helps those on this road
In their warfare with sin.

To which the second speaker replies:

So plain! I thought it was as dark
As the ancient's mystic lore;
Its teachings so in myst'ry wrapt,
In vain we o'er it pour,
Till light from heav'n around us shine
That we its truths may see;
The Spirit gives that light divine,
Would it were shed on me.¹⁴⁶

Dowling's emphasis on the integrity of the individual's unmediated relationship with God, together with his liberal desire for a universalistic salvation, combined with his sense that scriptures were the most important basis for Faith, but that those scriptures, as he had received them, were incomplete. All of this prepared him to channel a new gospel. It would be one that would be universally inclusive in the sense of placing the previous Christian savior and teaching in a larger context of many different religions from many different ages.

It is not surprising that Levi would search for other gospels that would make sense of them all. And it is not surprising that he should search for them in the interior expanse of his own spirit. And it is also not surprising that he should find one there and that he should place his confidence in it as true. What he entered inside himself was the whispering gallery of the universe, which contained not only the Bible, but also other scriptures, such as the Jewish Kabbala, which were "not in the scriptures preserved by the Christian Church," as he put it. He may still have been relying—like Protestants before and after him—on Scripture alone, but the dimensions of that Scripture were now as vast and

¹⁴⁶ *The Morning Watch* (Indianapolis) (September 1871): 133-134. The poem was by Sallie W. Smith.

unconstrained as space and as intimate as his own imagination. One of his acquaintances wrote that,

Dr. Dowling's faith was not built upon a religion of spiritual exercise, creeds and dogmas. He was but little concerned with matters of doctrine, but service and kindness were to him a divine system of the humanities; likewise health, happiness and a sense of fair play were valuable attributes. Dr. Dowling had a conscious communion with God, where it was nothing but God and the human soul on a spiritual mountain top, where the human and divine come together, an open and clear sky between the soul and God, where he had direct communion and spiritual immediacy.¹⁴⁷

His "God consciousness," as New Thought writers called it, was unconstrained by mere material fact.¹⁴⁸ Henry Coffeen's introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel* quoted ex-Anglican clergyman and Theosophist Charles Leadbeater with approval on the superior access to the historical record that clairvoyants (including Leadbeater himself) possessed:

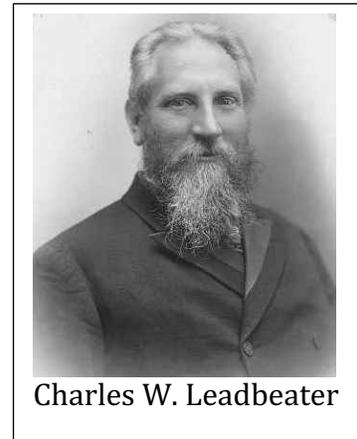
All knowledge is theirs for the searching, all that is, which does not transcend even this lofty plane; the past of the world is as open to them as the present; the Akashic records are ever at their disposal and history, whether ancient or modern, unfolds itself before their eyes at their will. No longer are they at the mercy of the historian, who may be ill-informed, and must be more or less partial; they can study for themselves any incident in which they are interested, with the absolute certainty of seeing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ William C. Watson, M. D., remarks in *The Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 309-310.

¹⁴⁸ On the New Thought use of the term "Christ consciousness," see Ursula N. Gestefeld, *The Science of the Christ* (N.p., 1889). For examples of the general reconceptualization of Jesus along Gnostic lines by the New Thought Movement (which is shared with Spiritualism and Theosophy), see Charles Brodie Patterson, "The Mission of Jesus," *Mind* (New York) (April 1899): 25-31; Rev. R. Heber Newton, "The New Thought of the Christ," *Mind* (July 1900): 256-275; and Charles Wesley McCrossan, *The Mind Science of Christ Jesus; a Treatise on Christian Psychology Showing the Power of Suggestion and Revealing the Secrets of Mental and Spiritual Healing* (Santa Cruz, Cal.: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1913).

¹⁴⁹ Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 12, quoting Leadbeater's *Clairvoyance* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1903), 11.

Coffeen speculated that this facility for excavating distant times—past and future—and places—on Earth and elsewhere—operated like the then-new radio receiver. But this wireless telepathy was not the invention of Theosophists. Spiritualists had developed the technique for exploring what some of them had called “the Summerland,” where the spirits of the deceased dwelt. They had also explicitly applied the technique to exploring via clairvoyance the distant past—including the ancient civilizations they discovered, such as Lemuria and Atlantis—but also the future, which they almost always found to be a utopia. Spiritualists regarded this psychic exploration as capable of filling in gaps in historical knowledge gained through conventional means. Or as capable of overturning information gained through such mundane methods as archeological excavation, analysis of the fossil record, or other means. They called this technique “psychometry.”



Charles W. Leadbeater

Unfortunately, psychometric findings routinely contradicted one another and provided little or no evidence that ever turned out to yield true results that were not obvious from more mundane methods. On the contrary, clairvoyants’ histories of ancient cultures often contained specific errors of fact that could only have been made by having been copied from commonly available published works of comparative religion or mythology.

Coffeen, quoting Leadbeater, explained that a seer’s advancement in developing psychic vision was like progressing from turning the pages of a photo album of still pictures, to watching moving pictures, to what today we might describe as being actually teleported into another time and place. The result was the seer’s ability to correct the historical record. “Not only can he review at his leisure all history with which we are acquainted, correcting as he examines it the many errors and misconceptions which have crept into the accounts handed down to us,” wrote Leadbeater, “he can also range at will over the whole story of the world.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 19-20, citing Leadbeater’s *Clairvoyance*, 116.

Occultists of the time warred against conventional history with another argument as well. History and myth, they said, were identical products of the plastic imagination—one could be fashioned into the other, since they were both written in the “Akashic record,” as Theosophist and Anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner would explain it in 1923. He used words that would have been plain to any Spiritualist in the nineteenth century or to any Postmodernist in the twenty-first:

Those who have enlarged their field of knowledge are no longer dependent on external evidences where past events are concerned. They can see that which is not sensibly evident, yet which time cannot destroy. And so, from available sources of history we can pass on to those which are imperishable. Such history as this is written in very different letters from those which record the every-day events of past times, for this is Gnosis.¹⁵¹

Those who demand empirical evidence would read this as a refusal to distinguish sharply between fact and fiction. To lead such people into the higher truth, an enlightened teacher might present fiction dressed up as if it were fact, in order to pry students from their retrograde ideas about an objective reality, external to their minds. The tool for doing this was “alternative reality literature.” In the decades before the turn of the century, the genre of “Occult fiction” had come into its own. Students of the Occult regarded many individual works, such as Bulwer-Lytton’s *A Strange Story* and *The Coming Race*, or Blavatsky’s *Nightmare Tales* as containing truth that was veiled from the unworthy by having been dressed up as fiction. We may wonder if some sympathetic readers (and, of course, the writer) of *The Aquarian Gospel* recognized it in some sense as a fiction—or perhaps they called it a “myth”—but still took it to be true in some fundamental way. Would they have seen close criticism of it as a niggling, unenlightened approach that had not yet comprehended that myths were true, or that all truths were no more than myths?

These were some of the paths that led some Christian progressives away from orthodoxy in the nineteenth century. The Higher Criticism had erased, for them, the Bible’s

¹⁵¹ Rudolf Steiner, *Atlantis and Lemuria* (London: Anthroposophical Publishing Company, 1923), preface.

uniqueness and authority. Some believed that it had shown that Jesus himself was, objectively speaking, a fiction, and that Christianity was mere myth. They held on to Christianity but did not seek the truth in historical fact, but rather in timeless or subjective myth. Progressives could not accept the Gospels as historical and could not accept the literal content of the Faith. They therefore found value elsewhere, either in myth and allegory, or in sentiment and feeling, or in the inheritance of Christianity trimmed of reference to the supernatural—in its ethics or its abstract, natural philosophy. They may have been prepared to believe in the Occult or in spirit contact, but they saw themselves as rationalists and Freethinkers.

They often accepted the Deists' old contention that the story of Jesus was simply made up, based on the legends surrounding the Greek sage Apollonius of Tyana. This idea was first forcefully made to the English-speaking public as far back as 1680. In that year, Charles Blount published a translation of Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, appending to it a set of notes that attacked the Gospel accounts of Jesus. Modern scholarship now understands that the influence between the *Life of Apollonius* and the Gospels, if any, was in the reverse direction—with Philostratus' second-century biography being, in part, a pagan reaction to the Christian Gospels. This was not definitively clear at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, when Dowling penned *The Aquarian Gospel*.¹⁵² Significant to Levi's rendition of the life of Jesus, therefore, is that Philostratus' fabulistic biography described travels of Apollonius to India, among other places, where he studied with Brahmins.

A "Christian" who believed that the Gospels were fiction and that truth lay entirely within his or her own subjective faculties might not hesitate to "improve" the traditional Gospels or update them with more fiction. He or she would probably not conceive of this as a fraud. Nor could he or she easily distinguish between producing any particular text by "automatic writing"—in which the entranced human author might plausibly deny conscious agency—and constructing it elaborately and deliberately by careful cutting and

¹⁵² See, for example, "Great Theosophists: Apollonius of Tyana," *Theosophy* (July 1936): 385-395, which does not recognize Jesus as an historical character; and "Apollonius of Tyana," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 611.

pasting from other published sources. Or by some mix of the two, producing a text that felt inspired but had also been editorially enhanced.

Without detailed evidence of how Levi Dowling produced his text, we cannot say what, within this range, his method and motives were. Nevertheless, Levi's and Eva's use of the word "transcription" in describing the process encouraged the notion that it was something that Levi did automatically, without much, if any, deliberation or filtering. Whether they imposed this image of automatism on the text entirely after the fact in order to elevate its divine authority is impossible to say. The sheer length and complexity of the document, however, suggests that a significant amount of mundane editorial work went into the production of the finished work.

Disguise is in the nature of Occultism—both old and new. Occultism often presents forged *bona fides* as part of its strategy of subversion of those in power, and to protect itself from those whom it judges should not have the truth. Dowling did this in presenting his new gospel and his new picture of Jesus, as if this information had been hidden away by a conspiring Church and kept away from the Faithful to make them easier to lead.

An Esoteric Christ

The Aquarian Gospel offers a picture of Jesus that is, in many ways, transitional. It lies between the traditional Christian view of Jesus as unique, as the sole Messiah, and as God, and some of the Theosophical versions of Jesus—Notovitch's for example—as merely one enlightened spiritual adept among many. For that reason, we may even wonder whether Dowling actually thought of himself as an *opponent* of a certain sort of Theosophy, rather than its willing collaborator, or at least whether he believed that he had offered a vision that could guide it into a recognizably *Christian* esotericism. Dowling did something like this with Blavatsky's prediction that human evolution would be led by a "Sixth Race," to appear on the West Coast of America. He wrote of this evolution as if it had first manifested when the Pilgrims, separatists from the Established Church in England stepped onto Plymouth Rock, carrying their Race's human seed with them. Further evolutionary progress had proceeded along the same dissenting religious lines away from orthodox

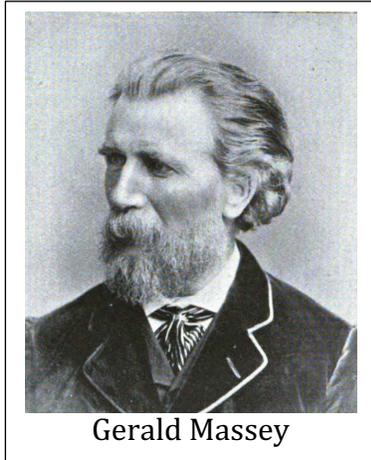
creeds. He formulated a synthesis of Blavatsky's Occultism with Christian millennialism. It appears to have been filtered through Charles Leadbeater's writings, which predicted that the full-blown appearance of the New Race would occur in several centuries of evolution rather than (as Blavatsky believed) in tens of thousands of years. Dowling wrote:

Races develop very slowly. Nearly 300 years have passed since the beginning of this Sixth Race, and now only a small percent of the descendants of these Pilgrims have the Telepathic sense developed in a very perceptible manner; but thousands of both Americans and Europeans are upon the cusp of the Races, and those who are willing to pay the price in consecrated effort may soon attain.¹⁵³

Here Dowling links the Christian millennial expectations to an evolutionary jump in human nature. In doing so, he adopted the Occultist idea that human evolution was being directed by non-earthly intelligences who would effect humans' salvation by liberating them from their bodies—their lower, animal natures. This was a variation on the ancient Gnostic myth that reckoned the material world as an oppressive prison built and maintained by lower demiurges. Bodies were material prisons of the eternal souls, spirits, or lights seeking freedom to travel to the stars. The idea was well known to Theosophists from Blavatsky's explanation that beings from elsewhere than Earth had infused the human spirit in the bodies of primates (her answer to Darwinian Evolution). It was an idea, however, that already had wide currency among Spiritualists, who believed that elevated spirits were about to intervene directly in human reproduction in order to make humans more spiritual. Here we may see in an early form today's Aquarian Age advocates' belief in extraterrestrial visitors to Earth, their stories of aliens' experimentation with human reproduction, and their visions of an interplanetary apocalypse heralded by starships rescuing a remnant of believers from destruction.

¹⁵³ "Universal Communication," *The New Age Magazine* (August 1909): 642. This system—like virtually every other Occult system of the time (until Noble Drew Ali)—assessed the northern European races as the human avant-garde, on the cusp of making an evolutionary leap.

Dowling's Christianity was more traditionally devout than that. For him, Jesus was



Gerald Massey

not an extraterrestrial. Nor was he merely a garbled myth.

Dowling supported the claim that Jesus did in fact exist. This distinguished him from the radical critics of the time, like poet Gerald Massey, who argued that he was entirely made up. The so-called “historical Jesus,” to these critics, was a bricolage, a hasty assemblage of bits of mythic flotsam bobbing about in the ancient ether that had flowed in from elsewhere—particularly Egypt—from centuries before. For Massey, every item in the historical record actually existed in what seem to

be a kind of timeless and unorganized attic—his version of the “akashic record” perhaps—a sort of cluttered Victorian museum of fantastic proportions. His wanderings through it resulted in his writing massive tomes on comparative religion that are nowadays forgotten by everyone but conspiracy theorists who ply their trade on the internet.

Massey was a popular speaker on the Spiritualist lecture circuit, where he delivered a presentation that declared him to be a vehement opponent of the Christian “hoax.” But he was unable to navigate reliably through the cosmic ether in which all historical records float. For him, the authentic and the fraudulent (gospels included), the true and the false, were all the same. They were all *myths* floating about, waiting to be collected together and fashioned into something good or ill:

The “apocryphal” Gospels are not a mere collection of “foolish traditions” or fables forged or invented to supply an account of that period in “our Lord’s” history, respecting which the accepted Gospels are almost silent. They are *disjecta membra* of the original matter; the mythos reduced to the state of Märchen; the story of the miraculous child told as a folk-tale which was at last repeated as a history in the Gospels with matter like the above omitted because it was too naturally incredible, and could not be utilized by the most desperate expedient of miracle.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Gerald Massey, *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 767-768.

Here we meet again the machinations of evil priests, preying on the superstitions of the common people. Massey's own politics—one may not be surprised to learn—were radical and socialist. He was a Chartist spokesman against the prerogatives of the nobility. But his conspiracy orientation placed him squarely among the Gnostics. They believed that (so-called) reality must be rejected, in order to pass entirely into the Light. This has continued to be a potent idea, certainly into the 1960s and 70s Aquarian Age and beyond.

Massey and his fellow Freethinkers and Jesus-debunkers were actively publishing in the 1880s and into the early years of the twentieth century. Massey was widely traveled in America, too, as a lecturer. As has already been suggested here, it may well have been Massey's works—especially his 1883 book, *The Natural Genesis*, that suggested to Dowling that the evolving Ages of mankind were aligned with astrological Ages (which Blavatsky had designated “Messianic Cycles”), and that the “Jesus Age” was the Piscean Age.¹⁵⁵

One may, in fact, further speculate on the very specific Theosophical context in which Dowling produced his book. In 1906, Charles Leadbeater had withdrawn, under threat of dismissal, from the Theosophical Society, because of a potential scandal involving his having encouraged young boys to masturbate in order to release oppressive inhibitions. The details became public in 1908 when Annie Besant had him reinstated in the Society, which created a crisis among its membership and a schism in the Theosophical Society, with the London Lodge becoming independent for a while.

One of the aspects of the brand of Theosophy that Leadbeater and Besant promulgated was that it was more positive toward the historical Jesus and Christianity than the system of Theosophy that Blavatsky and her associate Henry Steel Olcott had formulated. Blavatsky wrote of Jesus as if he had been merely a Gnostic hierophant and spiritual teacher and prophet, and that his Divine identity was a pure fiction created by his later followers.¹⁵⁶ Leadbeater allowed that Jesus was a real person and a real “Divine”

¹⁵⁵ Gerald Massey, *The Natural Genesis; or, Second Part of A Book of the Beginnings, Containing an Attempt to Recover and Reconstitute the Lost Origins of the Myths and Mysteries, Types and Symbols, Religion and Language, with Egypt from the Mouthpiece and Africa as the Birthplace* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1883); also, particularly on the Christian Age as the Piscean Age, see, for example, the appendix in his *Ancient Egypt*. Massey's deeply anti-Christian, pro-Spiritualist sentiments are on display in his lecture, “The Coming Religion,” first published privately in 1900, and since republished.

¹⁵⁶ For Blavatsky's views, see *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877), volume 2, 192-196. For Leadbeater's, see *Theosophical Talks at Adyar (First Series) The Inner Life* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1910), 19-22 and 114-119.

figure, although, one might say, not the one described by traditional Christianity, but rather a person with a highly developed “Christ consciousness.” Jesus, in his interpretation, was an avatar of the spiritual Christ, who had reincarnated throughout history in a variety of individuals, and he would continue to do so. Leadbeater, in fact, would soon find his way into the Liberal Catholic Church, an esoteric mixture of High Church Anglicanism and Theosophy.

In this respect, Levi Dowling in his *Aquarian Gospel* clearly revealed himself as a coadjutor of Leadbeater rather than of Blavatsky. This link with the Leadbeater faction is evident in the many references to Leadbeater’s works in Coffeen’s introduction to the first edition of *The Aquarian Gospel*. In addition, assuming a link to Leadbeater provides a possible explanation for the disappearance of Coffeen’s lengthy introduction in all the editions after the first, beginning with the 1912 edition. By that time, Leadbeater’s activities with boys had become a matter of public scandal. As a result, relying heavily on him as a source in the introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel* would have been inexpedient. Dropping the introduction would have been a way to distance *The Aquarian Gospel* from an association with Leadbeater.

In addition, in 1909, Leadbeater had “discovered” the young Indian boy Jiddu Krishnamurti and had begun promoting him as the new reincarnation of “the Christ” and “the Messiah.” Dowling and his admirers would most probably have found this, also, to have been inexpedient, if for no other reason than that Dowling himself had some claim to be the messenger of the coming age, rather than a John the Baptist to the boy Christ from India. Dropping the Leadbeater-infused introduction from *The Aquarian Gospel*, therefore, would have been the probable result of Dowling’s reaction to the continuing scandal within Theosophy over Leadbeater, and a way to have his text stand on its own.

The Aquarian Gospel tells the life of Jesus in a third-person narrative, not as Jesus’ autobiography. A garden full of gospels recently “dictated” by “Jesus” or his associates or contemporaries were available at the time.¹⁵⁷ Spiritualist clairvoyants, from nearly the very

¹⁵⁷ These included medium Levi McKeen Arnold’s *The Life of Jesus of Nazareth, Spiritually Given by His Spirit* (Poughkeepsie, N. Y.: 1853); Vermont physician George C. Briggs, *A True History of Jesus the Christ: Being a Detailed Account of the Manner of His Birth, and of All That He Did and Suffered up to the Time of His Crucifixion, Dictated by Himself* (Boston: W. F. Brown & Company, 1874); Glasgow spirit medium and painter David Duguid, *Hermes, a Disciple of Jesus: His Life and Mission Work, also the Evangelistic Travels of Anah and*

beginning of the Spiritualist movement, had taken dictation, as it were, not just from the spirits of ordinary folks, but also from those of Jesus and his immediate disciples.¹⁵⁸ There were also a number of self-admitted romances or novels, the authors of which, however, claimed to have been peculiarly inspired—verging on something like spirit possession—including such works as General Lew Wallace’s 1880 effort, *Ben Hur; a Story of the Christ*.¹⁵⁹ Wallace, we may note, like Dowling, was a Hoosier member of the Church of Christ.

In 1885, Spiritualist and Theosophist Susan Elizabeth Gay anonymously published a

Zitha, Two Persian Evangelists Sent Out by Hafed, together with Incidents in the Life of Jesus Given by a Disciple through Hafed (Glasgow: H. Nisbet, 1888); M. Faraday [pseudonym], *Jesus Christ, a Fiction: Founded upon the Life of Apollonius of Tyana; the Pagan Priests of Rome Originated Christianity; New and Startling Disclosures by Its Founders, and Full Explanations by Ancient Spirits* (Springfield, Mass.: Star Publishing company, 1883); Jonathan M. Roberts, *Antiquity Unveiled: Ancient Voices from the Spirit Realms Disclose the Most Startling Revelations, Proving Christianity to Be of Heathen Origin* (Philadelphia: Oriental Publishing Company, 1892); the anonymously authored *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as Revised and Corrected by the Spirits* (New York: The Proprietors, 1861); Charles Linton’s *The Healing of the Nations* (Philadelphia: The Author, 1864); John Ballou Newbrough’s *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Embassadors* (New York: Oahspe Publishing Association, 1882); and, of course, the American prototypes of this genre, Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus the Christ*, and the “gift” texts of the Shakers, such as Alonzo Giles Hollister, ed., *The Life and Sufferings of Jesus Anointed, Our Holy Savior and of Our Blessed Mother Ann: in Two Parts, Written by Inspiration, Envolved thru the Inner Consciousness of William Leonard, in the Church at Harvard, Mass., October 1841* (Mount Lebanon, N.Y., 1904).

¹⁵⁸ The “Auburn Circle,” for example, produced new revelations on the Gospels from the spirits of Peter and Paul, which they published as *Spiritual Exposition of the Prophetic Scriptures of the New Testament, Received by J. M. Brown, E. H. Baxter, E. A. Benedict* (Auburn, N.Y.: E. H. Baxter and E. A. Benedict, 1850). This circle was taken over by Thomas Lake Harris and moved to New York City. See also *The Spirit of Jesus Communicating through the Rappings!* (Rochester: The Tribune, 1851), a reprint of early spiritualistic material from The Rochester Tribune. A new wave of Jesus-as-psychic explanations were published in the period between the World Wars. Examples are Richard Arthur Bush, *Jesus at Work; a Selection from a Series of Communications upon Many Subjects from the Spirit-Side of Life, Given through Richard Arthur Bush* (Manchester: Two Worlds Publishing Company, 1929); Frederick B. Bond, *The Gospel of Philip the Deacon; Claiming to be a Reconstruction of the Original Document Burned in Athens about the Time of Philip’s Mission (say AD 36-40), through the Recall of the Spiritual Memories of the Past Which Ever Persist, and Are Available to Mental Sympathy; Received by Frederick Bligh Bond through the Hand of Hester Dowden ... Embodying the Narrative of the Holy Nativity, and the Messianic Constellation, the Passion, and the Resurrection of Christ, the Pentecostal Gifts and the Story of the Sangreal, the Sole Personal Relic of the Master Remaining on Earth* (New York: Macoy, 1932); Hereward Carrington, *Loaves and Fishes; a Study of the Miracles, of the Resurrection, and of the Future Life, in the Light of Modern Psychic Knowledge* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1935); John Sebastian Marlow Ward, *The Psychic Powers of Christ* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1936); Daniel Boone Herring, *The Thirteenth Man; a Revelation of the Actual Spiritual Work of Jesus* (Holyoke, Mass.: The Elizabeth Towne Company, 1936); and James Arthur Findlay, *The Psychic Stream; or, The Source and Growth of the Christian Faith* (London: Psychic Press, 1939). Channeling Jesus has continued down to the present; see, for example, George King, *The Twelve Blessings: The Cosmic Concept for the New Aquarian Age as given by the Master Jesus in His Overshadowing of George King*, revised edition (of 1958) (Hollywood, Calif.: Aetherius Society, 1974); James Morgan, *Jesus and Mastership: The Gospel According to Jesus of Nazareth as Dictated through James Coyle Morgan* (Tacoma, Wash.: Oakbridge University Press, 1990); and *The Wholly Bible, What I Intended; by Jesus, the Christed* (North Bend, Wash.: HeartHouse Publishers, 1995).

¹⁵⁹ See Lew Wallace, “How I Came to Write Ben-Hur,” *The Esoteric: A Magazine of Advanced and Practical Esoteric Thought* (Boston) 10 (September 1896): 105-110.

re-rendering of the Gospels, *The Spirit of the New Testament; or, The Revelation of the Mission of Christ*, by “A Woman.”¹⁶⁰ According to the advertisements for the book, the author possessed an exquisitely wrought feminine sensibility—her “finer feminine intuitions” and her psychic ability as a medium of “higher inspirations.” Her “acute perception of the inner meaning of the words and works of Jesus and his disciples” had allowed her to “see” things there that had been always been hidden before (from those male priests and clerical authorities). This enabled her “to throw a flood of light on much that is obscure” in the Bible. The book therefore claimed an authority superior to that of a mere interpretation or explanation of the Gospel, and hinted that, in its reliance on an enlightened vision, its authority was antecedent to that of the canonical Gospels themselves. Not surprisingly, perhaps, her feminine sensibility allowed her to detect a rather more feminine Jesus than had been revealed before, and her exegesis itself was “at once unique and significant of the intellectual progress of Woman.”¹⁶¹

In a similar way, Levi Dowling presented his book—however others may have regarded it—as a completion and fulfillment of the story of Jesus, rather than a refutation of it or its replacement. It reformed Christianity, he believed, rather than refuted it. It filled in the gaps of the years of Jesus’ youth. It told the full story of his public ministry in Galilee. It provided details that allowed its readers to see the story, as reported in the New Testament, in a different context. Henry Coffeen called it a “fuller gospel record” meant to “revive and rejuvenate the old church and remodel it for a new cycle of life.” As he put it, “this new work, which is but a fuller restatement of the old, recovered by psychic method from the everlasting astral records, comes forth ‘out of the heavens’ true to the ancient ideals and Essenic environments and yet again it is true to the psychological discoveries of our times.” He expected that the ignorant and benighted traditional churches of Christianity would oppose it:

¹⁶⁰ A Woman, *The Spirit of the New Testament; or, The Revelation of the Mission of Christ* (New York: Alliance Publishing Company, 1885). For an example of the advertisement, see the back matter in *Mind* (April 1899).

¹⁶¹ One is reminded here of the similar wish-fulfillment surrounding Morton Smith’s homoerotic Christ in the “Secret Gospel of Mark” in the 1960s, and of the “Gospel of Jesus’s Wife” that enveloped academia in 2012.

The church needs the new book, and hearts that yearn for the more complete life and words of Jesus need this new book, whatever may be the dictum of hirelings who sometimes stand in official places. Such would not recognize the Christ when he was among them in Judea in the olden time, and would not today.¹⁶²

Most assuredly implied here, but not directly stated, was that “the Christ” was in fact making his appearance again today, in the form of The Aquarian Gospel. Coffeen makes that claim a page later:

I have no hesitancy in saying, for myself, touching the personal character and ability of the compiler of these records, for whom I have great respect, that I believe neither he nor any other living man could have produced this book without help from the higher planes of vision.

It has qualities, tone and temper, spiritual insight, ethical teachings, conformability to the age and country, charm so divine and values so high that it stands out and takes its place among the world’s most wonderful books.

Let critics sneer if they must, and science ignore, and clerics gather their official robes about them and pass by; but the life of Jesus, the Divine Master, once walking up and down the ways of Judea and Galilee, in these pages breathes again upon the world.¹⁶³

The Message Bearer of the Spirit Age

Spiritualist authors—Dowling’s California associate James Martin Peebles among them—had developed a theory that reduced Jesus to a misunderstood spirit medium, and all present-day spirit mediums as somewhat equivalent to Jesus.¹⁶⁴ They assumed that the

¹⁶² Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 22.

¹⁶³ Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 23.

¹⁶⁴ Examples included Allan Putnam, *Bible Marvel Workers, and the Power Which Helped or Made Them Perform Mighty Works, and Utter Inspired Words: Together with Some Personal Traits and Characteristics of Prophets, Apostles, and Jesus; or, New Readings of “the Miracles”* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1873), Moses Hull,

Gospel writers were mere instruments of the divine, or trance mediums.

Among the various gospels channeled by Spiritualists, Levi Dowling included something in his that allows us to see the salesman and evangelist in him. Not only is Levi represented as the channel *for* the communication, he is also represented as present *in* the story itself, as the prophet and messenger of the New Age. According to *The Aquarian Gospel*, thousands of years before, the Egyptian teacher of Jesus foretold the coming of Levi—as Eva made clear in the book’s introduction:

About two thousand years ago Elihu, who conducted a school of the prophets in Zoan, Egypt, referred to Levi thus:

“This age will comprehend but little of the works of Purity and Love; but not a word is lost, for in the Book of God’s Remembrance a registry is made of every thought and word and deed;

“And when the world is ready to receive, lo, God will send a messenger to open up the book and copy from its sacred pages all the messages of Purity and Love.

“Then every man of earth will read the words of life in the language of his native land, and men will see the light.

“And man again will be at one with God.”¹⁶⁵

Eva also provided a selection from another manuscript, also channeled by Levi, in which “Visel, the goddess of wisdom”, commissioned Levi to the task of “Akashic Seer” Visel’s name, we may note, is a scramble of “Levi” with a sign for inversion—“s”—at its axis—and so is presumably Levi himself, in the person of his divine consort in a mystical union within him. She commanded Levi, as “message bearer of the Spirit Age,” to “go forth into these mystic [Record] Galleries” and “take up your pen and write” what he found there.

Embedding yourself in the scripture that you are “transcribing” is a useful device for adding to your authority—as being the one foretold and commissioned. It increases the

Jesus and the Mediums (Chicago: The Author, 1890), and James M. Peebles, *Seers of the Ages: Embracing Spiritualism, Past and Present Doctrines Stated and Moral Tendencies Defined* (Boston: William White and Company, 1868).

¹⁶⁵ She is quoting *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (1911), chapter 7, verses 25-28.

chances for the scripture's successful distribution. It is a literary device similar to that used in the Mahayana sutras, in which the Buddha predicts a future time when these very sutras themselves, invisible for a time, would be revealed. The scriptures have the Buddha promise merit to those who copy and disseminate them. If Levi had read some of the Mahayana sutras then widely circulating in translation among Theosophists, perhaps he had recognized the potential of this device.

Many of Blavatsky's ideas and terminology, developed in *The Secret Doctrine* appeared in *The Aquarian Gospel* or in other of Dowling's writings. These included such ideas as the "Akashic Record" itself, but also, the notion of the evolution of humans into various "root races," and the stories of the lost continents of Lemuria and Atlantis.

More than those single ideas, however, that link *The Aquarian Gospel* to Theosophy was the larger idea that it was a hidden scripture that would supersede all others. Many people assessed *The Aquarian Gospel* as a sheer fabrication created to diminish, if not entirely replace, the Biblical Gospels. And many people assessed Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* in the same way. It purported to be a massive commentary on a "root text." That inner text, Blavatsky said, was *The Book of Dzryan*, which she had received from one of her mysterious masters in Tibet. It had been hidden away from profane eyes, but was, in reality, she said, the true seed text from which all other scriptures around the world had been derived, and of which they were all lesser reflections. It was in a now-extinct language, "Senzar," and its source was ultimately extra-terrestrial. Again, alas, the original that Blavatsky claimed to have translated had mysteriously disappeared again after she had finished with it. Dowling would have been influenced both by Blavatsky's Occultic view of truth—behind the appearances of the world—as well as by her production of a new scripture, meant to outrank and therefore to replace all others.

The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society was headquartered in San Diego, at Point Loma, but this had become independent in 1895, and was at odds with the American Branch of the Adyar Theosophical Society, which, in 1912, moved from New York to Hollywood, California. Dowling initiated his Los Angeles students into "the great White Lodge," a term that indicates his identification with the Leadbeater group.¹⁶⁶ One curious

¹⁶⁶ See the remarks of his associate L. H. Worthington in *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 313.

item in *The Aquarian Gospel* suggests a kind of contradiction from, or competition with—the group at Point Loma. Eva wrote in the introduction that, “Early in life, when [Levi] was but a mere lad, he had a vision in which he was told that he was to ‘build a white city.’ This vision was repeated three times with years intervening. The building of the ‘white city’ was ‘The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ.’” Levi’s later follower Anna Patrick told the story with a few more details, saying that Levi first had this vision when he was twenty years old:

... the veil of the beyond was lifted by the Mystic Masters and they said to Levi: “The Masters have need of thee, put on the whole armor of God and wait. The time has come when the Empire of Peace must be established. The Capital City shall be built in security. Its foundation shall be laid in the solid rock, and shall stand forever. In the midst of this city shall arise a temple far surpassing in grandure [sic] the temple of Solomon; and this white city and this temple shall be built in the land overshadowed with wings, and where the mountains dip into the sea.”¹⁶⁷

But Katherine Tingley, who, shortly after 1897, began building the Center at Point Loma, the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity, as the headquarters of a branch broken from the main trunk of the Theosophical Society, wrote that, by establishing her Center, she was fulfilling a childhood vision she had of a “White City” where students



The White City at Point Loma

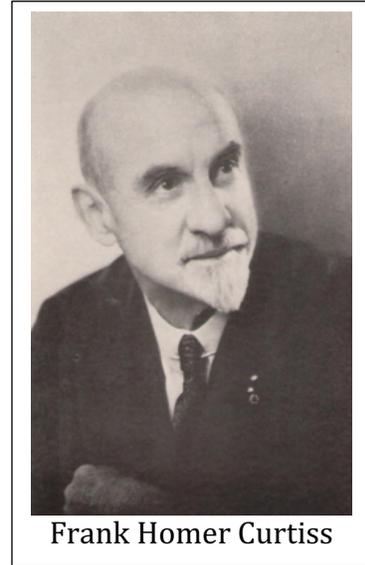
could be educated in mystic wisdom. Her vision was probably influenced by the Masonic imagery of her grandfather—building the White City in the West was equivalent to rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem in a new location, and not just in the West but in the microcosm, the interior of the soul.¹⁶⁸ It was a trope that had also inspired the planning of the grounds and

¹⁶⁷ “The Visions of Levi, the Seer and Teacher; Collated from the Book of the Empire by Mrs. A. D. Patrick, Who Had Known Him for Thirty-five Years,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 306.

¹⁶⁸ Katherine Tingley, *The Voice of the Soul* (Point Loma: Woman’s International Theosophical League, 1928), chapter 1.

buildings of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and nicknamed it the "White City"—as the model of the City of the Future, where the so-called "Parliament of the World's Religions" was held.

Theosophy, Occultism, Astrology, New Thought, and Spiritualism all intermingled in the cultural climate of Southern California then, as they do now. Many New Thought devotees and Theosophical students had found their way to Los Angeles at the time, such as Frank Homer Curtiss and his wife Harriette Augusta Brown Curtiss. Frank was an "alternative" physician, as we would say today, and a passionate advocate of physical exercise regimens, numerology, and the tarot. Harriette was the "instrument" of "Rahmea, Priestess of the Flame," the head of the "Order of Christian Mystics" and the "Order of the 15." The Priestess gave through Harriette the teachings Curtiss published as the Blavatsky-inspired 1913



Frank Homer Curtiss

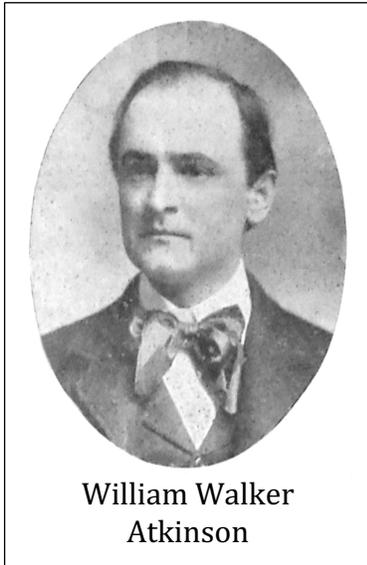
work, *The Voice of Isis*, in which Curtiss had referred to "cycles of fulfillment." This, she pointed to a few years later—in 1921, after *The Aquarian Gospel* was widely known—as a reference to the Age of Aquarius. Or, more properly, to the "Age of Aquaria," for by that time Curtiss had become the voice of "Aquaria," the Holy Ghost's name in the New Age, as she explained, following Dowling's own gospel's declaration that the Holy Spirit was feminine.¹⁶⁹

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to look farther afield for the sources of Dowling's "Age of Aquarius." Those sources included the writings of French Occultist Eliphas Levi (aka Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810-1875), whom Dowling quoted in lectures he gave at his Los Angeles home, demonstrating that he had absorbed from reading him a predilection for magic, Kabbala, and astrology, probably through Arthur E. Waite's translations of Eliphas Levi's works. Eva Dowling, too, ventured into celestial spaces limned by astrology and became its teacher at the Dowling's "Aquarian College" in Los Angeles.

¹⁶⁹ Harriette Augusta Curtiss and F. Homer Curtiss, *The Message of Aquaria; the Significance and Mission of the Aquarian Age* (San Francisco: Curtiss Philosophic Book Company, 1921), viii, 23-34, and 73-83.

Levi's residences in Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles, also call to mind two New Thought advocates of the time who triangulated their careers on these three cities. The first was self-made publishing entrepreneur, Charles Francis Haanel, who pioneered self-help seminars for business executives, who learned the same mix of pantheism and personal empowerment that people today still pay to hear under a variety of names.¹⁷⁰ Haanel taught his students that their own will is identical to God's, and that they can exercise that will, through "visualization," as he called it, to bring about their own material success and achieve whatever their goals may be.

The other New Thought leader of the time who was active in the St. Louis- Chicago- Los Angeles triangle was William Walker Atkinson, who was intent on Eastern based methods of self-realization, including yoga. Nevertheless, he was also an enthusiastic



William Walker
Atkinson

student of the Western Occult crafts of "psycho-magic," as he called it, including clairvoyance, psychometry, telepathy, crystal gazing, astral travel, and divination. He was a tireless writer and publisher of books on the subjects of "character power," "creative power," "desire power," "faith power," "memory power," "personal power," "reasoning power," "regenerative power," "perceptive power," "the art of salesmanship," "the secret of success," and the grandly titled "Mastery of Being."¹⁷¹

Atkinson's works are typical of the New Thought movement, which denied that the material world was real.

Instead, "thoughts are things" and, conversely, one might say, things are just thoughts, and so may be changed by changing one's thoughts. This is because the world and its weal and woe is created by our minds, and "the body is only the instrument by which the mind acts."

¹⁷⁰ Charles Francis Haanel, *The Master Key* (St. Louis: Inland Printery, 1917); Haanel's book followed on the heels of another book, by the same name, by Lauron William De Laurence (Chicago: De Laurence, Scott & Company, 1914), a similar New Thought exposition.

¹⁷¹ William Walker Atkinson, *The Mastery of Being; A Study of the Ultimate Principle of Reality, and the Application Thereof* (Holyoke, Mass.: The Elizabeth Towne Company, 1911). Perhaps his most popular book was the multi-edition *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life; Being a Series of Lessons in Personal Magnetism, Psychic Influence, Thought-Force Concentration, Will Power and Practical Mental Science* (New York: Psychic Research Company, 1901).

With this conviction, one may hope for the perfection of mind over matter and for the healing of the body through right thought. A corollary is that if some religious claim “rings true” to you, even for inexplicable reasons and irrational grounds, then it *is* true—or, at least, as true as anything gets. Although Atkinson was not explicitly mentioned in Aquarian literature, another New Thought teacher was: Julia Seton Sears, who identified herself as a supporter of the Aquarian Commonwealth, which sold copies of all her books through the mail.

The Rise and Fall of the Aquarian Commonwealth

Levi Dowling was listed in the 1911 Los Angeles City Directory, modestly, as a religious teacher. He had, in fact, become a New Age mystic dynamo, the center of grand expectations, based on the initial popularity of *The Aquarian Gospel* among Spiritualists, Occultists, and New Thought devotees. He was a “true Illuminate,” teaching “Biopneuma,” the course of lessons that included prohibitions against tight clothing, sexual impurity, tobacco smoking, impure language, and the use of drugs and alcohol. It included admonitions to engage in deep breathing of “ozone”-filled air, “proper willing,” and “forceful thinking,” daily outdoor exercise, bathing, controlling one’s temper, masticating each bite of food twenty times (rather than thirty-two times, as advocated by “The Great Masticator” Horace Fletcher), keeping regular waking and sleeping hours, and keeping regular times for eating, for defecation, and for one’s devotions—that is, meditation. This meant that one should “practice concentration of magnetic force upon yourself and others at least two hours a day.”

Levi now equated his term “Biopneuma” with the Holy Spirit, adopting an overtly Gnostic view that encouraged entering “The Great Silence” to be filled with the Biopneuma to become an Illuminate. To achieve this, Levi recommended the recitation of a formula that he said he had repeated to himself “for forty long years.” Then the clouds had parted and “the glory of the Lord” had shown forth and “the Mysteries of the Ages” had been revealed and had become “as an open book.” It was “Wisdom! Wisdom! It must be mine; Light! Light! I will see the true light; Illumination! Illumination! I will attain unto divine

illumination, through Jesus Christ, my Lord.”¹⁷²

Levi had established himself as the “National Hierophant” and “National Seer” of “The Aquarian Commonwealth,” a fledgling socialistic Occult brotherhood and mutual aid society headquartered at his house on Figueroa Avenue.¹⁷³ At its height, its Los Angeles members numbered a few hundred. It is likely that most of its members, located elsewhere, were joined to the organization only through subscription to mail order lessons. Eva had become the organization’s “National Scribe.” Membership was open to individuals around the world—One dollar a month qualified a member to receive an insignia button and monthly “typewritten” lecture notes of an ongoing series of teachings that Levi continued to record from the Akashic record. It included material on Kabbala and on other complex systems of Biblical allegory. It also contained speculations on esoteric sexual practices with a strong admixture of Indian tantra, elaborated out of the hatha yogic understanding of *prānāyāma*, or breath control:



The Tree of Life is SEX, with its two pole connection in each human, mystically called the REINS, and in East Indian literature Ida and Pingala. The fruit of this tree is its concentrated forces, and comes into existence because in the AIR man BREATHES, there is a VITAL FORCE of life, called “Spiro” in Greek, and “Spirit” in English. It is this same force, mechanically concentrated, that gives us our electric lights, runs our street cars and elevators as well as the human and animal body.

Now, it is the concentration of this Spiro in the air we breathe that, in its union with the MAGNETIC CURRENT that FLOWS THROUGH ALL, becomes the SPIREMA in the Greek Bible. In plain English, the concentrated life force, the FIRE OF LIFE IN SEX, the FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE. And as true as its use in generation procreates and

¹⁷² Levi D’Guru, *Complete Course in Biopneuma*, 56.

¹⁷³ See, for example, “The Aquarian Commonwealth,” *New Age Magazine* (September 1909): 701-704.

brings to earth human beings in new human bodies, just so true is it that when men and WOMEN learn to USE the SAME FIRE and fruit of life in regeneration that they now use in GENERATION and PLEASURE, they will have found the SECRET OF LIFE and WILL SURELY cease to die.

But this secret cannot and will not be given to the race as a WHOLE until selfishness leaves man in a greater state of freedom than he now lives in. MAN must find the secret of the way to live in sweetness, Peace and plenty without owning even as much as the clothes on his back. Then want, sickness and death will leave the land and all mankind shall be richer than the richest today, without a single earthly possession that he can call his own in the way that man owns things today. TODAY this secret is occasionally given to advanced natures of sweetness, learning and unselfishness. But it is always transmitted in exchange of feelings and not by words, and those who do receive it never tell of it. Nor do they ever die like common mortals. Nor do they remain long on earth, long simply because they can, but they leave the body for a vacation when they choose, with as much ease as the ordinary man leaves the house. We state further, that regeneration as it is taught in the world today is a mistake and will NEVER do the things it is believed to do. CELIBACY has always failed and ALWAYS will. Sex was made for regeneration as well as for Generation, and, in fact, sex would NEVER have been made for the purpose of begetting species. Its value is yet unknown to modern man. In twos Gods are, in twos man came, and in twos we must return. The secret of secrets is hidden in sex, and this secret man must learn ...

The mortal mind in its three parts, and the body MUST dip to the bottom of ALL there is to dip to, or in, and become WISE in ALL, and WHOLLY SATED with EVERY PHASE of emotion, sensation and life, known to all the world OUTSIDE the sweet repose in the ark, or Garden of Eden, or at oneness with God in man, before we can enter the Father's house, the citadel of Jesus, the BONY CAVERN in the forehead, above and between the eyes.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Pages 7-8 and 10 of manuscript in possession of the author, a copy of 18 pages, single-spaced, undated, but by "Dr. Levi Dowling" and mentioning events in California.

In the magazine appeared earnest articles by various writers on political, millennial Socialism, the universal brotherhood of Peace, medieval alchemy, astrology, magic, palmistry, diet reform, joined in together with sex secrets, yoga, auto-hypnosis, vibrations, invisible planetary masters, the Great White Lodge, and the new Race—all in the New Age package that continues down to today—which arranged themselves on the pages alongside the hidden “gospels” that Dowling was reading from the Akashic Record. Promised results of becoming an Aquarian included not only supreme enlightenment, but also increased “personal magnetism,” wealth, success, and foot health.

The Truth is Out There, as we have heard rather more recently, hidden somewhere for the finding, perhaps in the Akashic Record, which anyone might access freely if they knew how. Everything that was ever written is there, too, which, of course, makes the notion of copyright protection (grounded, as it is, on the retrograde principle of private property) absurd to apply to the Akashic Record and everything in it. And the notion of plagiarism is equally absurd: Once something has been written, it goes into the universal domain. That is why Levi really had no need whatsoever to read any of the hundreds of books in Dowling’s office. Levi just turned his mind to the universal record, and there found what he taught. Like this, for example:

The submineral, the mineral, the vegetable and the animal, are each presided over by a great created intelligence. Each dominion is peopled with unnumbered beings. Those of the submineral are known as Sylphs; those of the mineral, Gnomes; those of the vegetable, Undines; and those of animal, Salamanders. The Sovereign of the Sylphs and of the submineral world is PARALDA; of the Gnomes and of the mineral world is GOB; of the Undines and of the vegetable world, is NICKSA; of the Salamanders, and of the animal world, is DJIN.

It is said, and not without reason, that the throne of Paralda of the Sylphs is to the East, of Gob of the Gnomes to the North, of Nicksa of the Undines to the West, and of Djin of the Salamanders to the South.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ “Universal Brotherhood,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 295.

No need to read Paracelsus or any of his commentators or to attribute anything to him or them, or even mention them at all. Everything was just out there in an invisible state, there for the taking, and free of charge. And speaking of what was free, being an Aquarian was not that. Matriculation and tuition fees, lecture fees, regalia fees, graduation fees (“A. Ph. D.”—Doctor of Aquarian Philosophy), mail-order lesson fees, magazine subscriptions, and special event fees were assessed. Then, there were the opportunities for investing in the real estate projects (Mount Carmel by the Sea, and later the Etiwanda Vineyards). Dr. Watson also ran a fund-raising drive with a goal of \$25,000—quite a nice bundle in 1911—to support the Dowlings so that Levi could buy a “retreat” at Avalon on Catalina Island, where he could rest and concentrate on turning out materials from the Book of God’s Remembrance. Free will donations were, of course, always encouraged. Buying magazine subscriptions for friends and acquaintances were highly encouraged. Ad hoc special offers were sometimes made available as subscription premiums. “Are you Interested in the Mystic Masters’ Secret Formula?” went one of these limited-time-only propositions:

Through the good offices of a Manhatma [sic], a great master and member of the Ancient Order of the Sphinx, we have been able to secure one lesson from the Tablets of Heth in which is given a number of Magian formulas for the cure of disease and for successfully invoking the powers of the Seven Spirits of God.

Every person is under the dominion of one or another of these powerful Spirits and it is not only interesting but quite beneficial for each one to know the name and character of his guardian Spirit and know how to invoke him with success.¹⁷⁸

Levi’s associates in the Aquarian Commonwealth included, first and foremost, Eva, who was his amanuensis. Levi may have first produced *The Aquarian Gospel* by automatic writing (that is, written by his own hand while he was in trance), which Eva would have then transcribed on the typewriter. Or, he may have voiced the work in trance, with Eva taking it down in writing. Or, he may have simply written down drafts of the manuscript in

¹⁷⁸ “A Remarkable Offer,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (January 1911): 124.

his normal conscious state at night (with a bookshelf of Occult works at hand), and simply given them to Eva in the morning, explaining to her that he had been inspired.

In any event, the impression was given that she also produced typewritten transcriptions of his weekly lectures, copies of which she mailed to subscribing members of the Aquarian Brotherhood. Actually, Eva did no such thing. The Brotherhood was a sophisticated operation. Regarding the typewritten lesson courses (always explicitly advertised as such), surely the recipients of those lessons felt that their copies must have been laboriously produced by Eva or another intimate of Levi, perhaps directly dictated by the great Illuminate, especially for them (or, with carbons) for a small select group getting the secrets as they emerged).

In reality, the Aquarians bartered deals with commercial concerns they did business with, such as the hall they rented and the music publisher they bought sheet music from to use in their classes on music and vibration. Part of the barter deal was to offer them ads for their own businesses on the back pages of the *Aquarian New Age Magazine*. Assume then, that the supposedly rare and precious typewritten lessons came from one of the businesses given a small ad space in the back page of the *Aquarian New Age Magazine* issue of November 1910, the copy of which was done up in faux typewritten lettering (unlike the rest of the magazine), which read: "D. E. Hardy, 3744 San Julian St. Will print your imitation Type-written letters at the very lowest price for good work."

The core members of the Aquarian Commonwealth included three spirit mediums who had already a longstanding reputation in Spiritualist circles for their writings, their trance mediumship, and their abilities as spiritual healers. By this time, they had all moved to Los Angeles. They were William James Colville, Nellie Beighle, and James Peebles. All three had supplemented their Spiritualism with a study of Occultism, comparative religion, Theosophy, and New Thought, and had written and spoken in public about the "harmony" of all of these.

Colville had a long career in trying to reconcile various forms of esotericism, most particularly Spiritualism, Theosophy, and New Thought—all under the principle, he said, of



W. J. Colville

“the supremacy of mind over matter.” As an example of this reconciliation, he believed that the Age’s “metaphysical movement,” was in fact “the second coming of Christ.” This, he believed, happens “in ourselves” when we are true to our inner light. And, he argued, it was something not comprehended by Christians after the first century or so, who “degenerated into extremes” and “then put the second coming of Christ far into a remote period.”¹⁷⁹

Colville was also a writer of “Occult fiction.” In *The Garden of Eden*, “the problem of universal religion is presented for solution.” His *Onesimus Templeton*, “a psychical romance,” was advertised as occupying the neverland between fact and fiction—“Though this work is professedly a novel, it abounds in short essays and sparkling dialogues exploratory of the Spiritual Philosophy and all things related thereto.” Another of his books, *Dashed Against the Rock*, would also have to be shelved in the fiction-as-fact section (the same section where, today, one would shelve Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code*). This book by Colville was “a scientific and mystical novel, dealing with spiritual laws and the latest attainments in practical science.” Actually, it was essentially a promotional piece for Colville’s friend, con man and crank inventor of perpetual motion machines, John Worrell Keely. It “contains authentic interviews with John Worrell Keely and introduces in popular form amazing information concerning Nature’s mysteries.”

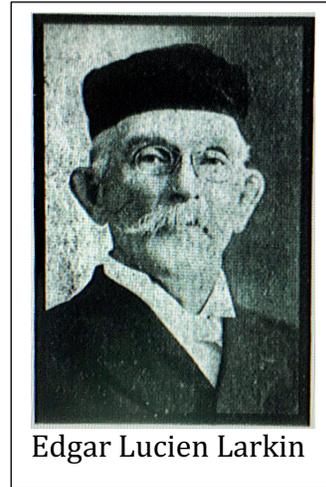
Having James Martin Peebles associate himself with the Aquarian group was particularly auspicious because of his long-time place in the forefront of the Spiritualist movement. He was also an early—although eventually disgruntled—associate of Theosophist founders Blavatsky and Olcott. Peebles was eventually installed as the “President of the Council Apostolica” of the Aquarian Commonwealth in May 1911. He also contributed a couple of articles to *The Aquarian New Age Magazine*, but by June, he was no

¹⁷⁹ *Metaphysical Queries; answered by W. J. Colville, in his classes on mental healing, held in Boston, Mass., during the season of 1885-86, reported and compiled by Miss S. C. Clark.* Sixth edition (Cambridgeport, Mass., 1898), 6.

longer teaching lessons.

Peebles was a friend of Edgar Lucien Larkin, who also wrote a couple of articles for the magazine. Larkin was an astronomer associated with the Lowe Observatory, who was also recruited into the group of budding Aquarians.¹⁸⁰ One writer described Larkin this way:

[He was] an elderly occultist who for some years before his death in 1924 ran the Mount Lowe Observatory in California—not to be confused with the nearby Mount Wilson Observatory. Whereas the latter is a great scientific institution, the Mount Lowe



Edgar Lucien Larkin

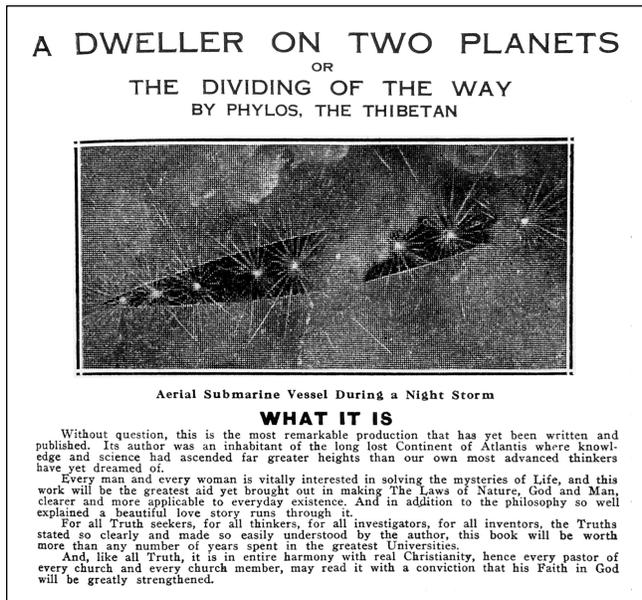
Observatory was operated as a tourist attraction by the Pacific Electric Railway in connection with their Mount Lowe Inn. Larkin showed visitors the stars through a small telescope until in the 1930s the telescope mechanism broke down and the Inn burned.¹⁸¹

Larkin was a tireless self-promoter and wrote many articles popularizing fringe science for the Sunday feature sections of the Los Angeles and San Francisco newspapers, which were often picked up by other papers in syndication. He was tied to some of the most exotic manifestations of Occultism in Southern California. This included his involvement with Frederick Spencer Oliver, a young man who had channeled a revelation from a character named “Phylos the Thibetan,” entitled *A Dweller on Two Planets; or, The Dividing of the Way*. It was first published by Oliver’s mother in Los Angeles in 1905, and so was more or less contemporaneous with *The Aquarian Gospel* and added to the lore passed among the members of the Aquarian Commonwealth.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Peebles’ consultations with Larkin, as reported in Peebles’ *Spirit Mates—Their Origin and Destiny, Sex-Life, Marriage, Divorce . . . also, a Symposium by Forty Noted Writers, Spirit Mates—Their Pre-Existence, Earth Pilgrimages, Reunions in Spirit-life* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Peebles’ Publishing Company, 1909).

¹⁸¹ Lyon Sprague de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature* (New York: Gnome Press, 1954), 71-72.

This work of speculative fiction—another of the primary sources for the New Age movement, whose adherents have often tended to regard it as more than fiction—



described a hidden Lemurian village still in existence down a secret tunnel in the center of Mount Shasta. Professor Larkin was supposed to have invented a “spintharoscope” which allowed him to view this hidden village.¹¹⁶ In the core of Mount Shasta, he wrote, lay a hollowed-out cavern, where a mysterious object lay, a sort of prototype of the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It was, in the words of the title of his 1916 self-

published book, *A Matchless Altar of the Soul, Symbolized as a Shining Cube of Diamond, One Cubit in Dimensions, and Set within the Holy of Holies in All Grand Esoteric Temples of Antiquity*. It was the catalyst for a human evolutionary or millennial jump into the New Age.

Spence’s book described a meeting of sages around that sacred object. The meeting served as an initiation and a commission ceremony.¹⁸² Its description is an imaginative reconstruction of a Theosophical Lodge meeting, but it is also similar to Dowling’s own rendition in *The Aquarian Gospel* of Jesus’ final initiation and commission at a meeting of world sages in Alexandria.¹⁸³

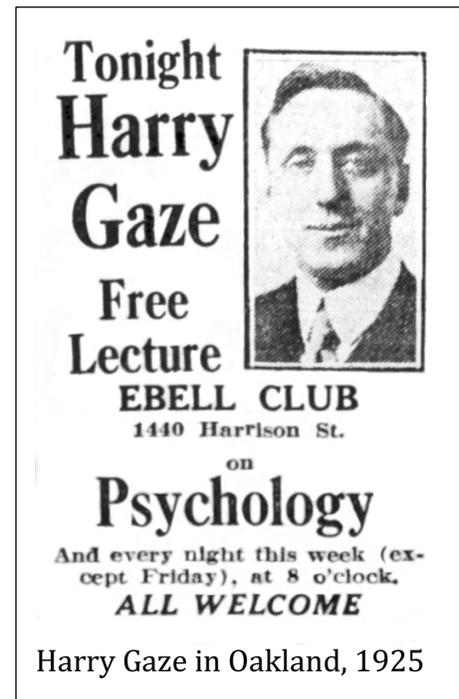
¹⁸² Frederick Spencer Oliver, *A Dweller on Two Planets; or, the Dividing of the Way, by Phyllos the Thibetan* (Los Angeles: Mary Elizabeth Manly-Oliver, 1905). Professor Larkin’s perhaps apocryphal expedition to Mount Shasta with his exotic spyglass was detailed in an article by Edward Lanser, “A People of Mystery: Are They Remnants of a Lost Race? Do They Possess a Fabulous Gold Treasure?” in the Sunday magazine of the *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1932, reprinted in Lewis Spence, *The Problem of Lemuria: The Sunken Continent of the Pacific* (London: Mayflower Press, 1933); see bibliographic studies on material at the College of the Siskiyou Library at <<http://www.siskiyous.edu/shasta/bib/B16.htm>>

¹⁸³ For a similar mythical ceremony of Occult initiation, see Emma Hardinge Britten, ed. *Ghost Land; or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occult Spiritism; Being a Series of Autobiographical Papers, with Extracts from the Records of Magical Séances, Etc. Etc. Translated and Edited by Emma Hardinge Britten* (Boston: William Britten, 1876), 345-366, hearkening back as far as the 1617, *Fama Fraternalitatis; or, a Discovery of the Fraternity of the Most Laudable Order of the Holy Cross*, yet another hoaxed, but highly influential and often believed, text, which instigated the legend of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood.

Another enthusiastic member of the Aquarian Commonwealth was Harry Gaze. He was a New Thought advocate of self-healing and the author of the ambitiously titled *How to Live Forever; The Science and Practice*, first self-published in 1900, and then published in Chicago by sexologist and women's rights activist, Alice Bunker Stockham. At the time he joined the Aquarian Brotherhood, he was writing *Life, Youth and Success, Constructive Psychology from A to Z, an Alphabet of Affirmation*, and teaching classes in esoterica—including one “to advanced students only” on sexual secrets (“auto-genetics”). Early issues of the *Aquarian New Age Magazine* listed him as its assistant editor. He would go on to become an effective leader of the New Thought movement, both in America and abroad.¹⁸⁴

The spiritual development that *The Aquarian Gospel* says that Jesus underwent allowed him to become the manifestation of the “Love of God.” In other words, “after thirty years of strenuous life the man [Jesus] had made his body fit to be the temple of the holy breath and Love took full possession.”¹⁸⁵ This suggests that Levi himself, as the new messenger, would have trained himself in order to be a fit vessel for the spirit. And indeed his devotees said that he had spent forty years in the Great Silence. Levi, in his course on Biopneuma, made clear that, on the authority of his personal experience, the power of telepathic control over another person was one of the real results that meditators practicing his techniques could expect to achieve.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine Levi Dowling as a yogic athlete. In 1907, during the time he had just finished channeling the spirit of Jesus the Christ in the wee hours of each morning, Levi gave a deposition to an examiner for the Pension Bureau in applying for a military invalid pension (He had just turned sixty-three years old). At the time, he was not quite 5' 11" and weighed two hundred and twenty pounds—not exactly



¹⁸⁴ See Charles Samuel Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion; the Rise and Development of New Thought* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 187, 415-418, and 462.

¹⁸⁵ Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 10.

the picture of a tantric adept.¹⁸⁶

He was an indefatigable spiritual salesman and organizer, however. In the summer of 1910, the Aquarian Commonwealth advertised to find members to establish a commune—in a kind of joint stock project—in the San Gabriel Valley, in parcels of the Etiwanda Vineyards. “Levi, the Transcriber of the Aquarian Gospel,” the advertisement



read, “has personally inspected this property, and believes it to be an ideal homestead site, and the opportunity of securing the lands most excellent.”¹⁸⁷ They did not succeed in attracting many, if any, settlers.

The activities of the Aquarian Commonwealth multiplied rapidly. In January 1911, the Aquarian College of Teachers and Healers opened, offering correspondence courses, as well as weekly lectures and instruction leading to two degrees—the “A. Ph. D.,” the “Doctor of Aquarian Philosophy,” and the “A. H. M.,” the “Master of Aquarian Healing.” These degrees trained “Aquarian Ministers” and “Aquarian Healers.” Among the teachers were the Dowlings, James Peebles, Harry Gaze, and Edgar Larkin.

¹⁸⁶ Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. The Seer seems to have been inexplicably uncertain about his personal characteristics—his eyes, he wrote, were “hazel, I guess,” and his hair color was “brown” and then, on second thought, “nearly black.” He married Kate Mayo, he wrote, “in 1868 I think.”

¹⁸⁷ “Etiwanda Vineyards,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (May 1910): back matter.

A feature writer for the *Los Angeles Sunday Times* visited a service of the Aquarian Commonwealth in February 1911 and wrote a long piece, which seems to deserve



Arthur See, 1911

reproducing in full. His generally unsympathetic take on the group was signaled by beginning the piece by mentioning the case of Evelyn Arthur See, a New Thought teacher based in Kalamazoo, Michigan and Chicago, publisher of the journal *Higher Thought*, who, claiming to be a “revealer of the word of God,” extolled his system for achieving “Absolute Life.” See had lately become infamous for shenanigans involving his training of girls in his basement to become “Mothers of a New Race,” which training was described in the Chicago papers as a “sort of trade school for Free Love.”¹⁸⁸

Chicago people were recently much excited about Arthur See, “the perfect man,” who victimized at least two women and a little girl and demonstrated his imperfection in many ways. Last week a Los Angeles “prophet” completed the organization of a whole commonwealth of persons who are seeking the “Absolute Life,” and he is starting out with a membership of more than 1000.

This city boasts everything in the way of mysticism and creeds from the Mazdaziana to the Bahaites, but of all its multitude of strange religions and queer religionists, none has managed to advertise himself more widely or to get deeper into the public purse and consciousness than Levi Dowling, whose followers have organized the Aquarian Commonwealth, incorporated, a brotherhood (principally sisterhood) under the general direction of Levi, the “Aquarian Hierophant.”

As a side issue they have the Aquarian college of teachers and healers, and they also have an inner circle.

A hierophant is one who is supposed to have been initiated into the mysteries of the higher knowledge, and who undertakes to impart this wisdom to the prepared. When members of the Aquarian Commonwealth are sufficiently well by reading typewritten

¹⁸⁸ “‘Revealer’ Lure Little Children by Strange Cult,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 January 1911; “‘Absolute Life’ Teacher of Women and Girls Jailed on Two Charges,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, 7 January 1911.

lessons for which they pay 25 cents a copy they are inducted into the more subtle degrees of understanding and they don white robes.

IN THE WHITE ROBE.

These robes are not worn on the streets. A man is not expected to sell garlic or bolts of ribbon and ladies' hose in a white robe. He is expected to don this emblem of purity only when he attends meetings of revelation at the home of Levi, the hierophant, No. 503 South Figueroa street. This robe signifies that the wearer has on the wedding garment of purity and is prepared for the feast the king has spread. There isn't any king, of course. There is only Levi, the hierophant, with his blazing eyes and his great bushy head, but in the absence of a king Levi does very well for a central figure at the metaphorical banquet board. Everybody enters the silence which washes the brain clean and makes the heart very still to hear the things that follow. Two candles burn, one on either side of an altar, which is an empty box, and Levi pokes his head into this box and reads the devotees of truth occurrences from the Akashic records which possibly happened 30,000 years ago, and which probably did not.¹⁸⁹

The disciples are not too particular about time. They stick pretty close to the consciousness of time in so far as the present is concerned, but when one is dealing with time by the wholesale so that he is reeling it off in bolts of 10,000 or 20,000 years he is not deeply concerned if he gets tangled up by a mere century or two. The main thing is to keep very still inside of the white robe so that one may hear all that Levi is reading from the pages that have passed.

SAY IT AFTER LEVI.

To make dead sure that they are getting it right, they say it after him, and with the lights turned out except for the two dim candles, this strange responsive reading is immeasurably weird.

¹⁸⁹ This particular description of the process by which the "records" were revealed by way of Levi's looking into a box strikes me as reminiscent of Joseph Smith's method of translating the golden tablets while looking into his hat; it also suggests a magician's illusion—transferring an already prepared sheet of text, hidden in a sleeve of a capacious robe, into the mystery box, and then reading it as if there was nothing there at all but the silent void.

Levi reaches back into the remoteness of time, sees a message floating dimly on the outskirts of the ether, with a scholar's eye recognizes the ancient Sanskrit of it, and hastily translates it into modern Saxon. "The stars are white, but they are not blue," he announces in sepulchral tones. Awed and inspired by this revelation through the lips of the illumined hierophant, the thirty or forty white-robed initiates repeat in a weird chant, "Stars are white, but they are not blue."

The vibrance of the chorus dies away, and Levi proceeds to snatch another sentence from the eternal life book and shed a little more luster upon the chosen ones wearing the white robes of purity and light.

Of course the revelations of Levi are not restricted to blue and white stars. This sentence is employed here purely by way of illustration. Levi will tell no man anything concerning his order or his initiation into that order, nor does he claim that entering his inner circle will learn any man his initiation into a higher order. He does claim that his classes prepared the novitiate to enter the great way, to find the true key and to approach the inevitable door. So far as his initiation is concerned, he says that that was brought about by himself, and is not a subject to be discussed with mortal man, since it came through no man.

ASTROLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY.

His philosophy, his school and his commonwealth are based upon the cosmological theory of a universal astrology which treats with this period of the present grand cycle as the Aquarian age. The theory is briefly that the days of Adam were in the age of Taurus, that the days of Abraham were in the age of Aries, the ram; that Jesus belonged to the sign of Pisces, and that today the sun and his family are passing from the sign of the fishes into the sign of the water bearer which is called Aquarius and which is pre-eminently a sign of the spirit. They claim that this new age is peculiarly adapted to the pouring of spiritual waters upon the heads of the people.

Levi came to Los Angeles nine years ago with the idea of establishing his brotherhood in a colony. The plan did not prove to be practicable, and the land purchased for this enterprise was released. Levi then published a book which he called "The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus, the Christ." A preface by the publishers, of London and

Los Angeles, claimed for this book such truth as may lie in what they described as “the imperishable records that are written of all men, and their words are deeds upon indestructible films of ether.”

HIS “ETHER” BOOK.

There are those who claim that all of the strange, rich romance and imagery of the book may be found in two or three Sanscrit manuscripts extant in the old world. Levi admits a knowledge of the existence of manuscripts covering a part of his Aquarian gospel, but denies obtaining any portion of his work from such a source.

Concerning the real source of the book he will not speak. He had to work ten years under preparation and concerning it he says, “Let the book stand for itself. I did not write it as a person. My name does not appear in it. It is offered as a record transcribed by Levi. That is all I have ever said about it. It is being read all over the world and as a result I have pupils by the hundreds from all countries who write for our lessons.”

Levi’s “gospel” accounts for the natural birth of Jesus, describes the life which the book supposes him to have led as a student and teacher in all parts of India, Persia and Egypt, and gives a romantic description and perhaps betrayal of the seven tests to which he was submitted in the Egyptian temples before being admitted through self-initiation into that high order which the world is able to recognize as the Christ-consciousness.

Levi is now preparing what he says will be the life records of Melchizedec and Enoch, “discovered” by himself, and now published for the first time as a transcript from the “Akashic records.”¹⁹⁰

In other words, he “saw” images of people, places, and texts in the “Akashic Record” by means of “psychometry,” as Eva Dowling explained in her introduction to the first edition of the *Aquarian Gospel*:

¹⁹⁰ “Levi, of Los Angeles, Full of Revelations. Incorporates Aquarian Commonwealth of ‘Absolute Life’ Seekers, Gathers the ‘Inner Circle’ Brothers and Sisters About Him in White Robes, and Delves in Remote Ages—Queerest Religion Here,” *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, 19 February 1911, section 2, page 1.

When but a boy he was impressed with the sensitiveness of the finer ethers and believed that in some manner they were sensitized plates on which sounds, even thoughts, were recorded. With avidity he entered into the deeper studies of etheric vibration, determined to solve the great mysteries of the heavens for himself. Forty years he spent in study and silent meditation, and then he found himself in that stage of spiritual consciousness that permitted him to enter the domain of these superfine ethers and become familiar with their mysteries. He learned that the imaginings of his boyhood days were founded upon veritable facts, and that every thought of every living thing is there recorded.¹⁹¹

More than likely, his boyhood notion was connected to the Book of Life inscribed by the Recording Angel in which each person's deeds are set down. That is the Book of Life mentioned in Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5 and 20:15. That Book of Life will be read by Jesus on the Day of Judgment and will provide the evidence for separating out those who will be invited to the heavenly banquet from those who will be consigned to the everlasting fire. Sometime between Levi's childhood and his later years, that Book of Life had been re-conceived as a sort of physical n-dimensional ethereal electromagnetic substrate onto which all things and events in the universe were recorded. That was Dowling's "Book of God's Remembrance," which he later called (under the influence of the Theosophists) "The Akashic Record." It had no juridical function; it had no apocalyptic use at a Last Judgment. The heavenly banquet was no completion of an eschatological sacrifice of divine atonement. But for Dowling, the broken shards of memory of the heavenly banquet, foreshadowed by the Last Supper, persisted.

During a week in April 1911 was held the First Aquarian Congress of North America, largely at the Dowling's house. On the last day, Levi initiated "The Spiritual Feast of Aquarius," otherwise known as the "Dinner of the Holy Breath." The names of everyone who partook of it were registered in a book for imagined historical interest in later ages about who had been the "Institutors of the Aquarian Dinner of the Holy Breath."¹⁹² One

¹⁹¹ Eva Dowling's introduction to Dowling, *The Aquarian Gospel* (1911), 10.

¹⁹² "The First Aquarian Congress of North America Held in Los Angeles, California, May 18-24," *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (April-May 1911): 219.

wonders why they thought such a book was needed. Anyone interested later on as the Aquarian Age advanced would have been able to watch it on the Ancient Instant Replay.

In May, the “First Aquarian Congress of North America” was held in Los Angeles—mostly at the Dowling’s house, with resolutions passed and officers ordained and Dr. Watson’s fundraising campaign launched. In June, the *Aquarian Age Magazine* noted that, through the generosity of the Dowlings’ wealthy patrons, Dr. and Mrs. Watson, “Levi has gone into semi-retirement in the mountains of the gem of the Ocean, Catalina Island, where he may more easily complete the transcriptions from the Akashic Records of the gospels of Enoch and Melchizedec and other parts of the Sacred Books of the Aquarian Age.”¹⁹³ But before Levi took full advantage of that resort, he went to Chicago to supervise the printing of a new edition of *The Aquarian Gospel* and to organize a branch there of the Aquarian Commonwealth. Overwork while he was in Chicago and the rigors of the return trip over the Rockies took their toll on his heart.

Levi Dowling, the “Aquarian Hierophant,” “stepped behind the thin curtain that separates the ‘here from the hereafter’” on August 13, 1911.¹⁹⁴ His was a sudden death—an “acute dilation of the heart”—while riding the train in South Pasadena, accompanied by Eva and son Leo en route to their “resting

AQUARIAN RALLYINGSONG

WORDS BY LEVI.

It is coming, coming, coming!
In the glory of the sun;
All the eastern hills are gleaming;
For the morning light is streaming;
Earth is radiant, heaven is beaming;
For the New Age has begun.

CHORUS

Ring the bells; unfurl the flag!
The banner of the man to be;
The banner of the old, the new,
The Red, the Yellow and the Blue;
The royal ensign of the true—
Float, banner, float from sea to sea!

It is coming, coming, coming!
Send the tidings through the land!

All the Orient is singing
The glad songs the Seers are bringing;
The bells of all the West are ringing,
For the kingdom is at hand.

It is coming, coming, coming!
Age of Spirit, of the free;
And the flower blooms are whiter,
And the star of hope is brighter,
And the hearts of men are lighter;
Sing loud the song of Jubilee.

It is coming, coming, coming!
Age of Brotherhood and Right;
And the joyous proclamation
Of the great emancipation
Is proclaimed in every nation:
Justice reigns and right is might.

It is coming, coming, coming!
The Aquarian Age has come.
And the Mount of Life is clearer;
And our Brotherhood is dearer;
Men are coming nearer, nearer,
To the New Jerusalem.

¹⁹³ *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (June 1911): 255.

¹⁹⁴ W. W. Dowling, “Emigratus.”

place in the foothills.”¹⁹⁵ It must have been a shock for his followers, who, if they seriously believed his tantric teachings, would have been inclined to think that he was immortal. A memorial service was held for him on August 17th at Rosedale Cemetery in Los Angeles. His body was cremated.¹⁹⁶ At Dowling’s memorial service, some of his old and close associates eulogized him. The mysterious and wealthy Dr. Watson’s oration seemed to acknowledge indirectly that there might have been opposition out in the world to *The Aquarian Gospel*:

The Aquarian Gospel’s Ark of God’s Covenant is the true temple of human liberty, never to be torn open by the all-absorbing and consuming greed for gold.

Who dare profane the immortal sentiments of our beloved leader, his righteous triumph or the purity of his heritage?

Whose pen or tongue dare defame or impair the value and virtue of that heritage since he has passed away, passed into possessions priceless and sacred?¹⁹⁷

In fact, there were many who dared, then and now.

In a special session of the Aquarian Congress immediately after Levi’s funeral, those present elected Eva to take his place. “Under the title Leva,” the account read, “she will, by the help of the Eternal Masters and the direction of the Holy Spirit, take up the work.”¹⁹⁸

After Levi’s death, Eva and Leo continued living in their house on Figueroa Street, together with Eva’s younger sister Adelle.¹⁹⁹ Leo found a job as an actuarial clerk for Occidental Life Insurance Company, for which company he would work for forty years. He and his mother published two volumes of Levi’s collected lectures, *Self-Culture; a course of lessons on developing the physical, unfolding the soul, attaining unto the spiritual* and

¹⁹⁵ Levi H. Dowling, Death Certificate (South Pasadena, County of Los Angeles); Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.

¹⁹⁶ “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 306.

¹⁹⁷ “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 311.

¹⁹⁸ “In Memoriam: Dr. Levi H. Dowling,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (September 1911): 315.

¹⁹⁹ 1920 Federal Census for Los Angeles, California. Adelle S. Brown (b. November 22, 1864, Iowa; d. March 2, 1941, Los Angeles) was the widow of Edward A. Brown, who had been the editor of the *Daily Press* and the *Daily Stockman* of Nebraska City, Otoe County, Nebraska; see the biographical essay on James C. Sellers in Hedge, *Past and Present of Mahaska County, Iowa*.

*Complete Course in Biopneuma: the true science of the Great Breath.*²⁰⁰ Although Levi's books—most particularly *The Aquarian Gospel*—continued to sell steadily, the Aquarian Commonwealth itself and all its various activities, including *The Aquarian New Age Magazine*, collapsed immediately after Levi's death. The ideas of the "New Age" and "The Age of Aquarius" and the cosmic pantheism and theosophical syncretism that were an integral part of Levi's book, however, all gained a life of their own and spawned countless reincarnations.

Dowling's sudden death cut off in midstream a very much larger publishing project that he had envisioned. As it turned out, he became permanently known for *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*. But he had conceived of that as only a part of what he was intending to transcribe from the Akashic Record. By the time of his death, he had already gone on to reveal other fragments of scriptures, which were published in the *Aquarian New Age Magazine* willy-nilly as he produced them. These included Other "gospel" (fragments) he "transcribed" from the Akashic Record: "The Indian Gospel of Jesus the Christ of the Piscean Age, by Lamaas," "The Gospel of Enoch, the Christ of the Taurian Age," and "The Gospel of Melchizedec, the Christ of the Arian Age." The Aquarians were also readying for publication fragments of "The History of the Christ in all Past Ages" and "The True Version of the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."

These (when completed) were to be published together with *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* to form volume 1 (to be called *The Complete History of the Christ*) of a larger three-volume set of the *New Age Sacred Scripture*. Volumes 2 and 3 of the larger set were projected as follows:

The Second Volume of the New Age Sacred Scripture will be known as "The Philosophy of the Aquarian Age," and will comprise the postulates upon which all religions and true philosophies are founded, together with a full report of the Seven Sages of the Aquarian Age. It will also contain the epistolary writings of Paul, the Christine apostle; of Peter, James and John; of Apollonius of Tyana, and others. Nearly a

²⁰⁰ Levi D'Guru, *Complete Course in Biopneuma* (Los Angeles: E. S. Dowling, 1912); http://iapsop.com/ssoc/1902_dowling_biopneuma.pdf and *Self-Culture* (Los Angeles: E. S. Dowling, 1912); (Los Angeles: E. S. Dowling, 1921) 2nd edition.

score of most wonderful letters written by Paul, of which men know nothing, will appear in this volume.

The third volume will be known as “The Aquarian Key.” This will be distinctly a book of ethics giving in detail the duties of every man to himself, to every other man, to inferior life, to angel, to cherubim and to God.

The Aquarian Gospel is the only part of the Sacred Scriptures now ready for distribution. ... The other portions of volume One will be ready in a few months.²⁰¹

All of that came to a standstill upon Dowling’s death. Also remaining were his lessons (“typewritten”) via correspondence courses (the Circle of Success Vibration—\$10 per year), including “Pathway to Power” (16 lessons), “The White Lodge of the Silent Brotherhood” (13 lessons), and “Practical Guide to Unfoldment” (16 lessons).

Eva Dowling, after a short illness, died in Los Angeles at the house in which she lived with her son on January 9, 1923.²⁰² Their Aquarian associate, the Reverend Charles Pierce, officiated at the funeral services, which were conducted at their home. Eva, like Levi, was cremated, but at the Los Angeles Crematory. She bequeathed her son Leo her half-ownership in the house and lot at 503 South Figueroa Avenue, which she and her sister Adelle jointly owned. “She left sufficient assets to defray the expenses of her last sickness and death,” he told the Bureau of Pensions examiner. Leo also inherited from her the rights to *The Aquarian Gospel* and Levi’s other books. These included compilations of his Kabbala-filled lectures in which Levi had organized the events in the life of Jesus as described in *The Aquarian Gospel* according to a kind of Midrash around the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Leo marketed these works until his death in Los Angeles in August 1974.²⁰³

²⁰¹ “The Sacred Books of the Aquarian Age,” *Aquarian New Age Magazine* (October 1910): 17-18.

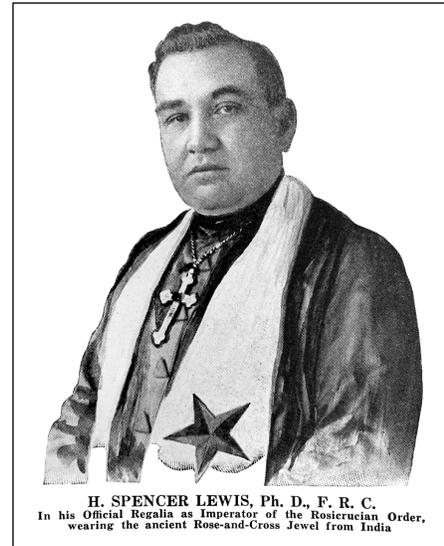
²⁰² Declaration of Leo W. Dowling, January 26, 1923; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. They were living at 126 North Vendome Street. For Eva’s obituary, see “Religious Authority Is Called; Mrs. Eva S. Dowling Dies after Brief Illness; Was Close Student,” *The Los Angeles Daily Times*, January 10, 1923. After his mother passed away, Leo quit his job as an actuarial clerk and, by the time of the 1926 Los Angeles City Directory, was in business as the publisher and distributor of *The Aquarian Gospel* and “other books of Levi.”

²⁰³ Social Security Death Index. Leo’s last residence was 91108 San Marino, Los Angeles.

The Afterlife of the Aquarian Gospel

The influence of *The Aquarian Gospel* on the New Age movement has been extensive. It began almost immediately after the first publication of Dowling's book. Joseph Harris' *The Triune Mind and the New Aquarian Age (the Age of Woman) 1914 to 4414 A.D; the Conscious and the Subconscious Mind and the Soul Mind Explained* is just as one example of direct influence. It was written by a Utah phrenologist in 1924 and published in Los Angeles. It reproduced great gobs of *The Aquarian Gospel* in its text. So did *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, written in 1929 by Spencer Lewis, the founder of AMORC (Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis), which became the largest Rosicrucian group in the world.²⁰⁴ But these books were not unique. Dowling's text was cut and pasted, in part or in full, into a plethora of New Age books, from the time of its publication to the present. It has never been out of print. Numerous translations of the book have been published over the years. If anything, the number of editions and translations are more numerous now than ever before. These have included translations into French, Polish, Italian, Dutch, Danish, Hungarian, Swedish, Indonesian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Czech, Slovenian, Japanese, and Korean. In addition, "guidebooks" and "keys" to the text have been published by enthusiasts, and a concordance to the text is available as a print-on-demand item. It is difficult to know what to make of all that, given the fact that there is not a single shred of evidence for what it says, but that, instead, there is a mountain of real evidence—including even within the text itself—that proves it a fraud.

Beyond the actual text, however, the ideas in it—the Age of Aquarius, the Akashic Record, the Cosmic Christ, Jesus in Asia, and on and on—became an indelible part of the New Age movement itself. They were immediately taken up and woven into the elaborate Occult writings of Frank Homer Curtiss and his wife Harriette. The Curtisses published *The*



H. SPENCER LEWIS, Ph. D., F. R. C.
In his Official Regalia as Imperator of the Rosicrucian Order,
wearing the ancient Rose-and-Cross Jewel from India

²⁰⁴ Harvey Spencer Lewis, *The Mystical Life of Jesus* (San Jose, Cal.: Rosicrucian Press, 1929).

Message of Aquaria in 1921 (without, of course, mentioning Dowling).²⁰⁵

The Aquarian paradigm surfaced in the 1930s through the 1950s in psychic literature by such channelers as Edgar Cayce and Elizabeth Clare Prophet and in the travel writings of eccentric explorer and Theosophist Nicholas Roerich.²⁰⁶

Theosophists almost immediately took the explicit title of the Aquarian Age and applied it seamlessly to the “New Cycle” they were expecting. Theosophist Alice Bailey and her “Tibetan sage Djwhal Khul,” for example, used the language of the “New Age” interchangeably with the “Aquarian Age” in her 1948 essay, *The Reappearance of the Christ*.²⁰⁷ Proponents of



Edgar Cayce

New Thought did the same with Levi’s “Age of Aquarius,” applying it to the “New Age.” Even as early as 1918, a group in Manchester, New Hampshire, calling itself the National Astrological Society, reformed itself into the “Universal Church of Aquarius” and offered its acolytes instruction on becoming “magi.”²⁰⁸

Nevertheless, these were fringe movements. Their terminology and ideas did not begin to pervade the wider world until the late 1960s. The entry point of “The Age of Aquarius” into the larger culture was the series of astrology columns that Gavin Arthur wrote for the *San Francisco Oracle* during its heyday in 1966-68. Public discussions that Arthur conducted with astrologer, Theosophist, and avant-garde musician Dane Rudhyar during this time, on the subject of when the Aquarian Age would (or did) begin, also contributed to the spread of the idea.²⁰⁹ It became more generally known through the song,

²⁰⁵ Harriette Augusta Curtiss and Frank Homer Curtiss, *The Message of Aquaria: The Significance and Mission of the Aquarian Age* (San Francisco: The Curtiss Philosophic Book Company, 1921). It would go through several editions. It, too, is still available as reprints by small publishers.

²⁰⁶ Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Lost Years of Jesus; on the Discoveries of Notovitch, Abhedananda, Roerich, and Caspari* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1994), reprint of the edition of Prophet’s Summit University Press in Livingston, Montana. Nicholas Roerich quoted chapter 36 of *The Aquarian Gospel* as “evidence” for Jesus in Tibet; see Roerich, *Himalaya* (New York: Brentano’s, 1926), 153ff, and *Altai-Himalaya* (New York: F. A. Stokes Company, 1929), 93-94.

²⁰⁷ Collected in Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *Esoteric Philosophy*, 79-82.

²⁰⁸ National Astrological Society of the United States, Inc., *Manual of the Magi of the Universal Church of Aquarius* (Manchester, N.H.: Prophecy, 1918).

²⁰⁹ Rudhyar was a friend of Alice Bailey. In 1969, he published an exposition of the astrological details of the Age of Aquarius, *Birth Patterns for a New Humanity: A Study of Astrological Cycles Structuring the Present*

“The Age of Aquarius,” in the off-Broadway 1968 musical *Hair*, and the song’s 1969 hit version by The Fifth Dimension in their medley “Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In” on their album *The Age of Aquarius*. In the years since then, the “Aquarian Age” has replicated itself into the farthest trivial recesses of world culture. It has appeared on everything from massage-parlor matchbook covers to Japanese Anime characters. It further expanded into the wider world with the publication of Marilyn Ferguson’s 1980 pop sociology book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, which drew together, as part of the Aquarian Age, various sociological, spiritual, and political phenomena, and solidified the image of the New Age as a cultural movement.²¹⁰

Dowling’s gospel itself, over the past hundred years, has also had a potent effect on the formation of other new religions. *The Aquarian Gospel* has stimulated wave after wave of publications of what might be called the “Further Adventures of Jesus,” as avatar of the Cosmic Christ principle and the modern-day dawning of the Aquarian Age. This was taught by Guy Ballard, founder of the “I Am” Movement in California in 1932, and it is still taught in the Aquarian Academy of Robert E. Birdsong in Eureka, California.

The Aquarian Gospel has spread, in a particular way, to Korea as well, connected to the syncretistic Unification Church headed by the Reverend Sun Myung-Moon. One of the first proselytizers for the Church in America, a Korean missionary named Young Oon Kim, used *The Aquarian Gospel* and other New Age material as part of her presentations on the new church founded by the Reverend Moon.²¹¹ It even worked itself into India and Nepal, where it was soon used to “prove” that Jesus got everything he taught from Brahmin sages.

The Aquarian Gospel continues to claim a place at the center of the New Age movement, with some of its devotees regarding it as “the most important book ever written.”²¹² Some of the organized Aquarian groups have incorporated into their beliefs the millenarianism of the New Age, with an apocalyptic tenor, together with the notion that

Worldcrisis (Wassenaar, Netherlands: Servire), republished in 1972 as *Astrological Timing; the Transition to the New Age* (New York: Harper & Row).

²¹⁰ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980).

²¹¹ Detailed in Michael L. Mickler, “A History of the Unification Church in the Bay Area,” M. A. Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, 1980.

²¹² See the website of Michael F. O’Keeffe at <<http://home.netcom.com/~mokeeffe/>>; see also <http://reluctant-messenger.com/aquarian_gospel.htm>.

hidden or extraterrestrial intelligences are guiding the evolutionary development of the human race. Jesus' home was "off planet," so to speak, and he and other "Christs" have manifested here to act as catalysts for human evolution. Jesus, according to one baroque variation on this theme, was an n-dimensional being projected into simpler four-dimensional space-time. He was a quantum fluctuation, yielding zero-point energy.²¹³ The Christ, coming in a divine invasion of saucers or comets, would be beaming up those who had plugged into this energy and had "dropped the body," and had thereby become "transhuman," a thoroughly Gnostic goal.

The growth from the germ of the notion of a millenarian "New Cycle," after it was grafted onto notions of race and human evolution, Occult histories and priestly conspiracies, has produced some strange fruit over the past hundred years. In Germany, Nazi theory and practice looked for the evolution, through controlled breeding, of the Aryan race and the elimination of "lesser" races in a thousand-year Age. In Southern California, the Heaven's Gate cult, convinced that the Aquarian Age would begin with their ascension to a higher level, committed suicide en masse in 1997, expecting to be teleported à la *Star Trek* onto starships that they imagined were trailing the Hale-Bopp comet.

On a lighter note, among the hundreds of groups that have taken up the name "Aquarian" are the Aquarian Age Teaching and the Aquarian Age Educational Group in Sedona, Arizona, and the Aquarian Church of Universal Service in Portland, Oregon. Most uninhibitedly fun, perhaps, is the Aquarian Perspectives Inter Planetary Mission, a UFO group whose leaders receive messages from "Futron" and the "Rainbow Star Legionnaires." The leaders are a couple, "Dr. RA-Ja 'Merk' Dove" (aka Stephen Stass) and "Prof. Moi-RA 'Lady of the Sun'/'Quan Yin' Dove" (aka Rosalia Borja). They are "Intergalactic Ambassadors from Venus and the Pleiades, Global Star Shepherds, and Anchors for the Taos Ashram of Ascended Masters."

More significantly, *The Aquarian Gospel* was also present at the founding of the Nation of Islam. Timothy "Noble" Drew "Ali," a railway worker from North Carolina living in New Jersey, incorporated much of Dowling's *Gospel* into the first nineteen chapters of his

²¹³ Mel E. Winfield, *Aquarian Universology: The Book of Omni-Science, The Book of Original Religion and the Sacred Forces and the Book of Polity* (Vancouver: Aquarian Universology Institute and Association, 1977).

scripture, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America* (sometimes called the “Circle Seven Koran”).²¹⁴ He established his church in 1913, very shortly after Dowling’s death. *The Aquarian Gospel* continued to live on, synthesized with plenty of other sources, in Elijah Muhammad’s writings.²¹⁵ And it has continued to make itself felt in the literature of the Five Percent Nation, called the Nation of Gods and Earth, founded in 1964 by Clarence Edward Smith (Clarence 13X). The Five Percent Nation points out that Dowling’s Jesus went to study and was initiated in Egypt, which is in Africa, and that (White) Romans killed him, and that the coming Age will include some Black on White payback. In this way, *The Aquarian Gospel* has conveyed to later generations a message of racist evolution as part of its subtext.

Levi Dowling, who thought, perhaps, that his *Aquarian Gospel* would provide a basis for a unifying, inclusive form of Christianity, beyond dogmas and creeds, would undoubtedly have been surprised at the uses to which his scripture has been put. But the unity that he envisioned required the acceptance of a conspiracy theory in which all orthodox forms of Christianity had to be subverted in favor of an esoteric form. And conspiracy theorists are hardly known for their ecumenism or tolerance, even when the conspiracy is merely an Aquarian one. It does not just supplement the Bible by filling in Jesus’ “lost years”; it presents an entirely and thoroughly un-Christian Jesus in place of the Jesus found in the Bible and in the two millennium-long tradition of Christianity.

That is not surprising. To achieve a unity of culture and religion, the New Age downplays or denies the distinctive truth claims of each culture and religion it uses. Each is welcomed into a multicultural universal brotherhood as long as it appears dressed as a simplified, disembodied, and spiritualized version of itself—that is, as long as it accepts being made merely relative. Impervious particularity of form is a scandal and an affront. The various races of peoples and their religions are melted down and refashioned into a super-race and a super-religion. Those who are unmeltable are ignored, but, if they persist, are sloughed off into the outer darkness.

²¹⁴ Noble Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America; Divinely Prepared by the Noble Prophet Drew Ali* (N.p.: n.p., 1927).

²¹⁵ Elijah Muhammad, *The True History of Jesus: Articles written by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (Last Messenger of Allah). Compiled and Published by Coalition for the Remembrance of Elijah* (Chicago: C. R. O. E., 1992).

All must yield to the New Order of the Ages, which dissolves distinctions in its universal solvent, its Philosopher's Stone, its elixir of youth, its permanent revolution. All contrary evidence, all protest, must disappear behind a willing suspension of disbelief, into a vision of a new utopia cleansed of dissonant elements through an alchemy applied by the play of the dialectical imagination. Woe to those, Black or White, Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist, whose distinctive claims or discrete identities resist this transmutation. But the "Coming Race" and its Über-religion, whenever it is conjured, always betrays marks of what the conjurer has pretended to make disappear. It never really escapes its origins. Its imagined future is always a parody of the present. Its materialized spirit—when examined closely—always resembles the conjurer who has called it forth.

Frederick Fairfield, the editor of *The New Age Magazine*, subscribed to the mailed typewritten manuscript teachings that Dowling offered for sale to the Aquarian Brotherhood. He glowingly reviewed a collection of them, entitled *Truisms of the Great Masters*, in his magazine. Included in his comments was this:

It is full of "meat," but all of Levi's writings are, for that matter. Where does he "get the goods"? I don't care, do you? I believe he has access to the sources he claims. But what matters it? Is truth something that somebody says? No, truth is something which I discover. And your truth is something which you discover. If some man says something which appeals to you and calls forth a truth which was sleeping within, then be thankful, and offer praise to the Giver of All Truth. Truth is always Internal. Truth is always Recognition. Truth is always Self-Evidence.²¹⁶

This is the message of the New Age. It deliberately brackets objective truth. It makes truth entirely subjective. It recommends the willing suspension of disbelief as the highest form of knowledge. It dotes on the play of youth rather than yielding to the authority of elders. Readers of Munchausenesque stories of Western seekers traveling to Tibet can say that these are revelations of veritable events, but when faced with massive evidence to the contrary, can also say that they do not care whether any of it actually happened.

²¹⁶ *New Age Magazine* (September 1909): 694.

The protagonists—and the authors—of Occult fiction present themselves as moving through a world of discoverable evidence, common sense, and testable structures of objective truth. But that is as much a sham as the robes covered with luminous paint that spirit mediums don in materialization séances in the dark. When the lights are turned on—when contradictory evidence is presented—the mediums turn against those who have exposed them, saying that what they were presenting was simply an entertainment. Those who have exposed it, they say, have not comprehended the spirit in which it was offered. They have not understood that truth resides in the imagined world created in the performance, not in the stage machinery that produced it.

The view that the real truth lies in what appears, not in what occluded little minds offer as objectively real—provides both method and content to Occult fiction, in which the villains (internal and external) are those who do not understand this view. By the time Theosophy appeared in the 1870s, self-described advanced thinkers regarded Christianity itself—insofar as it had not progressed to the self-destruction of its own authority—as having betrayed the revolution (or even the Protestant Reformation). That revolution aimed at making immanent the highest spiritual truth, which is that truth is a hall of mirrors, all of which reflect back onto the inner ineffable self. The universe is a whispering gallery of sounds singing our own name.

Dowling transcribed the first portion of “The Indian Gospel of Jesus the Christ of the Piscean Age” by “Lamaas” from the “Book of God’s Remembrance” and published it in *The New Age Magazine* in 1910. Its narrative has Jesus spending his youth in India. The sage Lamaas reveals that Jesus “read the Sacred Books [of the East] with interest” and that “The Gospel of the Buddha of enlightenment was his delight.” One day, a Brahmin asks him if there is “yet a power in Brahmic faith or Buddhic faith to save the world?” which is to say, is there a universal truth here in the religions of India? Jesus replies:

All truth is one. Through his appointed messengers God gave this truth to man, and out of it man formulates his doctrines, creeds, and ethic laws.

In ages long ago men thought that they had every useful phase of truth condensed to meet the needs of every man. They formed some postulates, drew up a form of

doctrine, made a creed and then declared, “What we have written is the secret Doctrine of the gods.

And men who found it tiresome to think, accepted without question what these good men wrote; and it was well, for what they wrote served well the purpose of the age in which they lived.

But time passed on and men required added light, and other good men seized the truth of God from which they formulated other postulates, made other creeds ...²¹⁷

All of these teachings “do not light up the mountain top. Their lights are darkness for the people of this age. The world needs higher lights; and they will shine.” Dowling has Jesus say:

An old religion cannot be reformed; when one disturbs its postulates, its doctrines and its laws, it goes to pieces, like an ancient fabric in a gust of wind.

Go to, and from the one great truth of God, form postulates, and state in language clear and most concise, the doctrines of the Deity that people of the coming age require and can comprehend.

The people of the coming age will walk in higher planes of life than did the people of the ages gone.²¹⁸

But is this really Jesus speaking? It certainly is Gnostic hierophant Levi Dowling, trying to break free of the chains of historical contingency. And it is the spirit of the Age of Aquarius, articulating its progressive religion. Truth is subjective and relative. Who cares about objective truth? It is all an industrial light and magic show: Journey to the stars, but always follow your own feelings, and may the Force be with you.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ *New Age Magazine* (October 1910): 18.

²¹⁸ *New Age Magazine* (October 1910): 7-9.

²¹⁹ For helping me in my research for the first edition of this essay, I thank Elaine Philpott of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Alvan Bregman of the Rare Book and Special Collections Department of the Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Kathy Grillo of the City of St. Louis Circuit Court Clerk’s Office, and the staff of the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. I also wish to thank the various readers who looked through earlier drafts of this paper and who offered their very helpful comments—Leslie Price, John Patrick Deveney, and Jerry Hejka-Ekins.