

Revisiting John Murray Spear

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Introduction

In the fifteen years since I wrote and published *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), the expanded availability of online archival resources, most especially collections of old newspapers, books, and genealogical information, has changed the nature of historical research. In light of that, this article is my effort to add to, annotate, and, in some respects, correct what I wrote about Spear and his associates in his biography. It will also provide photos, diagrams, and etchings that I was unable to include.

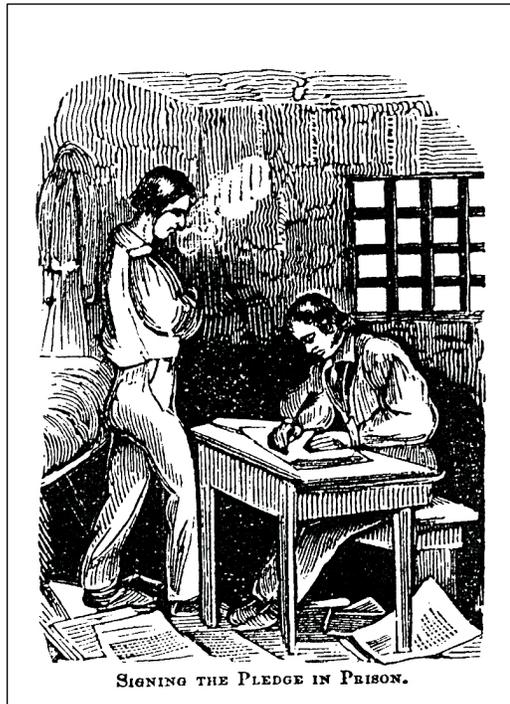
Finally, it will allow readers of the earlier biography to refine their judgment about Spear in his cultural context and perhaps to see more deeply into his inner life. That has always seemed to me to be difficult because almost all the evidence about him that remains is in the form of reconstructed reporting on, or transcriptions of, what he said and did while performing for an audience, either when preaching or when acting in trance as the mouthpiece of spirits. With Spear, there is practically no offhand evidence: no diary, casual letters, or reported conversations when he was out of “character.” Much of what I have been able to add here revolves around Spear’s associates and his critics, but it also shines an indirect light on him. Admittedly, it reveals some darker shading to his character.

Latent and Missing Images

When the biography was published, I had seen no photograph or etching of either John or his brother Charles. I still have not, except for a single rough sketch illustrating the article, “Rev. John M. Spear’s Labors,” in the July 7, 1850 issue of the Universalist newspaper *Christian Freeman and Family Visiter*. The sketch merely accompanies the article, however, which describes John’s visit to the local jail to convince an inmate to sign the pledge against alcohol. John’s physical features, as drawn, do not contradict the spare verbal descriptions of him elsewhere, but I do not know if the illustrator had ever actually

seen him in person. An additional verbal description of him has turned up, however, by a skeptic who described the Spiritualists' convention in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1853:

John M. Spear, the medium, is a tall, thin man, with a long neck, smallish head, and a triangular face, the apex of which is the point of his nose. He wears gold spectacles and a white neck-cloth, and looks very much like a clerical bird. He talks very slowly, very composedly, and in a tone that seems to savour very strongly of egotism.¹



Fashions in men's facial hair changed in the middle of the century, and John's spirits produced a spiritual rationale for a more hirsute style; in his later years he was described as having long, snow-white hair, and an even longer white beard. As Moncure Conway wrote, "Mr. Spear was a figure that any old Italian master would have rejoiced in to represent the noblest of his saints. Six feet and several inches in height, slender but shapely, his hair and beard snow-white, his face ruddy or even rosy, his eye exceedingly brilliant, his aquiline nose and other features clear-cut, his head rising to a dome, he was a wonderful apparition."²

The lack of images of John Murray Spear or his brother Charles—or of John's wives or of his devoted mediumistic daughter Sophronia—is disconcerting but is perhaps partly explained by the fact that John's spirit-guided activities, beginning in 1852, made him notorious and an unlikely subject in most circles for later respectful portraiture. Despite that, I have searched without success the likely archival repositories in Massachusetts for the daguerreotype that Charles Spear noted in his diary was taken of the Spear brothers at

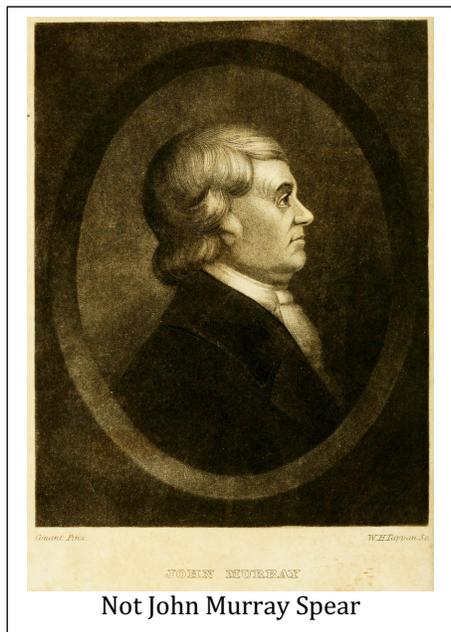
¹ A Scottish Emigrant, "Spiritualism in America (Second Part)," *Hogg's Weekly Instructor* n. s. 10 (1853): 500.

² Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences*, volume 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 342.

the end of their successful fair on behalf of “the Prisoner” in Boston in 1847. And I have also been unsuccessful in locating copies of the two *cartes de visite* of John and his spiritual wife Caroline that James Burns, the publisher of the English Spiritualist journal, *Medium and Daybreak*, offered to his subscribers in 1870 for a shilling apiece.³ I have no particular reason, however, for thinking that a genuine photo or etching of the Spears might not appear out of some archive or from the family albums of Spear descendants.⁴

The only photo of a near relation to John that I have found is one of John Murray Spear, Jr., his oldest son by his first wife, Betsey. It is in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston and shows John, Jr. in his later years, dressed up with his Civil War service medals (he was in the ambulance corps).

I dwell on this continued lack of an image of John Murray Spear for a particular reason. A few years after the publication of



the biography, several bloggers posted lightly researched articles about Spear and his New Motor project. The author of the first article mistakenly included an



John Murray Spear, Jr.

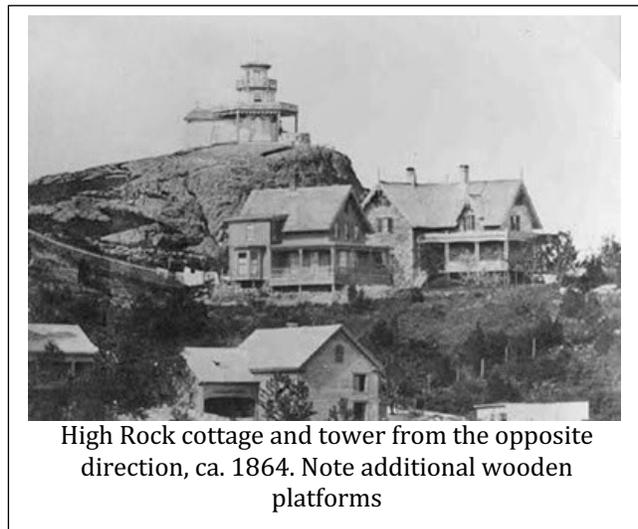
engraving of Spear that was actually an engraving of Universalist preacher John Murray, for whom John Murray Spear was named. Presumably the mistake was made because John Murray Spear’s first published collection of spirit teachings, *Messages from the Superior State*, were purported to have been veritable

enunciations of the spirit of John Murray, using John Murray Spear as his mere mouthpiece.

³ “Photographs of Mediums and Spiritualists,” *Medium and Daybreak*, 9 September 1870.

⁴ Charles’ 1840s diary notes that he spent several days sitting for an artist to re-do his engraved portrait, but no such engraving has surfaced. Among other things, I would also very much like to see some of the “strange” and “beautiful” diagrams and doodling that John produced at the beginning of his mediumship.

Consequently, John Murray Spear and Simon Crosby Hewitt, the book's editor, chose, as the

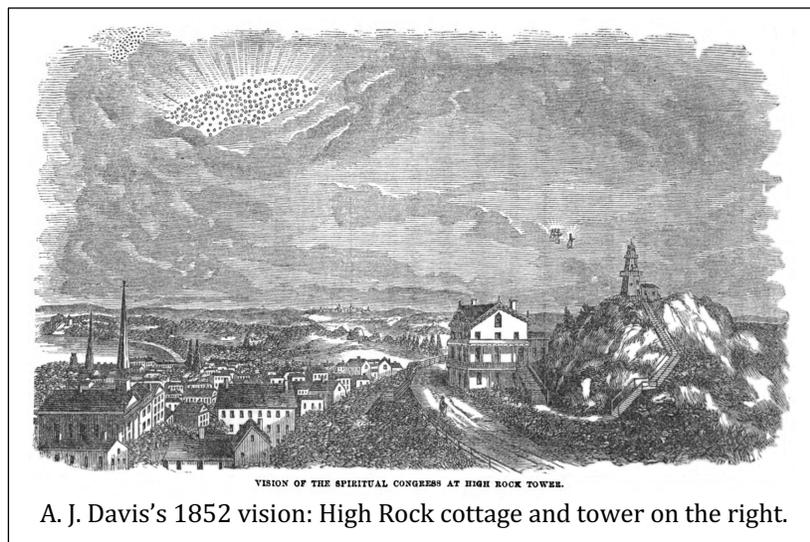


High Rock cottage and tower from the opposite direction, ca. 1864. Note additional wooden platforms

engraving that serves as the frontispiece a portrait of the Rev. John Murray. One look at Murray's powdered wig and very early 19th-century clothes should have made it impossible to mistake the engraving for John Murray Spear, but the first blog article inspired other authors, understandably keen on writing something about the New Motor, to pull the same image into their own pieces and commit the same mistake. The image has

multiplied across the internet as a result.

A couple of internet articles about Spear et al.'s construction of the New Motor have also carried images that confuse the place where it was crafted—Jesse Hutchinson's High



A. J. Davis's 1852 vision: High Rock cottage and tower on the right.

Rock Tower, adjacent to his stone "cottage," next to his house in Lynn, Massachusetts. A square tower (with observatory) is situated on High Rock today, and an image of it has snuck into a couple of blogs about the New Motor, but that tower was built by the city in

1904. Hutchinson constructed his circular tower at the site beginning about 1847.

Sometime not long before he died in 1853, and continuing over the following decade, a couple of elevated wooden walkways encircling the tower were added. When Spear and his associates used the tower, it probably looked very much as it did in the engraving that Andrew Jackson Davis included in *The Present Age and Inner Life* to illustrate his own

visionary experience there in 1852 of a “heavenly congress” of spirits he espied from its height the year before Spear and his coadjutors occupied it.

As for images of the New Motor itself, none have surfaced. Boston-based illustrator E. J. Barnes, however, managed to find the second installment of S. C. Hewitt’s three-part description of it in *The New Era* at the American Antiquarian Society (the issue with the third part is still lost) and, based on a careful study of parts one and two, has drawn up what is most likely to remain the best pictorial recreation of it.⁵

Spirits Floating on the Zeitgeist

John Spear made a point of describing himself and his associates as *practical* Spiritualists. This meant that the aim of their spirit guides was to transform society in tangible ways, rather than to offer mere intellectual, emotive, or imaginary visions. Spear’s previous work among the poor and the imprisoned of Boston seems to have convinced him that airy talk and mere philosophical theorizing were of little importance in effecting real reform. Consequently, his spirit guides commissioned him to elucidate and construct real world examples of millennial machines—novel inventions that would initiate the regeneration of human society. Spear had the Yankee inclination for tinkering. That temperament was what lay behind an editorial in the Boston *Daily Bee* praising the displays of machines at the city’s mechanical fair in July 1853:

Mere men of science, independent of practical ends and views, are of no actual *utility* to the world. The discovery of a new motor is worth the discovery of a thousand planets; and he who contributes to the comfort and luxury of our homes and abiding places; to the State, the city, the town, the family, the individual, is infinitely more entitled to honor and gratitude and emolument, than him who tells us that in distant

⁵ Parts 1 and 2 are reproduced at the end of this article.

space there are worlds of stupendous magnitude, and that a hundred, or a thousand years hence they will whip by us with flaming tails and burning heads.⁶

If not from “the spirits,” where did the ideas for these inventions come from? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were what Spear’s imagination constructed from bits and pieces of news and descriptions of what other inventors were working on (and working towards). He wove these together into a bricolage, and created what today might pass under the name of performance art. To a modern reader, his projected machines and schemes seem to be uncannily like anticipations of steampunk science fiction, almost a century and a half before the genre was invented. “Coming events cast their shadows before,” as Spiritualists often said, quoting Thomas Campbell’s 1802 poem, “Lochiel’s Warning.”

The most striking example was his “New Motor” or “New Motive Power” project, which began with spirit directions given to Spear beginning in July 1853. The real-world stimulus for this was undoubtedly the construction and initial testing of a ship powered by a “new motive power,” an engine designed by John Ericsson. The trial run of this ship was conducted in January 1853. Ericsson’s “caloric” engine burned coal, but heated air, not water, and the thermal expansion of the air drove pistons. When the air was vented, it was driven through a wire mesh, heating it and thereby capturing some of the energy. That heat, in this “regenerator” device, increased the engine’s efficiency, drastically reducing the amount of coal needed to turn the side paddle that drove the ship. The relative success of the ship’s initial trials created a national



Sarah Jane Newton, ca. 1870s,
“Mother” of the “Electrical Infant”

⁶ “The Arts and Their Encouragement—Exhibition of the Charitable Mechanic Association,” *Boston Daily Bee*, 23 July 1853.

sensation in the press during the first months of 1853. Because the engine used air rather than steam, the *New York Mirror* dubbed it “the breathing ship,” and the nickname was widely adopted by other newspapers across the land. The *Mirror* put it this way:

It was an imposing sight to witness a ship 260 feet in length by 40 feet breadth of beam, and capacitated for 2,200 tons burden, moving rapidly and gracefully down the bay, without sail, or a sign of motive power beyond the revolution of its wheels. No smoke-pillars nor clouds of vapor betrayed the mighty *breathing engine*, which, pent in the Ericsson’s hold, enabled her to “Walk the waters like a thing of life.”⁷

The *National Intelligencer* followed, even invoking a variant on the word “regeneration,” which carried with it a history of use in discussions of religious and social topics:

... the principle is simple, and bears much affinity to human respiration, the inhalation and expulsion of air being the key to the whole. The supply cylinders inhale about seventy tons of air per hour; that air when expanded by heat forces up the piston; it is expelled by chimneys on deck, but the heat is retained in a wire gauze frame-work, called a regenerator, taking up the heat the wires have retained, and thus expanded is ready for use.⁸

This metaphor of the ship’s “breathing” inspired even more expansive riffs on the same theme, as this, in the *Weekly Sentinel* of Burlington, Vermont: “The Ericsson is a ‘pulsating’ as well as a ‘breathing’ ship. She has a heart where the heat is generated, as well as lungs—and thus endowed like an animal, she literally, in Byron’s famous and oft-quoted expression, ‘walks the waters like a thing of life.’”⁹

⁷ Reprinted in the Washington, D. C. *Daily Union*, 11 January 1853. See Lord Byron’s *The Corsair* (1814), Canto 1, stanza 3.

⁸ *Weekly National Intelligencer*, 16 January 1853.

⁹ *Burlington Weekly Sentinel*, 20 January 1853.

The *New York Express* portrayed the trial runs of this “new motive power [that] can be applied to machinery on sea and land” as a spectacle of triumph demonstrated to an unbelieving world by Ericsson and those trusting capitalists who backed the project in faith that it would ultimately succeed despite the fact that “difficulties of a practical character have from time to time arisen.”¹⁰ This was essentially how Spear and his backers always portrayed themselves, as always just on the verge of triumph, in their struggle against a cautious, narrow-minded, and unbelieving world.

Even Spear’s extrapolation of the significance of his New Motive Power into the realm of its ability to effect social and moral reform, by hinting at the double meaning of the phrase “new motive,” was anticipated by commenters on the Ericsson engine, albeit in parody, as when Boston editor and humor writer (and Spiritualist) Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber’s fictional character, Mrs. Partington, “expressed her decided opinion that the period is not far distant when steamboats and locomotives will be propelled by the force of moral suasion! She therefore does not recommend to her friends to take any of the caloric stock at present.”¹¹

All this was in the air when the spirits began giving instructions to Spear and his friends concerning their New Motor. It also explains why the spirits also began giving instructions on using their New Motor to power a revolutionary “duck ship,” entrusting its ultimate realization to Spear’s associate, Daniel Densmore. Commentators on Spear’s New Motor project, then and now, invoked Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, with good reason, as an inspirational source, but it is obvious that Spear et al. had a much more proximate and powerful prototype for their “new motive power.” Nevertheless, Spear’s “New Motor” was also an “electrical infant.” His new motor project wove all this together in a dream-like trance vision with sex magic, spirit genetics, and the “scientific” manufacturing of the next,

¹⁰ “The Breathing Ship,” *Lowell Courier*, 14 January 1853.

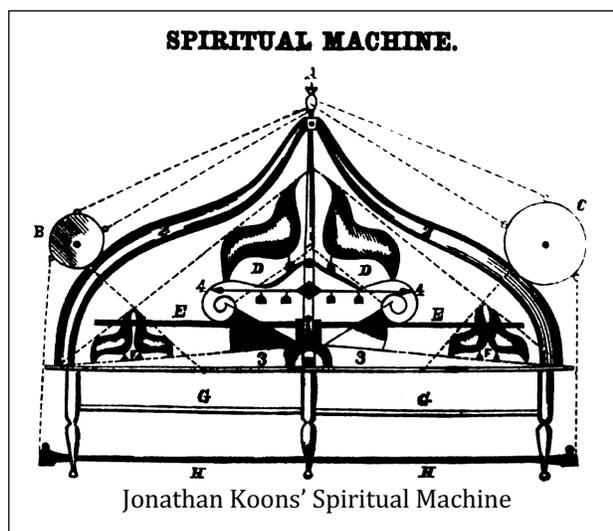
¹¹ Quoted in “New Motive Power,” *Boston Herald*, 4 June 1853. For an extensive selection of the New York City press reviews, see *Ericsson’s Caloric Engine; Description of the Trial Excursion of the Caloric Ship Ericsson from the journals of the city of New York* (Washington: Gibson & Company, 1853). For reformers like William Lloyd Garrison and other “non-resistants” (like Spear), “moral suasion” was offered as the way to change the world, not physical force.

higher race of humans freed from having been “shaped in iniquity” and “conceived in sin,” as Psalm 51:5 had it.

Ericsson’s “new motive power” had another odd parallel with Spear’s projects as well, for Captain Ericsson also adapted a smaller version of his caloric motor for powering (among other things) sewing machines:

It has always been a favorite idea with Captain Ericsson, that by the introduction of his engine he was to materially diminish human drudgery. When it was suggested to him, therefore, that it might be advantageously applied to sewing machines, he devoted himself with great interest to the subject, and soon devised an arrangement that has proved in practice completely successful. His plan is to employ the engine to pump air into a tank or reservoir, from which it is transmitted by tubes to each sewing-machine, by a simple mechanical attachment which actuates the treadle and graduates its speed at the will of the operator. This arrangement dispenses entirely with the use of the foot and leg of the operator, the action of which during the long hours of the working day is always painful, and in some cases insupportable.¹²

One other likely stimulus to Spear’s New Motor was a “spiritual machine” constructed in the rural township of Athens, Ohio by farmer and Spiritualist impresario Jonathan Koons and his family, around which the Koons’ sat the numerous Spiritualist pilgrims who wished to see spirits materialize, play musical instruments, and act out sacred skits. The plans for this “machine” were allegedly dictated to the Koons by the spirit of Benjamin Franklin “and others”:



¹² *Ericsson's Caloric Engine, Manufactured by Charles Pierson, Niagara, C. W.* (Toronto: Lovell & Gibson, 1860), 16.

On the 16th of August, 1852, [Spirit] King, with what claimed to be Benjamin Franklin and others, used the hand of Mr. Koons' son, Nathan [sic—Nahum] W., to make a drawing of what they called “an electrical table,” and through raps gave directions as to the materials to be used; also, how they wished the table to be constructed; and requested them to have it built accordingly, promising, if they did so, that they (the Spirits) would be able to produce music, vocal and instrumental, and that they would speak audibly with them. Mr. Koons employed a man to work with him in building this table. During its progress they had directions from Spirits. Sometimes Mr. Koons fancied they altered their original drawing, or else he had not fully understood it.¹³

The “machine” was set on a table in a darkened cabin, and musical instruments were set around it. The Koons family sat in a semicircle around it and the attending spectators arranged themselves on benches on the opposite side.

After these things were arranged they heard human voices, but could not distinguish words. The sounds appeared like shrieks, except at times they would attempt to speak through the harmonica, and then they could distinguish words, and the Spirits requested them to procure a tin horn two feet long, two inches in diameter at the large end and one-eighth of an inch at the smallest part near the mouth. Through this horn the Spirits speak audibly, so as to be plainly understood. They say this horn facilitates articulation, in helping to compress the atmosphere or direct the forces necessary to the utterance.¹⁴

The machine—considered as the centerpiece of a sort of Spiritualist pilgrimage site or even an amusement park—did not begin receiving national recognition in either

¹³ Charles Partridge, “Spirit-Manifestations in Athens Co., O.” *Spiritual Telegraph* 4.10 (7 July 1855).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Spiritualist or secular newspapers until November 1853.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Spiritualist grapevine would have surely been alive to the subject months before, making it entirely possible that Spear or his followers (some of whom lived in Cleveland and Cincinnati) would have heard about it or even visited it by the middle of 1853, when the New Motor project began.

Koons' "machine," however, never purported to exhibit any motion. It was not a motive power, nor was it ever expected to be one. Much less was it conceived as a working model of a new human race or a perpetual motion machine. It was like a fanciful three-dimensional sigil, constructed to draw spirits to the spot during a ritual performance. Its design looks like a primitive vision of a machine that would generate an electromagnetic field allowing beings from the other side to manifest themselves. It purportedly "magnetized" the atmosphere in the Koons' cabin. Within that space, its function was to allow distant, invisible beings to activate the musical instruments arranged around it, making them float about, "speak," and play music. Looked at in retrospect, it resembles a table-model of a radio receiver. At least two of Spear's coadjutors, Hannah F. M. Brown and Caroline Lewis, did visit the Koons' place in October 1854.¹⁶ And it was Hannah Brown who, in 1856, would test out a lap-sized device, the "Pschycosmon," whose intended function was to allow the user to establish mental communication with beings from other planets.

A kind of double vision is needed to view many of Spear's projects, which exhibit themselves not only as the product of a woven vision created of ideas and facts then current—a sort of performance art imitating and commenting on them—but also rendered with a future-leaning desire, which gives them in retrospect the look of science fiction that would later become fact. His project of erecting a network of mental telepathic towers, for example, was devised as a "democratic" alternative to the then-ongoing attempts by capitalists to complete an Atlantic telegraphic cable, and so, he believed, to establish a controlled monopoly. But it also "leaned forward" into a vision of the future that (as

¹⁵ G. Swann, M. D., "Visit to the Koons Family," *Buchanan's Journal of Man* 4.11 (November 1853): 322-24, reporting from Cincinnati on his trip to the Koons' place the previous March.

¹⁶ Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism* (New York: 1870), 317-18.

Joscelyn Godwin has called attention to) is manifest today in the network of microwave towers that cover the land.

Spear's project of digging a tunnel at Kiantone to find the remains and valuable artifacts of a high culture there, once flourishing, but then destroyed, also has resonance and antecedents. The region had been "burned over" by the *Book of Mormon*, which told the story of an ancient civilization in the area that had been conquered and laid to waste, as well as by scryers after treasure. Spear's follower, Caroline Lewis, in her childhood, had known several of the first Mormon testifiers. But another of Spear's followers, Daniel Gano, had taken a lead in excavating some of the Indian mounds around Cincinnati. The utopian (and dystopian) voyages described in the stories of Edgar Allen Poe (*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*), Bulwer Lytton (*The Coming Race*), and, later, Jules Verne (*Journey to the Center of the Earth*), filled with revelations of the advanced material technology of cultures hidden from contemporary sight, all seem to swirl in a similar vision.

Did Spear think of his projects as visionary performance art, as what we would call "science fiction"? The evidence shows that he did not. He and his followers had faith that they had been given practical directions to construct and accomplish these wondrous material projects. They believed they were not just imaginary. It was only when they failed to work that they backed down a bit, saying that these constructs must have been meant as "models," which would be realized in their material solidity in the fullness of time, in the future. It was an adjustment of expectations that the followers of any prophet of the Millennium have had to adopt after the predicted cosmic revolution did not arrive.

Sophronia Spear Butler

John's oldest daughter, Sophronia, was his handmaiden in his initial journey into Spiritualism. It was she who first presented him with a message directed to him which she had received in trance, and which prompted him to expect and imminently receive his commission from the spirit band that would call itself the "Association of Beneficents." That message was given to Sophronia on September 11, 1852:

You will soon be directed in the work you are to be engaged in promoting. The teachings will come in a way and at a time least to be expected. To-morrow you will receive a most important communication from a number of spirit friends. Do all they direct in all cases. You are to receive new teachings—different from those you have received. Have FAITH. A new work is open before you, and great shall be your reward, as you shall see. Some new spirit friends will soon teach you. You will know your work to do. Be quiet: all is well that is done with good impressions, and yours are. When the new light shines in upon the minds of the inhabitants of your earth, then shall the world be changed. It shall grow wiser and better, so that after a few years things shall be altogether changed, and you will hardly believe that things were as they now are. The day to spread joy and happiness is near at hand, when all shall love one another, and all shall feel that they are brothers. The darkest complexioned man shall not be crushed on account of his color, but you shall live, eat, drink together, and not know any difference—shall feel that you are all of one great family, and are to do good to all around you. Great and important will be the instruction given from the spirit world, and men will soon be directed by their friends there. Their faith shall be strengthened by the communications they will receive. They shall be restored to health by spiritual physicians, and new mediums shall be made throughout the world, and their truth shall teach men to lead good and pure lives. Crime shall decrease, and beautiful thoughts shall fill men’s minds. When they attempt to do wrong, they shall be directed differently, and all shall pass pleasantly along.¹⁷

The following day, John was contacted by that group of spirits, who used his own hand to write his commission. This was seven months after Sophronia, then age nineteen, had married Boston bookkeeper Josiah Rich Butler (the ceremony had been conducted by her father). Sophronia continued as her father’s co-worker, traveling with him in his wandering, spirit-guided “missions” of mercy, and joining him in setting up rooms for spirit-guided (“magnetic”) trance healings. She was with him all throughout the New Motor

¹⁷ John M. Spear, *Twenty Years on the Wing*, 13-14.

fiasco. She gave birth to a daughter, Ella Sophronia Butler, on February 8, 1856, but died of carditis at her home in Melrose shortly thereafter on April 2.¹⁸ Alonzo and Sarah Newton both contributed to an emotional and unusually long obituary notice for her, “Mrs. Sophronia B. Butler,” in Alonzo’s *New England Spiritualist*:

Few labors are more grateful, and at the same time more difficult, than to duly chronicle the virtue of a true, faithful and loving soul. Such in an eminent degree, was she whose name is the subject of this notice.

Being the first-born and daughter of that widely-known and pure-minded philanthropist, John M. Spear, she was an intimate sharer and sympathizer in all the trials, struggles and misinterpretations, which he has been called to experience, during the last three years. Of a tame, retiring nature, she shrank from participation in public performances; but when duty called, she would do her part, with that same sweet, unconscious grace that the bird pours its song. She was a model of child-like simplicity, combined with a womanly dignity of manner, and a rare discretion. She was affectionate, confiding, intuitive, with scarcely a trace of vanity. Her nature was too fine to enjoy the contests of mere intellect; and anything like a strife or difference among those who were engaged in a common cause would fill her with sadness. Wherever she went, she won universal love, from the pine lands of Maine to the banks of the Ohio.

Though scarcely twenty years old, when called to participate in the labors of her father, yet she entered cheerfully into co-operation with him; being often called to leave husband, home and friends, and journey to distant regions, on unknown errands, and purposes hidden in mystery. Yet the *felt* assurance that these requirements were made in wisdom, and urged in love, gave confidence; and the known purity of her father’s purposes, his unselfish love of man as man, were ever dear to her heart; and fidelity to them and him, was “the most immediate jewel of her soul.”

As has already been said, during all the years of her father’s misunderstood and misappreciated labors, Sophronia was his constant companion and loving supporter; and

¹⁸ Josiah Butler remarried less than a year after Sophronia’s death. He moved his new wife and daughter Ella almost immediately to Chicago. Ella grew up there, married, had children, and died there in 1896.

when at last, the hour of slander, coldness and desertion of old friends was to come; and with it not only the scorn of the multitude, but the sarcastic sneer of professed co-workers in the harmonial movement, poverty and utter isolation, or abjuration of the soul's deepest faith in the divine love and providence—then it was that this noble daughter, seemingly more fragile than the woodland violet, displayed the elasticity and strength of the forest oak—and instead of hiding herself from the storm, stood up by the father and uttered these memorable words—“Do, father, what you feel to be right, and I will stand by your side. Nothing but wrong shall ever part us.” No one who has ever seen or heard the expressions of the father's and daughter's mutual love, will need other confirmation of what they were to each other. ...

But out of all these sorrows and misconceptions, that devoted child has seen developed the details of a stupendous system of philosophy, which penetrates the secrets of Nature and Life, and makes of their hitherto hidden mysteries an open book—a philosophy which demonstrates the dual unity of lifes, of worlds, motions, forms, principles—pervading all things, discreeting [sic] all things, from the generation, conception and birth of a planet or human being, down to the agglomeration of material atoms, or the formation of an insect—which teaches of new mechanisms impelled by the same forces, and in harmony with the same laws which control sidereal movements, and of the social destiny of man—which teaches the great truth of a permanent divine influx, and of the laws of reception and transmission of life; all tending to, and culminating in, a new and divine social order, wherein the noblest and grandest of all the sciences—the science of MAN-CULTURE—shall be studied and applied. ...

Her earth-labors were now done; and, taking a flower from her bosom, in the opening spring-time, she planted it in the earthly mould, under chilly skies and contending influences, to be watered by angels' tears, and cultured by angel-hands, till the hour of its transplanting—just at the moment when she herself, the parent stalk, was to be transplanted to the upper Hesperides.

The father returned from a long absence just in time to see his daughter, for a few last days, with mortal sight, and to hear the last words of encouragement from her mortal lips. A few days before her departure she called her husband, parents, brothers and sister to her bed-side, and addressed each one personally. The whole interview

occupied nearly two hours. With joy she looked upon her coming change, and talked of the realities of another life with the wisdom of a philosopher.

She gave all directions as to her funeral, requesting that no parade be made, and no formal clerical services be had; but a few friends were invited to be present, and were requested, if so impressed, to speak at length, or converse together, upon the nature of the spirit life, its labors and relations to the present life. The spirit-name by which she had for years been known was FIDELITY.¹⁹

The obituary continued, and described the funeral services, mentioning that John Spear, Daniel Goddard, Charles Spear, and John Orvis, among others, spoke at the gathering. It then concluded:

During these exercises [at her graveside], and more especially while Miss [Achsa] Sprague had been speaking, the enfranchised spirit of Mrs. B. had succeeded, according to her expressed intention, in manifesting herself to a clairvoyant who was present. She appeared in a most resplendent form, and communicated words of love and cheer, most grateful to the hearts of such as could receive them. She had also manifested herself, the evening previous, quite unexpectedly but unmistakably, to a lady in Boston. ...

What exactly had Sophronia done that had resulted in “slander, coldness and desertion of old friends ... and with it not only the scorn of the multitude, but the sarcastic sneer of professed co-workers in the harmonial movement”? The fact that she had merely been her father’s “constant companion and loving supporter” and a medium herself does not seem enough to explain that.²⁰ But there is a plausible explanation.

John and his daughter Sophronia acted together as spiritual healers, offering their services in the Spiritualist newspapers either at their small, rented quarters in Melrose or as house calls. The healings offered by these “practical Spiritualists” had both a physical

¹⁹ Alonzo and Sarah Newton, “Mrs. Butler’s Transition” and “Mrs. Sophronia B. Butler,” *New England Spiritualist* 2.3 (19 April 1856): 2.

²⁰ H. F. M. Brown, in A. E. Newton, ed. *The Educator* (Boston: Office of Practical Spiritualists, Fountain House, 1857), 33-34.

and spiritual component. They almost certainly consisted of a sort of entrancement as well as physical intimacy, broader in scope than a laying on of hands. It was assumed to eliminate physical ills, certainly, but also to open up the patient to a higher spiritual influence. Adin Ballou's description (cast as a prediction) of Spear's Boston spirit circles comes to mind here: "They will receive revelations from high-pretending spirits, cautiously instructing them that the sexual communion of *congenials* will greatly sanctify them for the reception of angelic ministrations."²¹ Benjamin Hatch, also alluding in a thinly veiled way to Spear and his circle, put it this way:

There is another class of Spiritualists who believe that every faculty of the human mind, being implanted by Deity, is capable of direct inspiration from Him; therefore, that every inherent desire should be gratified in the way of its promptings. This, to them, is rendering obedience to the promptings of the Divinity within them, and thus becomes a religious duty. They aver that the ultimate of love is promiscuous, and is curtailed only by arbitrary and unwholesome regulation of society. To usurp their freedom, to them becomes a moral obligation. Monogamic marriage is thus made an outrage against the promptings and inspirations of the god within them—that the relation of the sexes is not so much a matter of delicacy as a fastidious and perverted society would make it appear. The most of this class claim to act upon the principle of policy, and refrain from publicly promulgating their sentiments and practices, as they believe that the world is not yet sufficiently advanced to receive their doctrines.²²

The point to notice is that sexual intercourse between those who, within a trance-like state of attraction, is portrayed as both holy and therapeutic. It was part and parcel of how people were "developed" into mediums. It was, as we might say, how they learned to disassociate themselves from their usual inhibitions and emerge into a state of spiritual freedom in which they could communicate with spirits. These couplings, as the Newtons

²¹ Adin Ballou, "Modern Spiritualism—Its Good and Evil," *Spiritual Telegraph*, 30 September 1854.

²² Benjamin F. Hatch, *Spiritualists' Iniquities Unmasked* (New York: The Author, 1859), 49.

declared in Sophronia's obituary, were experiments in "Man-Culture," aimed at conceiving a new sort of human, unsullied by sin.

The supposition that John and Sophronia were offering this sort of healing service as spiritual therapy is made clearer by looking at how John's ministrations upon Caroline Hinckley at Kiantone a couple of years later, which resulted in her giving birth to a "spiritual" child, were interpreted and defended by John and Carrie. Their co-adjutor John Sterling wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph*. He argued in his letter that Carrie was exercising her sovereign right to decide for herself when and with whom to become a mother, and so on. But for our point here, the most important words in his letter are these:

I deem it a matter with her own soul, and the one she loved, and her God, with whom she is at peace. THE SMILES OF HEAVEN HAVE BEEN UPON HER; her religious nature has been greatly blessed; her spiritual vision has been unfolded, and her prospects of health and happiness, and especially of usefulness to her race, greatly augmented, and she feels to bless God that strength and courage have been given her to walk thus calmly, deliberately, and peacefully, in a path ignored by a corrupt and unappreciative world; but approved by her own conscience and the smiles of bright and pure and exalted spiritual intelligences, who constantly surround her with their beautiful and happyfying influences.²³

In other words, her sexual intercourse with Spear had been a course of spiritual and physical therapy. In writing to a friend, Carrie described herself as having progressed, through these ministrations, in both physical and spiritual health:

I am acted upon most wonderfully; power is given me to walk with great rapidity, and exercise in other ways, when I myself had not strength to rise from my chair without help. This telling others of what is done *in* and *through* you is not to them experience, and perhaps is not of much value. The good God has given me strength to say that I'll *do* the right as fast as it is made known to me, so that I am calm, quiet,

²³ "J. M. Sterling's Defense," *Spiritual Telegraph*, 18 December 1858.

anxious about nothing. Passages of Scripture are almost constantly coming to my mind, and are beautifully interpreted.”

In a rare piece of writing that John produced while in the “normal” state and from his own mind (rather than voicing the words of spirits), John wrote a letter to one of his associates and he described Carrie’s experiences in the same way, as a spiritual therapy, leading to a conversion—a regeneration, one could say:

Ere this Brother H[ewitt] has told you how Carrie is being developed physically and mentally, and her spiritual vision unfolded. It would do your soul good to hear her talk. What I have most devoutly prayed for has come, viz.: her deep *religious* nature has been reached, and she is a praying, hoping, trusting woman. In due time she will stand at the head of our educational institution. At times my heart overflows with gratitude. I am willing to endure hardship, reproach, scorn, abuse. None of these things move.²⁴

There is no reason to assume that this notion of spiritual therapy via exalted sex did not lie behind the healing services that John and Sophronia had offered a few years previously. It would certainly explain why Sophronia was made the object of scorn and was alienated from many previous friends and acquaintances. The same people, of course, would have judged John as pimping his daughter.

John was not unique in holding this idea, although he seems to have been unusual in holding it so publicly. Thomas Lake Harris, for example, at least when he tried to assume god-like control over his Mountain Cove Community in 1850, practiced sex with his married and unmarried female followers, telling them it was a spiritual therapy through which they could unite with their eternal counterparts in the spirit world. The deliberate breaking of sexual norms and the baptizing of irregular sexual practices as spiritual

²⁴ The letters from Carrie and from John are quoted in S. S. Brewer, *Last Day Tokens: nos. 1, 2, 3* (Yarmouth, Maine: I. C. Wellcome, 1874), 72-74; quoting the *World’s Crisis*, 30 March 1859, an Adventist newspaper published in Lowell, Massachusetts. Even in this epistle we may not have an example of Spear’s own unguarded thought, for he is writing to one of his followers.

therapy is nearly a defining characteristic of the new religions and cults formed in the American northeast in 19th century. A “letter from America” to the *Birmingham Journal* in March 1858:

A noticeable phenomenon in the modern social history of this and the Northern and Eastern States, is the rapid increase of Spiritualism. It is supposed that this latest delusion has now as many believers as any religious sect in the country, and it is remarkable that none of these religious and philosophic meagrimms extend to the South, nor do they meet with much success in the British Provinces. They are confined to the Puritanic States, who citizens boast a superiority in morality and education over all creation; but which, in spite of their rigid correctness, supply New York and the seaboard cities with an undue proportion of great rogues and lewd women. It is strange, too, that all these fanatical movements and philosophic discoveries invariably gravitate towards a breach of the seventh commandment, and the popularization of indecency.²⁵

Harriet Eager

Hattie Eager was one of nine siblings, the children of Farwell and Althina Eager of Lancaster, Massachusetts.²⁶ Both of Hattie’s parents and all of Hattie’s siblings, save one sister, died before Hattie reached adulthood. In her late teen years, when thrown on her own resources to make her living, she came to Boston and found a position as a waitress at a confectionary shop, where she was well liked by her fellow employees and by the customers. While in Boston, she also developed herself as a medium of the spirits, albeit not a professional one, though well known among the Spiritualists of the city.

²⁵ “Letter from America,” *Birmingham Journal* (6 March 1858): 10.

²⁶ Harriet (“Hattie”) Althina Puffer Eager, born in Lancaster, Massachusetts in 1834.

We had often heard Miss Eager's name mentioned by persons who knew her; but the first circumstance which gave her a marked individuality in our mind was in connection with a gathering of spiritualists which she attended, some two months since, in this city. On that occasion she appeared dressed in mourning. Not for the dead, but the living. For one upon whom she had bestowed her woman's affection, but who had gone from her, and failed to return. Believing him lost, or unworthy, she put on mourning for him, as for the dead. ... The N. E. Spiritualist says of her, "She appeared to be unusually susceptible to spirit-influences, and could be thrown into the interior or trance state almost instantaneously, and as quickly be restored to her normal condition. So quietly was the influence thrown upon her and removed, that even at the table during meals she would speak to her intimate friends for some spirit who wished to convey them a message, without arresting the attention of exciting the suspicion of any stranger who might be present."²⁷

Be this as it may—whatever the "influence," it sometimes manifested itself strangely. Some six months ago, when in a state of trance, she announced, as from "spirits," and unconsciously to herself, that, in the latter part of October, "she would be taken to the other world." In her normal state, according to those who knew her intimately, she retained nothing of what had been said "through her," in the trance; and this singular prediction was kept secret from her by those to whom it had been made. Not long after, she was one day taken "possession" of in the street, and on recovering her consciousness, found herself in the coffin ware-rooms of Franklin Smith, on Tremont Street. A fact of gloomy significance, which appears to have perplexed and annoyed her. She said, in relating the affair, "she wished the spirits wouldn't do so." Subsequently to this, she had a vision, which she described to two of her friends, as it occurred. She was shown by her "spirit-mother" a casket, "which at first seemed empty; but looking again, she saw some one in it. 'Why, it is me!' she exclaimed a moment after. She then went on to give a description of her own funeral, naming the persons who

²⁷ The relevant issues of Alonzo Newton's *New-England Spiritualist* from late November 1856 into February 1857 appear not to have survived, so quotations here from it are all from other sources, most often (but not here) from La Roy Sunderland's articles in the *Boston Investigator*.

would be present, and describing the house where it would take place—Mrs. D. L. Hale’s, in Franklin Square—which at the time she had never entered, and had no particular reason to suppose she ever would—nearly all the particulars of which have since been realized almost to the letter.”²⁸ We quote from the language of a person who knew her, and vouches for the truth of the statement.

Other premonitions, of a similar nature, came from the same source. On one occasion the spirits said, “*Before the snow covers the ground, she will be with us.*” We do not know precisely what effect these “revelations” had upon the mind of her friends. We think these were generally skeptical, yet the close of the month of October was awaited with anxiety by many; and the memorable evening of the 29thth seemed at first to bring to pass the prophecy. It was the occasion of the Fremont torch-light procession. Miss Eager, attempting to cross a street, was thrown down by a vehicle and carried home wounded and bleeding.²⁹ The injury proved, however, to be of a superficial nature, and she soon recovered from its effects. We should state that some time previously she had removed from her former boarding-place, to the house of Mrs. Hale, in Franklin Square. It was here the final incidents in this singular drama occurred.

Thirteen days previous to Miss Eager’s death, the spirits were asked to explain: Why had they predicted what had failed of fulfilment? The answer came, “*In a fortnight she will not be with you.*” On the last day but one of the stated term, she gave Mrs. Hale directions with regard to the manner in which she wished her funeral conducted. All that day she appeared in her usual health and spirits. At the tea-table, however, she was entranced; her hand drew a casket, with a pencil, and wrote beneath it, “In a few hours all will be revealed.” In a few hours all *was* revealed—and yet not all. Hattie Eager was seized with violent convulsions, which terminated fatally. This was on the evening of the 22nd day of November, in the 22nd year of her age.

²⁸ Sara Sanborn (Messer) Hale (1809-1859), wife of Daniel Lee Hale (1805-1877). Mr. Hale, it is pertinent to note, for the unfolding of the tale, was a druggist.

²⁹ Perhaps her first try at suicide?

The news spread as only such news can spread. Wonder and conjecture were rife. Spiritualists considered the fulfilment of the spiritual predictions *perfectly convincing*, and even skeptics were staggered.³⁰

On the very day of her death, the *New England Spiritualist* printed an article entitled “Death a Blessing,” which began, “With the happyfying knowledge which spiritual intercourse brings to our aid, we feel as happy at the approach of bodily dissolution as if we were about starting on an earthly journey to some place of delightful associations. This knowledge completely disarms death of its terrors, and makes life quite another object.”

The funeral services were held at the home of Mrs. Hale, and were conducted by Unitarian minister Rev. Samuel H. Winkley. After the coffin had been conveyed to the grave at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge,

a medium there was thrown into a state of trance, and addressed the friends at her open grave, the communication coming as was alleged, from the spirit of Miss Eager; she requested “her friends not to weep for her, as she was in a much better state than while in this world,” advised them “to go home and live a virtuous life, the only true source of happiness here and hereafter,” said “she should frequently visit them,” &c., &c., and when she had concluded her exhortation, “made signs through the medium for the sexton to close the services and fill up her grave.”³¹

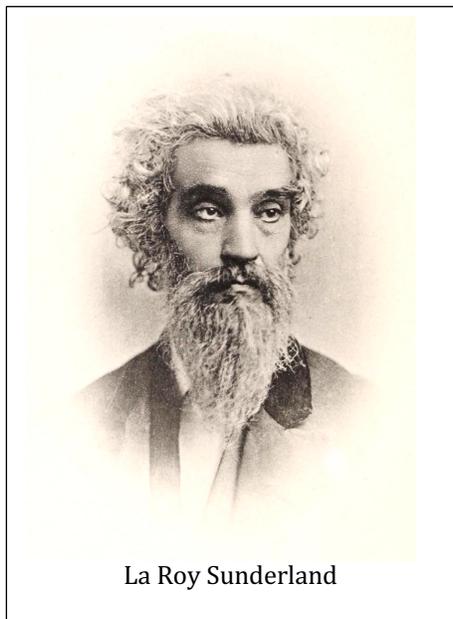
The medium “personating” her pointed repeatedly at her corpse in the grave in order to do so.

La Roy Sunderland (1802-1885), a former leading Abolitionist and Methodist clergyman and current Boston mesmeric physician, suspected some dark work had occurred—namely, a suicide premeditated and perhaps accomplished while she was in trance—and began investigating and writing letters to the local newspapers:

³⁰ “Hattie Eager’s Case,” *Boston True Flag*, 27 December 1856.

³¹ “Classics of Mount Auburn,” *Waltham Sentinel*, 11 December 1856.

She was a beautiful young lady, affable and kind; all speak well of her as amiable and lovely. But “Oh! the cruel spoiler came.” She was “a spiritual trance medium;” as reliable for “spiritual communications” as John M. Spear, or any other “writing,” “speaking” mediums in the land. In the Spiritual paper of this city [Alonzo Newton’s *New-England Spiritualist*] of Dec. 6, she is extolled, glorified, and exalted to a high rank among the



La Roy Sunderland

angels in heaven. John M. Spear sings paens to her exalted soul; calling her a “fondly loved one,” “sweet countenance,” “gentle spirit,” he says:

“Imitating thee, they would be firm; imitating thee, they would be tranquil; imitating thee, they would welcome the approach of the loving messenger who guides to fairer and more peaceful realms. A little band of choice ones, assembling weekly at this place, would look upon thy countenance as it was. They now pledge themselves to prepare a suitable memento of thyself, that weekly their eyes may rest upon it, and that thy example may inspire them to holy lives.” ...

This editor [Newton] tells us she appeared, and in his presence declared that what she had previously said respecting her being a medium, was “all true”! These are his words:

“It was the Editor’s privilege to be present at a circle, held on the afternoon of the day succeeding Miss Eager’s release, at which she was the first person to manifest herself. Giving, at the outset, to a gentleman present [Spear?—JB], a singular and satisfactory test of here identity, she proceeded, though in great weakness, to say a few words to the circle. They were to the amount that, though still very weak and overwhelmed with the beauty and glories which had just opened upon her vision, and with the love which had been showered upon her ransomed spirit, by the bands of bright ones who had welcomed her there, she felt that she must come and tell her

earthly friends of her joy at the change, and assure them that '*It is all true.*' The occasion was affecting and joyous beyond description."³²

Sunderland was particularly enraged at the way that the Boston Spiritualists, especially those, like Alonzo Newton, who were devoted to John Spear ("that poor lunatic," as described by Sunderland), used Hattie's death as a kind of evidentiary proof for the truth of spirit communication and held her up as a martyr for the cause, portraying her as humbly accepting of the fate foretold for her by her invisible guides.

The following week, Sunderland made a disquieting revelation in both the *Boston Herald* and the *Boston Investigator*:

To the credit of some of that young lady's friends (who are Spiritualists, and candid, truth-loving,) a *post-mortem* examination was instituted by two eminent physicians of this city, who will, in due time, announce the result of their investigations to the public. I have it from the mouth of one of those gentlemen when I affirm, that Miss Hattie A. Eager caused her own death *by swallowing an enormous quantity of antimony, TWENTY GRAINS being found in her stomach.* And from the fact that she vomited severely immediately before death, she must have thrown up more or less. Thirty grains of antimony were found in a tumbler in her sink, dried on the sides, precisely as it would be left after drinking.³³

The *post-mortem* was done before the burial, but its results had not been released until afterwards. Indeed, at least one paper had reported that no cause of death had been assigned; another had said the cause of death was *cholera morbus*; and the examining physician who filled out her death certificate listed the cause of death as dysentery. Sunderland, now reflecting on Spear's recently received and read spirit message exhorting its hearers to imitate Hattie's faith:

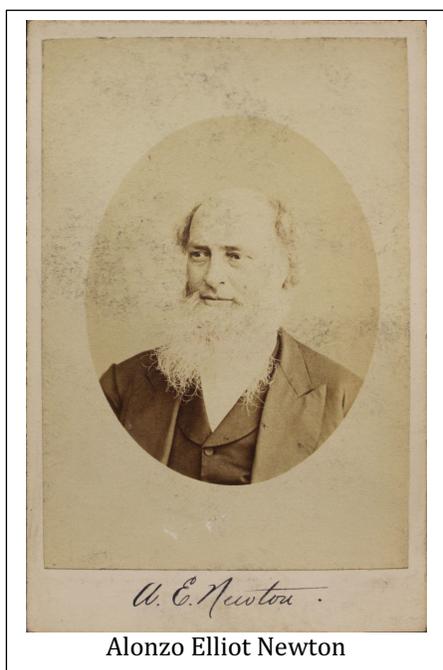
³² La Roy Sunderland, "The Recent Suicide by a Spiritualist," *Boston Investigator*, 24 December 1856.

³³ La Roy Sunderland, "The Recent Suicide by a Spiritualist," *Boston Investigator*, 24 December 1856.

And thus John M. Spear will commit suicide, if, as he pledges himself, he does really follow Hattie's example; for this is not John himself speaking, remember, but a "holy spirit" speaking through him. Hence he says:

The above was communicated through me, with a request that it should be read to the friends assembled this day at Horticultural Hall, accompanied by the suggestion that a likeness of Hattie be taken, and that the same should be placed in the Hall.³⁴

Sunderland's revelation about the poisoning (by her? or by the "spirits"? he asked) suddenly changed the public's perception of what had happened. Alonzo Newton tried to bluster his way through, replying to Sunderland in the pages of the *New-England*



Spiritualist, but the facts of the *post-mortem* gave him very little leeway. One of the questions he tried to answer was how it was that the spirit that delivered the message to Spear assuring those still in the flesh that Hattie had passed peacefully into the spirit world did not know that her life had ended by violence. Sunderland replied:

Mr. Newton ... represents that the Spirit" which sung a pean to Hattie, through John M. Spear did not know the poor girl caused her own death! And, although Hattie's "guardian spirits" put her in the "unconscious trance,"

and compelled her to drink the poison, they (the spirits) did not really know what they were about, and they "failed to remove her tendency to suicide!"³⁵

³⁴ La Roy Sunderland, *Ideology: Mental Anaesthesia Self-Induced, Miraculous Cures Self-Made, Involution and Evolution in the Human Mind as in the Whole of Things* (Boston: J. P. Mendum, 1885), 173-80.

³⁵ La Roy Sunderland, "Prediction," *Boston Investigator*, 24 December 1856.

The argument continued to play out between Sunderland (in the *Boston Investigator*) and Newton (in the *New-England Spiritualist*), and it only faded away after Newton was pinned on the sharp horns of a dilemma. Either Spear's "message" from the spirits was a self-aggrandizing and callous fraud (and even, perhaps, evidence of being an accessory to the suicide by encouraging Spiritualists to trust the spirits blindly) or the "happifying" but lying spirits had not just predicted her death but had murdered her. As Sunderland put it:

Mr. Newton stumbles, also, in his representations of my views of John M. Spear's pean to Hattie's spirit. It was "dictated by a 'spirit,'" which was "unacquainted" with the suicide, while at the same time Mr. Newton tells us that the "spirit" was a personal friend of Miss Eager! That is, a week after a most horrible suicide or murder had been committed by the spirit, another spirit, "a personal friend of the murdered victim," *not knowing of the murder*, chanted a solemn pean to her! Hence you see it comes to pass as I predicted—the Spiritualists, when they get in a hobble from too much reliance on spirits which murder the mediums, fall back on the *ignorance* of the spirits! And, as we are now told, the spirit, although "a personal friend to Hattie," and in the spirit world with her for one week, yet it was not known that the spirits had caused her to commit self-murder! Nay, Hattie did not herself know it; the spirits which spoke at her funeral did not know it! And had I not disclosed the suicide in the public paper, it is quite doubtful whether the "spirits" would have found it out to this day!³⁶

It was not the first time—and it would not at all be the last—that Spear would resort to the "Don't shoot the messenger" plea. He was only the instrument of the spirits, he would say. He could not be blamed if he passed on messages from the spirits, who might be mistaken or just plain ignorant. Yet people would blame *him* when the messages turned out to be false, or things did not work out as the spirits had said (through him).

Almost a year after Hattie's death, Boston's new Spiritualist newspaper, *The Banner of Light*, printed a message from her spirit, delivered through the "organism" of the

³⁶ "'Correction' Corrected," *Boston Investigator*, 21 January 1857.

newspaper's "house medium," Fanny Conant. In the message, the subject of ignorance came up again, but the tone now seemed to have shifted. Perhaps we can read it as reflecting the Spiritualist community's having thought a bit more deeply upon Hattie's death, and particularly upon the question of who had been ignorant. Hattie (in spirit) said:

Do you ever consider what a position it is to sit around a table, and call for those who have crossed the Jordan of death to manifest to their friends?

Now you should be exceedingly cautious that your thoughts are all ascending—that you have cast off all earthly cares as much as possible, for you know not how difficult it is for us to manifest when the storm is raging with fury in the souls of those to whom we draw nigh.

When I was on earth I did not realize this. I would sit at the table and call for my friends, and perhaps my thoughts were on earth and things of earth, or perhaps some joke was upon my lips. Were I on earth now, I should do far different in this respect.

It is now near one year since I left earth, and I have been many new and beautiful truths regarding Spiritualism. I sometimes wonder that those who draw nigh to mortals do not chide them for an overflow of mirth. A spirit may have something of sorrow about them, and it is difficult for them to manifest when all is frivolity in those they wish to manifest to. You should strive to be evenly balanced in everything, neither mirthful or sad, but at rest.

I have been requested to manifest here. I have many friends on earth—dear friends, kind friends, and I have enemies also, and I daily pray for them; for if they have not charity for me, I am sure I have for them. The sin of ignorance God winks at, and I am sure I am forgiven. Many of the world's people spoke harshly of me when I left earth, but in the spirit life we know God rules, and the harsh words of mortals fall like oil upon the spirit's ear.

I would not be a medium on earth for all the wealth of the world. I look upon them with pity when I look upon the mediums of earth, for I once stood where they now stand; and who should pity if not I? ...

Oh, I wish you were all with me, but I would not have you come to us as I came, especially if you have the reasoning powers which God has given you...

I was possessed of a lively, buoyant spirit—could cast off sorrow easily, yet there was something within that was always a source of trouble, a perfect hell I might say.³⁷

With this, the admitted suspicion that Hattie, the trance medium, possessed a silent directing mind with only a hidden connection to her conscious mind, we are led to an observation made by the mesmerist John Bovee Dods in 1854, in his book discounting Spiritualism:

I can easily conceive how the medium, retiring to rest under the full impression that spirits would write on that paper, could rise from her bed in somnambulism, believe herself to be that spirit, get the key unobserved, perform the task in that state, return to her bed, and rise in the morning without the least remembrance of the deed.³⁸

A key, a desk, a paper, and a pen—why could they not be easily replaced by a tumbler, water, and a packet of white powder?

John Montgomery Sterling

At the time I wrote the Spear biography, I was aware that his main financial supporter, John M. Sterling (1801-1880), had on one occasion brought back with him from Paris a paramour, who was known among the Spear group as “The Josephine.” I knew little more about her, and I guessed that Sterling had met her in France. That was incorrect, as is clear from two newspaper articles published in 1887, reflecting warring narratives. They were occasioned by a suit filed by Sterling’s son, Theodore Weld Sterling, for the land that his father had bought at Kiantone and which he had willed to the Spear group on the

³⁷ “H. Eager,” *Banner of Light*, 17 October 1857.

³⁸ John Bovee Dods, *Spirit Manifestations Examined and Refuted* (New York: De Witt & Davenport, 1854), 150.

condition that “a complete and fully equipped industrial home and sanitarium should be in existence and operation within six years from the time of his death.”³⁹

The court action stimulated reporters to dig into the history of the Spiritualists at Kiantone and especially into the careers of then-deceased Sterling and Spear. The first article, “Led Away by Spirits,” appeared in the *Philadelphia Press*, submitted by a correspondent from Jamestown, and was copied the following day by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.⁴⁰ It described the discovery of mineral springs at Kiantone, the interest of John Spear in the place, the purchase of the land by Sterling, and the gathering there of thousands for Spiritualist camp meetings. It was at one of these gatherings, according to the article, that Sterling met a beautiful, eighteen-year-old divorcée from New York City named Josephine Paxley.⁴¹ He became infatuated with her and made arrangements to divorce his wife. The settlement included the transfer of many acres of prime land in what would become the heart of Cleveland to Sterling’s wife, and her release of all claims on her husband’s future affairs. He then married Josephine, established a home with her in Philadelphia, and often spent time in Kiantone.

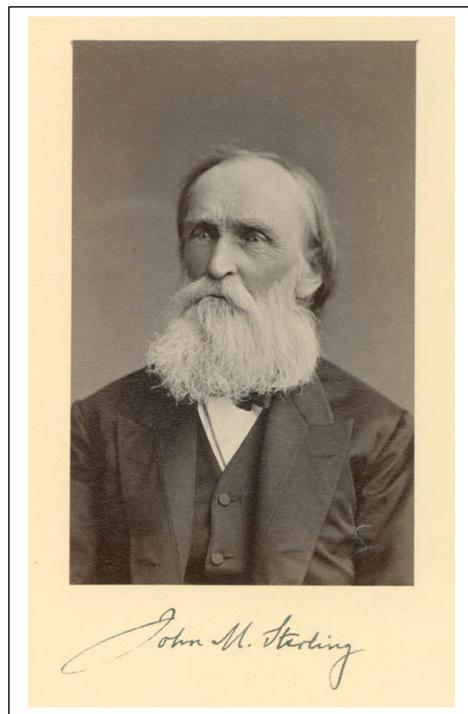
The article then spins off into what seems to be a garbled pastiche of hearsay. John and Josephine were said to have sailed to Europe, where they frittered away his money, and each became dissolute, with Josephine becoming pregnant by some indeterminable partner and giving birth in Liverpool to a “puny, sickly” daughter. John deserted her there, it was said, returning to America and retiring to the nearly deserted settlement in Kiantone. Josephine, it was said, still in London, fell “into the lower strata of society,” where the infant daughter died when she was eighteen months old. Then, left alone as a starving outcast, Josephine leapt off one of the London bridges and she was drowned.

³⁹ John Sterling’s will made his son Theodore executor and trustee of his estate. However, the will gave the “Homeville Colonial Association of Spiritualists” ten years, not six, to begin operations before the land was to be folded back into the Sterling estate. Sterling made no allowance for or even mention of his second and third wives in his will.

⁴⁰ *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 29 August 1887.

⁴¹ She was Josephine Belinda Smith, born in Southington, Connecticut in June 1841. At age 15, she had married the much-older Charles Shepard in Hartford in May 1857, but she had divorced him by the time she met John Sterling. I have no idea how she was supposed to have acquired the name “Paxley.”

A reworking of the original article immediately after it was first published, in the Warren, Pennsylvania *Mirror*.⁴² This article corrected the original on the question of the fate of Josephine: “A personal friend of Mr. Sterling who is intimately acquainted with all the circumstances in this case, tells us that the gentleman did not accompany Miss Paxley to Europe. She did, as stated in the above story, become dissipated, and was deserted by Sterling and her other admirers. She, however, did not die, and if she ever floated down the Thames river it was on the deck of a vessel. She returned to America and, at last accounts, was alive and well.”



A trimmed-down version of the original article was printed on August 30th, in the *Boston Globe* under the title of “Spiritualists’ Mecca. Strange Outcome of John Spear’s Trance. Not the Centre of All Power, but a Valuable Mineral Spring Found. Curious Story of a Thrice-Married Man—Peculiar Suit of His Son.” The *Globe*, however, immediately discovered that the supposedly deceased Josephine was then living in Boston and sent a reporter to interview her. The *Globe* printed his article the next day. It was entitled “What the Spirits Said. Interpreted, However, by the Worldling J. M. Spear. Mme. Josephine Sterling Tells the Story of Her Wrecked Life. Strange Freaks of a Man Controlled by Superstitious Beliefs.”⁴³ Her account sketched out details of her free-loving husband, John Sterling, but it also provided an indictment of John Spear:

“I was 20 years old when Mr. Sterling married me, and he always used to make a romantic tale out of it when he related that part of our history. ...

⁴² “A Romance of Kiantone. The Sterling Spirit Springs and History of Their Owner. A Mistake of the Philadelphia Press Correspondent Corrected by The Mirror,” *Warren (Pennsylvania) Mirror*, 28 September 1887.

⁴³ *Boston Globe*, 31 August 1877.

“I had been living in Boston for some time, and had been in the habit of calling on a lady, an elderly friend of mine, on Sundays. On one of my visits, as I was going up the front stairs, I called to a child that was standing near by, and, as my lady friend afterwards told me, Mr. Sterling was inside and heard my voice. He had come on here to transact some business, and was boarding while in the city at the house where I made my calls.

“When he heard my voice, he asked the lady who that was. She answered that it was a friend of here, whereupon he demanded that I be brought in. My friend came to the door and at once asked me to come in. Before I knew it, I was in the room with the old gentleman, for he was many times older than I, and he had hold of my hands.

“I thought he acted very oddly, but I saw that he was old, and supposed that accounted for it. All at once he said: ‘I’m a widower, and am perfectly free.’ Well, I didn’t know what to do. I thought him very queer, but supposed as he was an old man that perhaps he was a little ‘off.’”

“Then he went on to tell me that he believed that I was the person who had been preparing for him all these years, and so forth. You see he was a Spiritualist and had great confidence in mediums. That was what caused his separation from his wife, and in fact, his subsequent divorce from me.”

“He had always been a faithful member of the Congregational church in Cleveland, O., where he lived, and where he was a prominent member in society. But when an idolized daughter of his died, it set him almost crazy with sorrow, and for comfort he went to the Spiritualists.⁴⁴ He thought they helped him. The more confidence he put in them, the wider grew the gap between himself and family, so that it ended at last in a divorce.

“So it was that soon after he met me in Boston the same medium told him that he had met in Boston the woman who had been prepared for him from the beginning. Then we were married. ...

⁴⁴ John M. Sterling had nine children by his first wife, Marianne (Beers) Sterling. Among the children was Susan Fitch Sterling, who died at age 13 in August 1844.

“Mr. Sterling’s confidence in Spiritualism and in spiritualistic media had been on the increase from the time of his daughter’s death. One man, by the name of John M. Spear, had a very great controlling power over him.

“My husband was supporting this Spear and his family in Philadelphia, and had given him for life the use of a splendid residence there.⁴⁵ That did not satisfy the Spiritualist, and he was always making fresh demands for money. ...

“Well, his generosity of heart allowed him to be completely carried away by this Spear, who, by the way, was a very common sort of person. He was willful and stubborn; he had a high head, but as for mental calibre, it wasn’t there. And yet Mr. Sterling would obey his every nod, so completely was he under his control. I was constantly warning him that the Spiritualists were using him and his money purely for personal ends, but he would say: ‘Josie, don’t let your prejudices crop out; I need their dictations.’

“By the time we came back from our three years’ visit to Europe, Mr. Sterling’s mind was completely controlled by that of Spear, and he cared for little else than for what he said. Soon after our arrival here, at my husband’s request, I went out to Woodbine street and selected a neat little cottage, which he bought and paid for. Then he went with me while I selected the best of furniture, and we made the cosiest of homes.

“It was not long, however, before Spear made his appearance and began to use his influence. He often used to give him communications and the worst of it was that Mr. Sterling trusted in them.

“One of them read something like this: ‘This apostle of the government (for so the spirits were reported as calling Mr. Sterling) must soon depart from this realm. Let him, therefore, make a will leaving his cottage on Woodbine street to the young mathematician.’ By the young mathematician he meant a young son of his own.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ This answers the question of who funded the Spears’ house in Philadelphia, which I did not know when I wrote the biography.

⁴⁶ This was “Zadie,” i. e., Murray Hinckley Spear, the lovechild of John Murray Spear and Caroline Hinckley.

“It was perfectly evident to me that all these communications were for nothing else than for the gratification of personal ends. At first I trusted in them, but gradually my eyes opened so that I lost all respect for Spear.

“In order to flatter me he at one time sent to me such a communication as this, reported to have been given him by the spirits: ‘The Josephine (as I was called by the spirits) must go on a journey; do you supply her with funds and send her off forthwith. It is necessary for her own good and for the benefit of the spirits that she go abroad.’

“Well, I had been waiting to go to Europe again. I always did have a preference for Europe, and Spear knew it, so he sent that message.

“Soon Mr. Sterling came to me and asked me if I would like to go abroad. I told him I would, and he said, “Well, all right; I will give you the money; I shall miss you but you may go and have as good a time as you like, but don’t you give any of your money away.’

“I was away for about three years, and when I returned, I found that Mr. Sterling was still more under the power of the Spiritualists. He had met a new medium in the shape of a woman. I don’t see how he ever could have had any regard for her, for she was of a very common calibre, was not handsome nor brilliant in any sense of the word, and yet she moulded him almost as clay is moulded in the hands of the potter.

“A new notion had grown up in his mind. He was always full of his notions, but while I was away he had got it into his head that his life would be prolonged if he could in some way or other imbibe the magnetism of young women. I told him that he was right, provided there was added thereto an affection and a love. But he did not think [it] necessary. Thus he kept on with his foolish notions.

“The female medium told him that if she could not give him all the assistance he needed, her young daughter was at his command. Things went farther and farther, until she sent him a communication say that the Josephine must leave his home, and that he must prepare for the entry of herself and daughter.

“I told him that all these Spiritualists aimed at was self-gratification, and he hoped that I would not show my prejudices, etc.

“I could not stand this much longer, and I told him so. When, at length, I hinted at a divorce, he said he thought he had better bring the divorce, and so wrote up a statement. I never saw it and don’t want to see it. Some such paper was sent to me once,

but I would not look at it, and have preferred to let things stand as they are. He and I were friendly after that.

“When I heard that he was so ill a few years ago, a short time before his death, I and ‘Bubby,’ the child that was born to me in Europe and who is now 17 years old, went on to see him.⁴⁷ He admitted then that he had been duped by the Spiritualists and, putting his arms around me, said: ‘you are the only friend I have on this earth, Josie.’

Of the two divergent narratives here, I suspect that Josephine’s is closer to the mark, though clearly self-serving; however, she leaves much unsaid—for example, why she had agreed to marry an old man if she had thought him off-kilter from the beginning, or why she had agreed to travel to Europe and stay there for three years without him. One of the collected notes in the Thaddeus Sheldon Papers at the University of Pittsburgh library, apparently from John Spear, in London, to John Sterling, in Paris, urges Sterling to use “the Josephine,” presumably as a honey trap, to attract potential investors in the group’s sewing machine project.

Simon Crosby Hewitt

None of Spear’s close associates was more enthusiastic about putting Spear’s spirit-delivered inventions into “practical” form than the ex-Universalist minister and former mechanic, Simon Crosby Hewitt. Near the beginning of Spear’s “spirit mission,” Hewitt accompanied him to a Spiritualist Convention in Springfield, Massachusetts:

Mr. S. C. Hewitt, editor of the *New Era*, took the stand. After remarking that though table tipping was very well in their place, we were yet to look for something higher. He announced that the spirits had turned their attention to practical matters, and that

⁴⁷ “Bubby” was Sterling Sterling (1870-1947). His birthplace, according to the federal census records, was New York. He became an insurance broker. Josephine died in Boston in February 1897.

Roger Sherman had given a course of twelve lectures upon architecture, though John M. Spear, medium, who was a remarkably good medium, and by whom no serious errors had ever been communicated. According to these lectures, houses are to be built of a material formed by mixing with sea water, in equal proportions, iron ore, pulverized granite, fine clay, and sand from the sea shore. The house is to be modelled after the human body when in a sitting posture, and the family are to reside in the apartment which corresponds to the cavity occupied by the brain. We are not quite certain whether by this is meant the upper story, for it was not very apparent where the brains of the speaker and some of his companions were. The house is to be warmed in a way revealed in a course of twelve lectures from [the spirit of the deceased English prison reformer John] Howard, upon beneficent machinery. No fuel is to be used, and the system is according to the arterial system of the circulation of the blood. A framework is to be built in the basement of the same materials as the house. A large boiler is to be placed in the framework and in the boiler a jar made of zinc and tin, with two wires, like arms, and five fingers, tipped with brimstone. Linseed oil is to be poured into the jar, and the wires are to be rubbed, and, somehow—the speaker did not exactly understand how—perpetual heat is to be produced. Villages are to be built under the new dispensation, as follows: First, a circular park is to be laid out; and in it a circular church, and a circular school house with a triangular roof all over, are to be built. These are to be surrounded by a circular street, and then the houses are to be built in circles about them. We are at first angular, being in the first stage of development, but the second form is circular, and when we come to take the second step in the advancement of art, we shall have nearly all arrangements circular. These discoveries are not patented, and those to whom they have been revealed, do not wish to monopolise them, so any one who wishes, is at liberty to build a house and warm it (if he can,) or lay out a village according to these plans. Mr. Hewitt said that if he got a good number of new subscribers, he would give a plan of the house in his paper [*The New Era*], and if he received a large number, would publish a perspective view. If he had only said he would build such a house, or live in it, he could hardly fail of obtaining enough subscribers.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "The Rappers Convention at Springfield," *Cleveland Herald*, 27 April 1853.

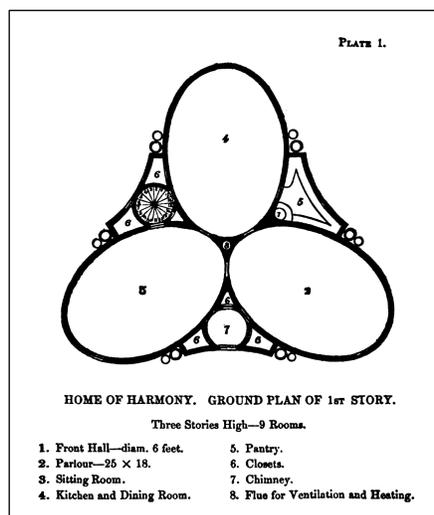
Hewitt had been a long-time Universalist minister and labor organizer. Through Albert Brisbane's exposition of Charles Fourier's writings, Hewitt had become a devoted follower of Fourier, who had modeled his perfect society as a fully functioning body, alive with "affective labor." Hewitt often appeared in the Fourierist newspapers of the 1840s, *The Phalanx* and *The Harbinger*. He appears to have spent some time residing in Josiah Warren and Albert Brisbane's Fourierist inspired community, Modern Times, at Brentwood on Long Island. The Reverend Hewitt was said to have spent his time there strolling the lanes completely nude, chatting up whomever he met. Going without clothes, he was convinced, improved his eyesight.⁴⁹

After becoming attached to Spear's spirit messages, Hewitt continued to refine and elaborate at least some of these organismic architectural ideas, no doubt aided also by parallel notions put forward in the widely popular books by Orson Squire Fowler, *Home for All: or a new, cheap, convenient, and superior mode of building* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1850), which detailed plans for constructing domestic buildings in the shape of an octagon, and his 1854 revised version, *A Home for All; or, the gravel wall and octagon mode of building*, which later edition incorporated a recommendation and instructions for using poured concrete walls.⁵⁰ Fowler nowhere hinted that spirits had suggested his designs; nor did he make the case that his plans were meant to emulate the form of the human body, as a way to draw down the Macrocosm, as Hewitt did.

⁴⁹ Helen Beal Woodward, *The Bold Women* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953), 174; Bernard I. Murstein, *Love, Sex, and Marriage through the Ages* (New York: Springer Company, 1974), 334.

⁵⁰ The method of concrete construction was actually invented and patented by Orson Fowler's half-brother, Samuel Theron Fowler.

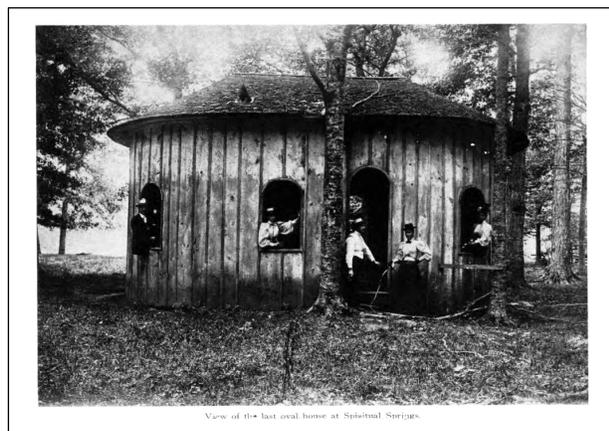
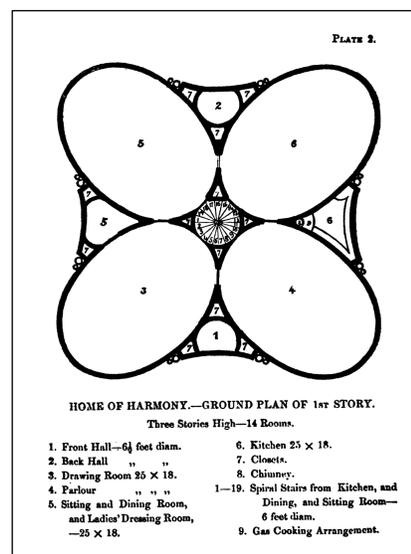
As Hewitt continued to fiddle with his own designs, that cosmic significance appears to have receded into the background out of necessity. What remained central for his



architectural designs, however, was the principle of curvilinear form (like the body) as conducive to the reception of spirits (who were “roundish” and who were pained, more or less, by angles and straight lines). The walls of his house designs consisted in round or ovoid shapes, as did all the rooms within; the

roofs, following the original spirit messages, appear to have remained “triangular.”

Hewitt sent British reformer and newly converted Spiritualist Robert Owen sketches of his plans for his “homes of harmony,” which Owen published in his *Millennial Gazette* in 1855. Hewitt, back in Boston, advertised plans and drawings of the houses to the public via the columns of the



Spiritual Telegraph.

Those of Spear's followers—notably Horace Fenton, a carpenter and farmer that the spirits dubbed “Big Builder”—who erected the much simpler shacks or cottages at Spear's Harmonia settlement at Kiantone, incorporated at least the elements of ovoid shape and triangular roof.

Hewitt's preoccupation with the Macrocosm and Microcosm continued to haunt him through the late 1850s, inspiring him with the conviction that the impending political strife



View of the last oval house at Spiritual Springs. The last house stood until 1907.

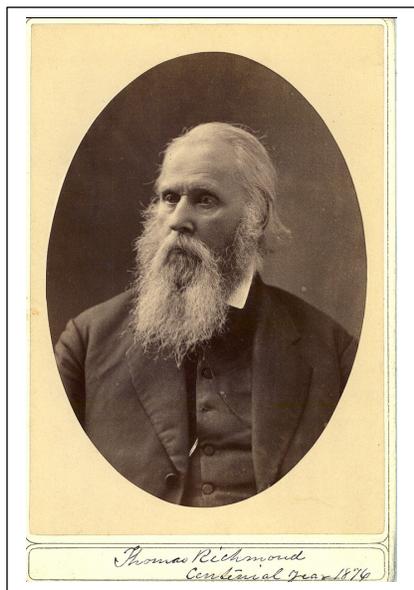
on Earth was being triggered by a cosmic upheaval in the solar system resulting in the incipient formation of new planets and a “divine invasion” in which spirits were inseminating sensitive women. He toured west with a lecture series on the subject. When I wrote the Spear biography, I had only been able to track him as late as the 1860 federal census, which had him

residing at the North Union Shaker settlement outside of Cleveland. But he spent most of the 1860s in Cleveland, lecturing the local Spiritualists, and selling life insurance. He died in Rockford, Illinois in 1870.

Thomas Richmond and Gleason Lewis

Spear deliberately recruited and relied on wealthy patrons to fund his expensive projects. Thaddeus Spencer Sheldon (1818-1868), from Randolph, New York, for example, supplied the money for digging the tunnel at the Kiantone property that John Sterling had bought and, at least until much of Sheldon's wealth was gone, made some perfunctory start on setting up a “telepathic tower” on his own land. Two other supporters, however—Thomas Richmond and Gleason F. Lewis—also contributed heavily to Spear's projects. And their particular business interests dovetailed with the spirit-directed projects that Spear was pursuing.

Thomas Richmond (1796-1892), whom Spear enlisted in 1859 as integral to the project named in *The Educator* as the New England Association of Philanthropic



Commercialists and the Unitary Bread League in the early 1860s, was an immensely wealthy Cleveland- and Chicago-based shipping and railroad entrepreneur (he listed his real estate value on the 1860 census as \$100,000). “He built many vessels, and was one of the pioneers, if not *the* one who established the iron ore trade with Lake Superior mining districts.” It was Richmond whom the spirits had in mind when they posed the question via Spear to his followers asking them if anyone knew of a wealthy industrialist interest in iron ore deposits in the Great Lakes region. He owned the “Richmond House” hotel in Chicago,

and served both in the Ohio legislature and in the Illinois Senate. At the beginning of the Civil War, he traveled to Washington, D. C., for consultations with President Lincoln regarding the construction and protection of supply lines around and from the Great Lakes to the rest of the Union.

Richmond was also a fervent abolitionist. Before the War, he left the Presbyterians because they continued to hold communion with slaveholders, which left this true believer without a religious affiliation until he was converted to Spiritualism. After the War, he wrote his autobiography and published *God Dealing with Slavery; God's*

Instrumentalities Emancipating the African Slave in America; Spirit Messages from Franklin, Lincoln, Adams, Jackson, Webster, Penn, and Others (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1870). Most of the spirit messages in that book were delivered to Richmond by medium and sealed-letter reader Lorenzo Lothrop Farnsworth (1830-1890).



Gleason Filmore Lewis (1820-1903), the husband of radical free lover Carrie Samantha (Ensign) Lewis, was also immensely wealthy. He ascended the social scale from the ground up. As a boy, he began his business career hawking bags of popcorn from a handbasket on the streets of Cleveland (and gained the nickname “Popcorn Lewis”). That story was made the basis (although his name was altered to “Frank Gleason”) by Spear associate Hannah Frances Morrill (“H. F. M.”) Brown, who wrote *Sketches from Nature for My Juvenile Friends* under the name “Frances Brown,” when she was still living in Cleveland in 1858, as were the Lewises. All of them by then were notorious for their outspoken free love views.⁵¹ Gleason and Carrie lived in a mansion built on land owned at the time by John



Hannah Frances Morrill Brown

M. Sterling.

Popcorn Lewis was an extraordinarily shrewd businessman, turning the pennies’ profits from selling popcorn into real estate investments in Cleveland that allowed him to turn banker, and then to turn to specializing in brokering land scrip issued to military veterans (to publicize his services, he issued a newspaper, *Old Soldiers’ Advocate*). Just after the Civil War, he was brought to Washington to consult with Sen. Benjamin Wade and Rep. George Julian, both of whom were Spiritualists, as they

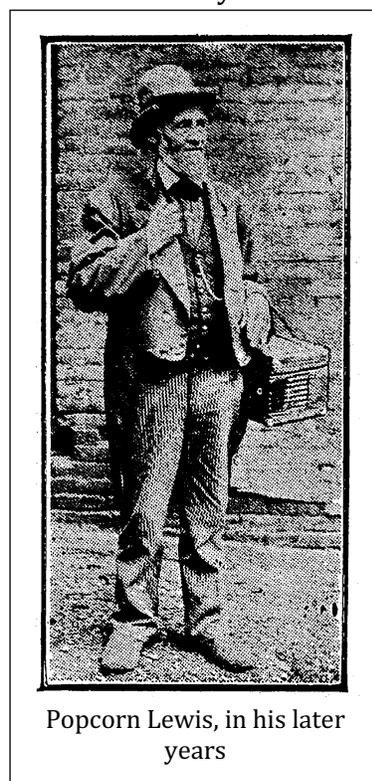
crafted legislation to grant millions of acres of federal land scrip to the states for the purpose of setting up agricultural colleges. After it passed, Lewis expanded his brokerage business to include buying and selling much of this scrip, at one point becoming the largest

⁵¹ Self-published in Cleveland, as well as in Cincinnati by Longley Brothers and in Boston by Bela Marsh. Lewis’ story is “The Pop-Corn Peddler,” 53-58. H. F. M. Brown would continue her socially radical, Spiritualist writing, editing and publishing in *The Agitator* while in Cleveland. She then moved to Chicago, where she helped start *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*. She was elected President of the American Association of Spiritualists in 1871 and turned over the presidency the following year to Victoria Woodhull, afterwards moving to National City, California, along with her sisters Flora Kimball and Louisa Kimball.

private landholder (in the form of scrip) in the country. He also invested in the construction of railroads in Pennsylvania, and moved to Corry, Pennsylvania from Cleveland, after he separated from his wife Carrie.

The strength of his and Carrie's conviction about the righteousness of their free love beliefs (and their Spiritualism as well) was based on the notion that the "natural" affections were a given and signified a compatibility between two people of the opposite sex that would, magnetically as it were, justify physical intercourse. The "affinities" feelings could rise and fall, and so were in no way dependent on the institution of marriage, as such, which free lovers regarded as a manmade institution that provided an unholy sanction for what amounted to a church-enforced, sordid selling of sexual favors and an enslavement of women. A "true" union of "affinities," on the other hand, arising "naturally" between a man and a woman would cast an aura of feelings about the couple that would provide the natural conditions for the growth of a healthy and highly endowed fetus in the mother's womb. "Licentiousness," therefore, became redefined as sex between a man and a woman who were not "affinities" (whether married or not). That was the more or less magical belief about how children are made behind Gleason Lewis' acrid 1857 letter to an Akron, Ohio newspaper:

If freedom of the affections can teach us how to generate children rightly, there will be no need of *regenerating* them and the 30,000 priests can be employed in some useful business, and when these children being rightly generated, grow up with healthy bodies, and natural noble minds, no forced institutions of Sensualism can for a moment get dominion over them.⁵²



Popcorn Lewis, in his later years

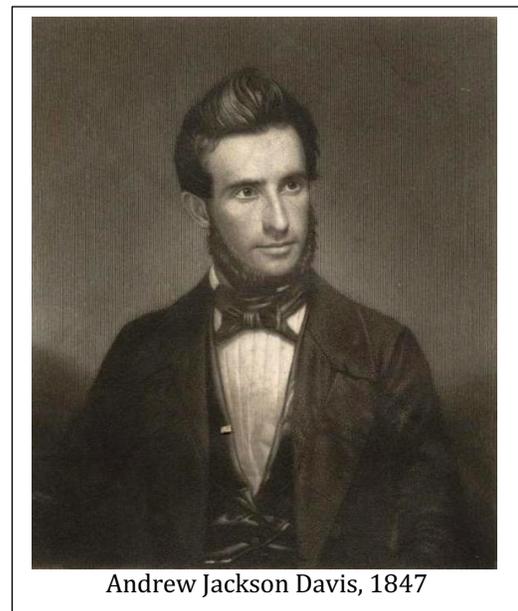
⁵² "Free Love," *Summit County Beacon*, 5 August 1857.

“Popcorn” Lewis’ wife Carrie died in 1879, but Lewis survived until 1903, living in Corry for many years and then moving back to Cleveland toward the end of his life. He held his Spiritualist convictions to the end, becoming known eventually as the oldest Spiritualist in Ohio, and providing an unsolicited letter of support for John Spear’s mediumship to the mid-1880s Seybert Commission at the University of Pennsylvania, which was conducting its investigation of Spiritualism. At the time of his death, although none of his wealth remained, he was regarded by the Cleveland press as a sort of revenant and colorful character who had come alive again in the city’s midst, and he was engaged in a project to set up a Spiritualist camp meeting grounds on Lake Chautauqua that would compete with the Spiritualist resort at Lily Dale.

Andrew Jackson Davis

The “Seer of Poughkeepsie” was a clairvoyant visionary twenty years younger than John Spear, but Davis’ 1847 book, *Nature’s Divine Revelation*, plausibly opened the field for the birth of Spiritualism the year before the Fox Sisters began hearing rapping sounds. When Spear read Davis’ book, he reviewed it in *The Prisoners’ Friend*, saying that he thought it was the greatest work he had ever read. It formed the backdrop for Spear’s conversion to Spiritualism a few years later.

At the widely reported convention of Spiritualists in Springfield, Massachusetts in August 1852, both Spear and Davis were on the platform and acted as leaders:



Andrew Jackson Davis, 1847

The spirit acted upon a large, brawny looking man, whose name we did not learn, and he being in a spiritual trance, or being operated upon by the spirits, took the platform, and with his eyes closed, his features distorted, and his arms swinging, commenced what was termed by the initiated to be bringing the male and female mediums into harmony. After sawing the air with his arms for some time, he went to Mr. John M. Spear, who was seated on the platform, and taking him by the hand, led him to Andrew Jackson Davis, whom he also took by the hand, and led them both to the desk, and placing Mr. Spear's hand on the top of Mr. Davis's head, he left them in that position, and continued his operations for invoking the air of the spirits.

Presently Mr. Spear opened his mouth and spoke, he appearing to be under some magnetic influence, and consecrated Mr. Davis to the harmonial work, by everything that is noble, glorious, and much to be desired. The two gentlemen then sat down.⁵³

The following month, at the Spiritualist Convention at Worcester, Massachusetts, another hint of a connection between Davis and Spear surfaced:

Mr. Davis read to the convention a true and faithful record of visions he had seen, and communications he had received from an inhabitant of the spirit spheres. His angel showed him a cross of hail stones suspended in the air, and also great fields of ponderous electric elements and meteoric stones, and told him that the laws of gravitation were not yet well understood. The spirit, said the philosophical Mr. Davis, showed him these things to prove that spiritual bodies, which were matter spiritualized, could walk, move, and have their being in the superior spheres without any violation of natural laws. ...

The next transaction seemed to indicate that the Mr. Spear mentioned above, and Mr. Davis, are moving in spheres which interfere, and that each is making a desperate bid for the captain-generalship of the spiritualists. We have shown above how cleverly Mr. Spear appealed to the interests of his hearers, and how slyly he put the point of his

⁵³ "Spiritual Convention," *Boston Herald*, 7 August 1852.

medical capabilities. His friends, not content with this, brought forward a most convincing series of testimonials.⁵⁴

Spear's confrères spoke about Davis as if he was only the voice crying in the wilderness, the annunciator and precursor. The reporting from the Worcester convention, for example, detailed that when the exalted spirit spoke to Davis, "The spirit told him to go and call men to repentance and life, for the kingdom of Heaven was at hand." And when Spear's partisan, S. C. Hewitt, took the podium, he said that "John M. Spear was yet to be the wonder of the world. He would go forth to heal the sick, and do many marvellous things."

Davis's allusion to his angelic vision probably referred to his interlude at High Rock Tower.⁵⁵ The lesson that he learned there, "that spiritual bodies, which were matter spiritualized, could walk, move, and have their being in the superior spheres without any violation of natural laws," means that when John Spear and his co-workers assembled at the same place, High Rock Cottage, a year later, they were not just choosing a propitious spot for receiving spiritual influences, as proven by Davis' previous experience there. They were, instead, attempting to "modelize" the very principle of the secret physics that connected heaven and earth, which had been revealed to Davis. And so, they were outdoing Davis; or perhaps one might say, bringing to life what he had prophesied.

By the time of the convention in Springfield, Davis had already formed a secret society, the "Harmonial Brotherhood," whose "Declaration of Independence" had been published in the *Spirit Messenger* the previous year.⁵⁶ He had described its organization, by

⁵⁴ "The Wonders of America—The Spiritual Rappings Convention," *New York Herald*, 2 November 1852.

⁵⁵ Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Present Age and Inner Life* (New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1853), 82-96, describes the vision, which occurred August 7, 1852. It opened with a vision of spirits of men, riding upon "a magnificent Shining River of what appears to be electricity; and yet it is different from this element. It looks far more like the principle of Light in a state of condensation or liquefaction."

⁵⁶ Andrew Jackson Davis, "Declaration of Independence," *Spirit Messenger* 1.43 (31 May 1851): 337-340; Davis anthologized the "Constitution" of the Harmonial Brotherhood, which had described it as a human body constituted of parts, in *The Great Harmonia*, volume 3: The Seer (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1867), 392-96. Presumably, a notional link extends from

comparing it to the form of the human body with its parts, and this comparison was briefly mentioned at the convention. Though Davis's "Harmonial Brotherhood" did not materialize into anything significant, his descriptions set the precedent for Spiritualist secret societies. The various organizations that Spear and his cohort formed followed Davis's lead in this matter, even as far as S. C. Hewitt's adoption of the body-part notion as his spirit-guided principle for building construction. As a generic term, a "harmonial brotherhood" came to mean any network of mediums and believers that formed a regular séance circle, where they held hands and thereby enchained themselves into a spiritual battery. These formed individual "cells" that were meant to communicate with one another and with the spirits. The "harmonial brotherhood," therefore, was an invisible structure, built up of many séance circles, that would, when fully constructed and switched on, materialize the spirits' higher realm upon the earth and revolutionize it.

Used generically, the term "harmonial brotherhood" could refer to any cell of such an invisible trance network, and was probably so used to refer to Spear's Order of the Patriarchs, based in Cincinnati in 1855:

The Cincinnati *Columbian* gives an account of the Harmonial Brotherhood Association, say that several *very pretty* women joined them Sunday. The paper says:—"The Brotherhood is a secret association, most of whose members are believers in the verity of spiritual manifestations. There are several degrees in the order. ...

We confess our faith in these "Brotherhoods" is such as to lead us away from them. None that we ever knew produced anything but evil. The very principle of "association" and "attachments" and "affections" and "confidences" breeds that familiarity which, alas for human nature! too often ends in sin and desecrated family altars. Still more fatal to virtue and purity when, like this "Harmonial" association is a secret one—a progression of mysteries. The very secrecy is a cloak for whatever may be weak in humanity, and the presence of "pretty females," of white and black persons—bound together by secret ties which encourage spiritual affinities," "psychological twinship," "disinterested

this "harmonial brotherhood" back to the mesmeric *Sociétés de l'Harmonie* in France in the mid-1780s.

confidences” and “unselfish attachments”—is, to us, no evidence that the moral and social purity which is the very foundation of our happiness and progress will be advanced;—rather do we fear that its best development will be retarded, and the sacredness of love, the individual trusts and hopes of home be desecrated by making all common.⁵⁷

Davis’ attitude toward Spear is hard to gauge. He visited the New Motor while it was being constructed, for example, but was perplexed by it. A couple of years after its birth was aborted, he wrote:

There are many inventive spirits who, acting upon the willing faculties of John M. Spear, gave the world to understand that a new motive-power was possible. Any impartial and intelligent person, who will investigate the lectures which preceded and gave rise to the mechanism at High Rock Tower, will be at once surprised at the profundity of the suggestions, and chagrined not less at the inconsistency of the metallic application. There was the obvious mixture of the divine with the human. Divine principles can scarcely descend into the strictly human sphere without misapprehension. Deep and thorough scientific knowledge, spiritually derived, was dissipated by the human instruments. The received theory was *unique*, although based upon the human structure: the absorption of electricity from the atmosphere, and the incorporation of that subtle element, by the polar organization of a metallic Idol. Inventive Spirits had their minds earnestly at work to develop a new motive-force; and the principles divulged, although so sadly misapplied in the first experiment, foreshadowed the great era of utilitarian discovery.⁵⁸

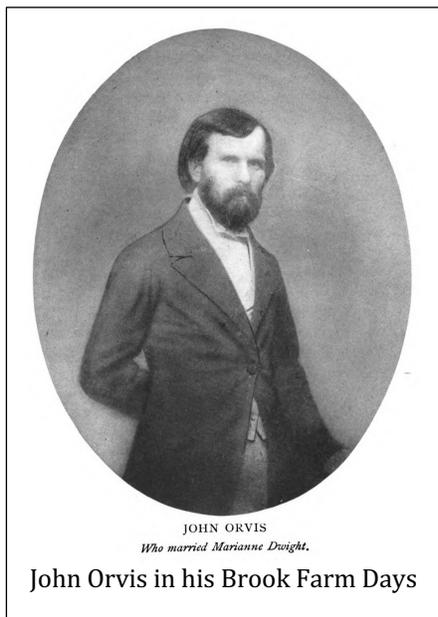
In other words, he readily agreed that the spirits were at work in the genius of its idea, but that the human instruments tasked with putting the idea into effect had botched it. Still, he looked forward to the great invention it “foreshadowed.”

⁵⁷ “More ‘Brotherhood,’” *Daily Commercial Register* (Sandusky, Ohio) 12 September 1855.

⁵⁸ Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Penetralia* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1856), 228-29.

The Sacred Order of Unionists

The Spear group's "river expedition" down the Ohio to Cincinnati, continuing down the Mississippi to New Orleans, seems to have been an implicit admission by the "spirits"



that the projects hitherto engaged in by Spear and his cohort were just preliminary experiments or tests (read, failures). Their *real* comprehensive project was to be accomplished on a far broader scale. It would be the establishment of a socialistic and Spiritualistic society that would embrace the entire North American continent. The river expedition was a spirit-directed scouting expedition of the territory that would form the riverine backbone of its trade network. The earthly organization that would form its shadow government would be the Sacred Order of Unionists. The Order itself became the "new child," taking on the aura of the

previous "electrical infant," the New Motor.

The initial spirit messages about the Sacred Order indicated that its main centers would be in Boston (headed, outwardly, by John Orvis), Cincinnati (headed by "Major" Daniel Gano), and New Orleans.⁵⁹

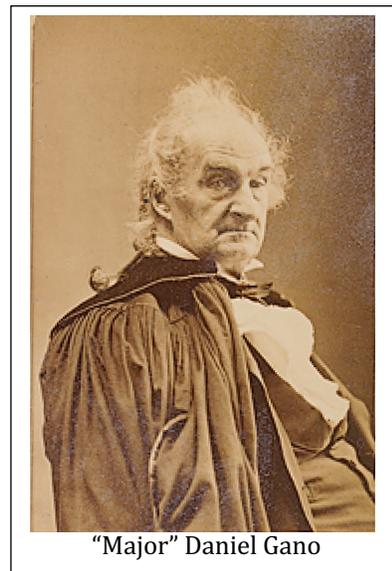
In the Spear biography, I could not understand who might have been supposed to run the New Orleans center, that is, who could have been thought likely to bring the gospel of spirit-guided socialism down South. Now, however, I believe that person was probably

⁵⁹ Daniel Gano (1794-1873, informally "Major" because of his militia service) was the clerk of the superior court in Cincinnati for his whole career and was one of the founding members of the Cincinnati establishment of its Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian), and his home was where Frances Trollope stayed on her visit to America when she reached Cincinnati. He was also a wealthy breeder of plants and of horses. He was an important official in the discredited Order of the Patriarchs after it had been taken over by Spear and his co-adjutors. Gano's grandson wrote a supportive letter to *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* during the tumultuous run-up to her Presidential run in 1872, in which he mentioned that he had examined his grandfather's papers and had found the "Major" to have advocated the most radical free love ideas based on the notion of "Affinity."

Dr. Alexander Hamilton Burritt (1805-1877), a homeopathic physician who had studied with mesmerist and Spiritualist physician John Gray in New York City and who had moved from his home in Troy, New York to New Orleans around 1848. It was Burritt, a solid Spiritualist, who was listed as the New Orleans agent for Spear's book, *The Educator*.⁶⁰

As the spirits unfolded their plans for the Sacred Order, details were filled in.

Agencies were directed to be opened in Louisville, St. Louis, Chicago, New Orleans, Harmonia (that is, Kiantone), Baltimore, New England (that is, Boston), and "the Provinces" (most probably, the British provinces of Canada). Cuba was also to be visited. And an outline of the operation of the Sacred Order was provided—roughly, it was to consist in an inner council, composed of such high executive offices as an "Omniarch," as well as a "General Assembly" of twelve members. The inner core was also directed to divide itself up into seven committees: Ways and Means; Real Estate; Rules and Regulations;



"Major" Daniel Gano

Correspondence; Publications; Accumulation; and Dispensations and Distribution. There was also a "High Priest of Communication" (with the spirits), who was undoubtedly John Spear, along with his amanuensis, Caroline Hinckley.⁶¹ By the time the Sacred Order came into public view with the issuance of a small pamphlet, *The Sacred Order of Unionists*, which detailed its broad goals and some of its organization, the role of Omniarch was filled by John Orvis and the head of its General Assembly (who also acted as its secretary) appears

⁶⁰ While the river expedition was making its way down the river, but had not yet reached New Orleans, Dr. Burritt, still in New Orleans, received a written threat from the local vigilance committee accusing him of being an Abolitionist (which he vigorously denied). He was vaguely accused of having been to Cleveland "to sympathize with 'the Sympathizers and Avengers Society of John Brown.'" This strikes me as enough to identify Burritt with Spear's Cleveland crowd of fellow radical Spiritualists, including H. F. M. Brown, J. M. Sterling, and Gleason and Carrie Lewis; "Ordered to Leave the City," *New Orleans Sunday Delta*, 2 December 1860; A. H. Burritt, "A Card," *New Orleans Crescent*, 3 December 1860; and editor's remarks in the same issue of the *Crescent*. Burritt did not leave the city but stayed there and practiced until his death in 1877.

⁶¹ "Outline of Plans & Purposes of the Sacred Order," 20 July 1860, Thaddeus Sheldon Papers, Darlington Library, University of Pittsburgh.

to have been Thaddeus Sheldon, which explains why the Sacred Order's records and papers wound up being found years later in a trunk in his house.

The initial plans unfolded by the spirits make it clear that the spirit organizations that had composed the previous Association of Beneficents and its various branches were now being rolled into the Sacred Order of Unionists. Important for the operation and nature of the Sacred Order was its headlined declaration that "Mere individual action is to cease in all things, being hereafter done through the action of the Sacred Order." Surely that was an attempt to tighten up the members' activities and bring them all under the purview of the highest officers (and John's spirit guides). The Order had a set of sacred symbols as well that "will be requisite in time to aid the order to have a language known only to its members," referring to passwords, items of regalia, ornaments, and pins.⁶²

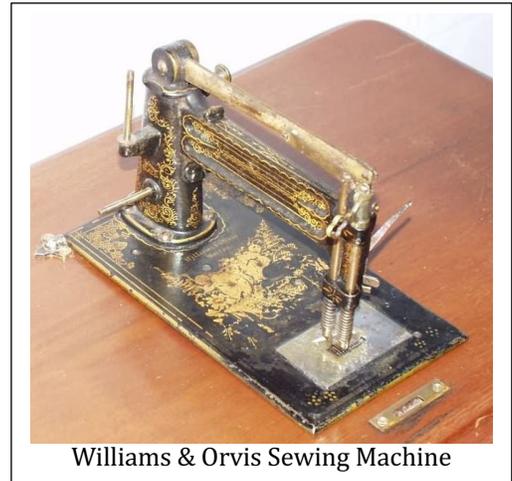
A copy of the printed pamphlet, *The Sacred Order of Unionists*, does not appear to have survived, but judging from parts that were quoted by its critics, a preliminary draft still exists as a spirit-dictated paper titled, "Announcement of the Organization of the Sacred Order." Perhaps the most significant—and, to its potential critics, most ominous—section is this:

The order looks forward also with hope, to the time when it shall call into life remedial institutions and unitary homes in all the more important cities and towns in the United States. At this present moment it can only elaborate its thoughts in this direction on a very limited scale, it seeks only to accumulate that it may distribute. Announcing the existence of this order, in the United States of America, it is expected that will speedily extend its benign influences to the West India Islands, next to Great Britain, then Paris, and from that centre of civilization it will spread from pole to pole, & it will open the way in less than seven years to call not only national, but a world's convention, where it will hope to meet the ablest sociologists of the 19th century. Such are some of the hopes & the plans of the founders of the sacred order. The methods of action proposed are of the most simple character. It has at its head one single mind.

⁶² "Of Symbols for the Sacred Order," July 1860, Thaddeus Sheldon Papers, Darlington Library, University of Pittsburgh.

That mind receives suggestions from the heavens above, as well as wisdom from the earth beneath. It seeks for truth wherever it can be found.

Here is encapsulated the *sub rosa* program that explains John Spear's wanderings and actions for years afterwards as the Order's "one single mind." It explains why he organized the river expedition, extending finally to Cuba. It explains the Order's hope that it could develop and sell a sewing machine ("a most valuable labor saving Machine") that would fund its activities. It explains his group's working to set up commercial cooperatives and distribution networks for basic commodities. It lies behind Spear's sending agents (as well as himself) to England and to Paris, as well as his promotion there (without fruit) of a world's convention of Spiritualists. It aims at setting up a "pole to pole" (that is, world) government, a universal free love socialist society, all under "one single mind," John Murray Spear.



Williams & Orvis Sewing Machine

When the Sacred Order printed application forms, prospective members were first of all asked, as a sort of preliminary pledge:

1. Do you seek to connect yourself with this Order for mere personal ease or emolument, or do you love God and man, and desire to obey the one, and to promote the happiness of the other?

2. Are you willing that each fellow member should follow his or her attractions, without any interference, jealousy, or unkind feelings on your part?

The first of these seems meant to ensure that the applicant will give up his or her individual rights to the Order and to its grand high panjandrum. The second seems meant to ensure that the applicant will be agreeable to the Order's principal of Free Love and its voiding of the marriage institution and the nuclear family.

This would strike most of the public as supremely authoritarian, as subversive of

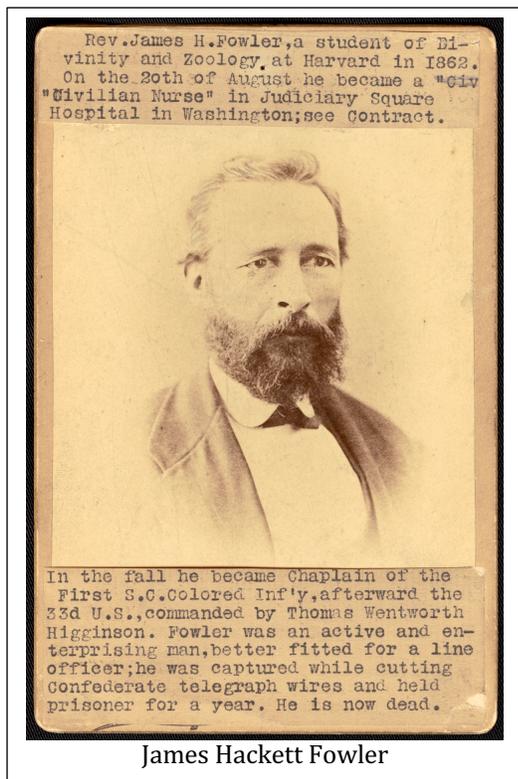


individual freedom and of the basic foundation of society in the family. That was why it had to remain a *secret society*: “This order is believed to be a transcript of one which has long existed in the Spirit life, & it has there been a means of great good, to those who have passed from the mortal to the immortal. For the present moment, for reasons satisfactory to the original members, this is a secret, as well as a social institution, but in due time it will remove the injunction of secrecy, and the earth will be permitted to behold its glory and to feel its power.” It would come to fruition out of the public eye, moving successively from the invisible to the manifest.

The language in the draft announcement declaring that the Order had “one single mind,” which was guided by spirits, presumably was dropped in the printed pamphlet. The fact that John Murray Spear was sitting at the center of the web was veiled in print, but it was apparently an open secret among Spiritualists. When Emma Hardinge discovered it, on the occasion, it seems, of the pamphlet’s publication and distribution around Boston in 1862, she blasted it in a public address. And her animus against Free Love in general and Spear in particular motivated her to write up the details of his various projects in a chapter of her widely read *History of Modern American Spiritualism*, entitled “Darker Shades ...” Even there, however, although she named him clearly enough in her account of the New Motor project, she dropped out his name when she moved into her following sub-chapters on the “Kiantone Movement,” “The Order of the Patriarchs,” and “The Sacred Order of Unionists,” giving the casual reader little clue that Spear was at the heart of all of them. It is odd, how Spear stayed out of sight in print.



Another critic of the Sacred Order, aroused apparently by the pamphlet's



publication in 1862 was the “independent” clergyman James Hackett Fowler (1824-1899), a Spiritualist, who in 1856 had published *New Testament “Miracles,” and Modern “Miracles,” the Comparative Amount of Evidence for Each, the Nature of Both*. He was profoundly disturbed by the pamphlet because of the impossibly unrealistic goals, as well as because of the implicit authoritarian structure of the Order. It appears that the pamphlet listed John Orvis as the public head of the Order and the drafter of its statement. But Fowler intuited that the real boss was John Murray Spear, and in a letter to Andrew Jackson Davis’s newspaper, *The Herald of Progress*, he wrote:

Their plan seems to be consummately foolish. I say foolish, for it cannot be intentionally knavish, as it would most manifestly appear, but for the fact that I think I know the principal drafter thereof, and know him to be incapable of rascality. I, however, half suspect, (for I seem to scent it) the influence of another, whose little brains and unbounded egotism, rat-like selfishness, and unlimited power to make—I almost used a bad word—fools of men and women, even of large brains and good hearts, has been to me the greatest marvel of Spiritualism.

But I leave out this character altogether, as I understand they disclaim any “official influence” from him. The movement, in spirit and motive, I therefore assume to be good, and for that reason I am drawn to it with my whole heart. But good men are often presumptuous, fanatical, and most of all, exceedingly foolish in some of their greatest undertakings.⁶³

⁶³ J. H. F., “Spiritualists with a ‘Supreme Head.’ ‘The Sacred Order of Unionists,’” *Herald of Progress*, 28 June 1862. His full letter is in the appendix here.

Juliette Manley

After two decades of service as the earthly communicator for the spirit band that styled itself the “Association of Beneficents,” John Murray Spear retired himself from that post in 1872 with a kind of memorial salutation, which was printed in the form of a pamphlet, *Twenty Years on the Wing; Brief narrative of my travels and labors as a missionary sent forth and sustained by the Association of Beneficents in Spirit Land*. That work makes clear that he is passing on his role as Communicator of the Association of Beneficents to a successor, a Mrs. Manley, whom he had earliest consecrated as “Spirit Missionist.”

When I wrote Spear’s biography, I could find no satisfactory information about Mrs. Manley, and allowed myself to speculate that she might have been one of Spear’s followers who followed him and Caroline back to America from England. That was wrong.

Mrs. Manley was Juliette L. (Evans) Manley, born in Chautauqua County, New York in 1829, wife of a cabinetmaker, Elon G. Manley, and mother of four children. She did not emerge as a spirit medium until 1869, while living in Ellicott or Jamestown, nearby Kiantone. Her Spiritualist history appeared in brief notices in *The Banner of Light* and the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*:

Jamestown, N. Y.—O[liver] G[ilman] Chase says: Spiritualism is making rapid progress in Jamestown. We have a writing medium that has astonished the natives of Jamestown, and will eventually astonish the world. Her name is Mrs. E[lon] G. Manley. The spirits control her hand and write very rapidly. She has written since the 15th of July last three thousand pages; makes few mistakes or errors, and is still improving. She knows not what she writes until she reads the same. We hold our meetings twice a week. The clergy of this place are much alarmed.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Banner of Light*, 4 December 1869. Oliver G. Chase (1811-1887) was originally a farmer in Chautauqua County and the “discoverer” (under the guidance of a local fortune teller) of the original “spirit springs” that eventually brought Spear and others to the adjoining

A Spiritualist visiting the area wrote:

They have been greatly assisted by the late development of Mrs. Manly as a writing medium, who, beside a vast amount of private communications, has filled several large black books with essays upon religious subjects, two of which she reads every week. She is a lady well known and much respected, and together with her husband, a member of the Episcopal Church and, till recently, opposed to Spiritualism. Her fidelity to her convictions, in fully identifying herself with the Spiritualists, against the earnest solicitation of friends, and every inducement to denial and concealment, and the freedom with which she gives her time, at the request of those interested, are greatly to her credit, and already productive of good. Her writings are said to resemble, in style, those of Charles Linton.⁶⁵

By March 1871, Mrs. Manley was practicing her mediumship in western Pennsylvania, as a letter to *The Banner of Light* from Corry related:

I find here a most useful instrumentality of this work—Mrs. Juliette L. Manley, a lady of fine intellectual powers, developed as a medium within the last two years; has a good and somewhat novel writing phase, and is doing excellent service in the cause of truth. Individuals from many parts of the surrounding country call there when in town, unnoticed, “you see,” by their neighbors and acquaintances, hence not *liable* to be laughed at. She is doing a grand work in convincing skeptics. The style of her writings seems to be that of the Ancient Philosopher, and she often gives excellent tests. A communication to myself gave me several well defined and unusual tests.⁶⁶

property, where they set up the Kiantone “Harmonia” site. Oliver Chase then moved into Jamestown and began manufacturing furniture. He was a devoted Spiritualist and was one of the founders of the Cassadaga Spiritualist camp meeting at Lily Dale in 1877.

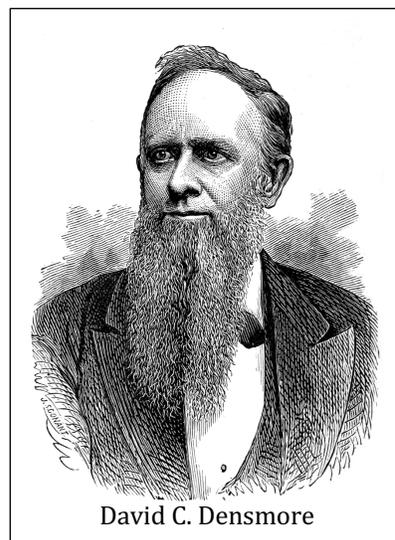
⁶⁵ *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 9 July 1870. Charles Linton was the spirit medium and prolix author of *The Healing of the Nations* (1855), a catechism and exordium from an unnamed spiritual source, for whom the young Linton was the entranced conduit.

⁶⁶ Letter from J. K. Bailey, *Banner of Light*, 18 March 1871.

And in May, Lyman C. Howe, from Titusville, related:

Mrs. Manley is a writing medium of much promise and is doing a good work among skeptics and church people. She was herself a strict church member two years ago, and was converted to our golden faith by Planchette and her own mediumship.⁶⁷

A little over a year later, in September 1872, Spear was referring to her as the “Spirit Missionist” and made her his successor as leading communicator of the Association of Beneficents. Her tenure was fairly brief and I do not know if anyone made much of it. I have not discovered that any of her thousands of channeled pages of spirit disquisitions survived or were published, and she died in November 1878 in Westfield, Chautauqua County, not far from Lily Dale. Messages from her spirit, received from mediums, later appeared a couple of times in the *Voice of Angels*, the Spiritualist newspaper run by David Crossman Densmore, who, years before, had been roped into attempting to construct a ship in the form of a duck and using a “New Motor” to propel it.⁶⁸



David C. Densmore

The White Cross Society

⁶⁷ *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 6 May 1871.

⁶⁸ Even years after the “duck ship” episode made a public fool of Densmore—which he admitted in his biography—Densmore continued to open the columns of *Voice of Angels* to Spear’s spirit-guided medical advice. Yet, he also allowed Spiritualist Abisha Hudson’s criticism of Spear—“... he merely prescribes for a picture of his imagination,” which could seemingly encapsulate Spear’s entire career; Dr. A. S. Hudson, “Dr. A. S. Hudson Criticism of Spear’s Mode of Cure,” *Voice of Angels*, 1 November 1879.

At the time I wrote Spear's biography, I did not know that, in 1882, when John was approaching 80 and had apparently bowed out of acting as the "agent" of toploftical spirits, he and his companion in his spirit projects, John Orvis, again became tangled up with a short-lived attempt to establish a Spiritualist organization, the White Cross Society (or Fraternity). It, too, had an inner and outer membership.

The true beginnings of the White Cross Society are muddled, but there are indications that tie its inception to a group that was active among Spiritualists in the Boston area in the early 1870s whose full name is unknown, but whose acronym was O. W. H. B. S.⁶⁹ Two of its members were a married couple, both spirit mediums, John William Fletcher and his wife Susie Willis Fletcher. At the time, they were rising stars in the Spiritualist firmament, highly successful at receiving messages from the spirits, and they would rapidly evolve their public séances into occasions for the materialization of the forms of spirits from large cabinets in the dark.

The O. W. H. B. S. was a secret society, meaning, at least, that its membership and its meetings were open only to experienced mediums and the truest of true believers. As such, its activities were not the subject of gossip or coverage in the Spiritualist press. It functioned, most probably, as a "mediums' protective association," where mediums could develop their skills amidst their fellow mediums, free from the fear of being exposed by skeptics.

The Fletchers travelled to England in 1877 and quickly became renowned for their successful "test sittings." They also organized there some version of the O. W. H. B. S. under the name of the White Cross Society. In September and October 1879, Susie Fletcher, using the name "Liberta," wrote two letters to the British National Association of Spiritualists' *Spiritual Notes* explaining the society's origin and purpose. "A secret order under the name



⁶⁹ "O. W. H. B. S." *Banner of Light*, 8 January 1870; "Spiritualists' Camp Meeting," *Boston Journal*, 24 August 1870.

of “The White Cross has been established in London,” she wrote. “The object is to teach the higher truths of Spiritualism, and to promote in every way the good of its members.” She linked it to the older O. W. H. B. S., which was, by then, possibly either inactive or defunct. Her second letter went into a bit more detail, saying that the White Cross was a mediums’ protective association, and that it was

... a secret order only to this extent, that the methods of its work can only be known to the initiated. These initiates gain admission to the working room or lodge by means of information, which, if sacredly kept, guards the members from interruption and intrusion. ... the Order of the White Cross has inner circles in connection with the Lodge, where its work is freely spoken of and explained. ... One important object of this society is the development of mediumship, and we have grown into the comprehension of a method at once easy and rare,—namely, surrounding our sensitives with so much hearty sympathy and appreciative encouragement that no bad spirit, either on this or the other side of the veil, can penetrate this bulwark of human hearts. Consequently we impose no “test conditions,” use no weighing machines, and satisfy no curiosity.”⁷⁰

Not long after that, both Susie and her husband John were made notorious in England (and consequently in America) for their “free love” living arrangements with another couple and for obtaining money under false pretenses via mediumistic fraud. Susie was imprisoned in England for a year and returned to the United States in May 1882. At that point, Spear and Orvis entered the picture, as Mrs. Fletcher later described it:

It having been predicted that she should organize a White Cross Society in America, [Susie Fletcher] returned to this country ... and in May, 1882, started the movement.⁷¹ After she had been in Boston about three weeks, the spirit of Mary Stuart [Queen of

⁷⁰ *Spiritual Notes*, September-October 1879. In other words, no skeptics or questioners were allowed.

⁷¹ “The White Cross Society’s Claims; Dr Augusta Webster Fletcher Says She Was Its Founder; Moved by the Spirit of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, She Enlists as Co-Workers a Number of Eminent Gentlemen,” *San Francisco Call*, 19 July 1891.

Scots] went to her and said: "We now propose founding the White Cross movement in America, and to-morrow a gentleman, who is a stranger to you, but whom we have selected to assist you and take a prominent part in the work will call upon you. He and another man we require will come to you without any effort on your part."

She went on to outline the plan and scope of the new society, pointing out that it was to differ from the London society chiefly in the fact that besides the inner or esoteric circle there would be an outer and exoteric organization, devoted to the work of social and other reforms, and from which, as fitness was shown, the inner circle, which should govern it, would be recruited. Strangely enough it was insisted that there should be no fees or dues, no money exacted or asked for in any way, and no thought taken as to where the material means required to carry out the work should come from. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all things shall be added unto you," said Mary Stuart, "is the first and essential truth to which the organizers of the movement must give their implicit adherence."

The next morning John Orvis, who was a leader in the Brook Farm movement with Emerson, Alcott, George William Curtis, Charles A. Dana, Margaret Fuller, Lawrence Oliphant and others called upon her, and excused his visit by saying that the spirit of Mary Stuart had sent him. Queen Mary had given him Mrs. Fletcher's name and address, and had also informed him that another person was necessary and would be brought to him. While they were talking the door-bell rang, and John Murray Spear, a medium of marked development, was announced. He also had been instructed by the spirit of the Queen to call on Mrs. Fletcher. She tells the result of the visits in the following language: "That day I was in a trance for five hours, and while, under control of the spirit of Mary Stuart gave Orvis and Spear all the rules and bylaws of the new White Cross Society, and mapped out the plan of the organization. The officers were to consist of a 'spiritual head,' who was to have entire control in the inner circle or spiritual lodge. The inner lodge was to be a strictly secret organization; the outer open to all who sympathized with its objects and fraternized with its members. This outer lodge was to be again divided into sections devoted to special reforms and to meet as a body twice a week. Before separating, we three—Orvis, Spear and myself—pledged our allegiance to the spirit world and our lives to the carrying out of this particular work. Thus was the order

of the White Cross in America virtually founded, though a formal organization was not effected until several months later.

At this time Prentice Mulford was not only not a member of the order, but he did not even know of any such organization as the White Cross Society. It was therefore a matter of great surprise to Mrs. Fletcher and Spear and Orvis when Mulford was announced, saying that a New York medium had ordered him to come to Boston to join a new spiritual movement which might require him to be absent a few days or a year. In obedience to instructions, he had abandoned his hut on Staten Island, had resigned his position on the Graphic staff, and was at their disposal.

Mr. Spear, while standing talking to Mulford, was suddenly controlled and the controlling spirit, addressing Mulford, told him a new set of spirit guardians had come to him under whose guidance he would branch out from his old work and be prepared for something greater. To a question of Mrs. Fletcher's the spirit replied that this work be in connection with the movement under consideration, but the time was not ripe for a fuller revelation to Mr. Mulford of its organization.

Mulford, Orvis and Spear were found to be obstinate subjects to deal with, and Mrs. Fletcher was becoming very much discouraged. Her hopes were revived when some ten days after this Francis Morton, a lawyer of Boston, who had been familiar with the White Cross movement in London, called on her. He said he had received through a medium named Mrs. Alden a strange communication from a spirit claiming to be Mary Stuart to the effect that a White Cross society had been started in Boston. Mrs. Fletcher would know if this was true, he thought. She was not at liberty to confirm this communication or give him any information, but told him simply not to consider the spirit as false or the medium an imposter on that account. A few days after he went back and said a friend of his had received a similar communication from Mary Stuart, and had further been informed that both Morton and he would be called on to interest themselves in the American White Cross movement. His friend was Horace W. Fowler.

Meanwhile, Mulford, Spear and Orvis had changed around again and were eager for work. The details of a plan for organization were arranged. Special literature for the movement was discussed, although the first number of the White Cross Library did not appear for nearly two years afterward. It was ordered that no money should be

solicited. "Money," said the spirit, "is the blood of the world, but your spiritual forces are greater than money and will command it." The spirit designated Spear as an honorary member and medium's assistant, while Orvis, Mulford, Morton, Fowler and Mrs. Whittaker were named as the working corps. Orvis was selected to sit with Mrs. Fletcher, and receive whatever Instructions were to be given. He took down the instructions of Mary Stuart. Mary announced that she wished to deliver through Mrs. Fletcher a series of lectures to prepare and instruct the people. To these lectures a number of people who were not members and knew nothing about the movement were invited.⁷²

Spear and Orvis both set about recruiting members for the White Cross, not only in Boston, but also in the Spiritualists' summer camp meeting resorts, Onset Bay and Lake Pleasant, which were popular with believers from Eastern Massachusetts.

The Directors of the Onset Bay Grove Association [just west of Cape Cod] voted the use of their platform to the Fraternity of the White Cross, for a one day's convention on Monday, August 11th.⁷³ At ten o'clock, Mr. John Orvis, of Boston, called the meeting to order, and after a song by the friends present, he proceeded to explain the objects for which the meeting has been called. He outlined the movement as of a spiritual nature, and made special reference to the addresses of Cephas B. Lynn and Emma Hardinge-Britten, that were delivered upon that platform the day previous, as being the keynote to the great work the White Cross proposes to carry forward. He rehearsed the law of Moses, with its "Thus saith the Lord," together with the great commercial centers in

⁷² After the White Cross had become more or less inactive, journalist Prentice Mulford carried the name forward by writing a series of popular books he called the "White Cross Library" that were influential in the New Thought movement; Charles Warren Stoddard, "Passing of Prentice Mulford," *National Magazine* (September 1906): 563.

⁷³ W. W. Currier, "The White Cross: A Letter from Onset Bay," *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 23 August 1884. That issue of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* carries a letter that refers to "One John Orvis, an ancient crank, whom rumor connects with the Fourier fizzle, the John Murray Spear movement, and various impractical schemes, has been deputized as the official monkey who shall remove the chestnuts from the fire, the Pythoness's [Susie Fletcher] man Friday; for business purposes he is called the Secretary."

trade and commerce, railroad and manufacturing monopolies, and after a long and tedious talk of nearly two hours, he came to a point where he said that we have a new dispensation, in which we are to do more than they did in the time of Moses or Jesus, for we must love our neighbor better than we love ourselves.

He said that the new dispensation was not handed down by any one man like Zoroaster, Jesus Christ or Joseph Smith, but was presented by the Spirit-world for co-operative work by the people in the great reforms of the day, "and now," said he, "I come to talk to you of the White Cross. It is a descent from heaven, and it is a duplicate of a society corresponding to it in the Spirit-world."

"How is it duplicated?" was asked from the audience. "I'll tell you," said the speaker. "Its work is to be the natural way for general co-operation instead of individualization of the human. This last medium is the first to announce the Associations of Societies in the Spirit-world, and from there it is announced that a new church is to be established on earth. This last medium and her husband compared notes in these phenomena, and found that they are alike."

Questions from the audience: "Who was the woman medium?"

"Well, I do not care to tell you now. Principles are what we want. You will say, if that person is there, I won't join; and again, if that person is not there, then I won't join."

"Does the speaker quote [Andrew Jackson] Davis as an authority?"

"I say not."

"Will you not tell on whom the mantle of the White Cross of the Spirit-world has fallen in this life?"

"If you get that you will judge of the person instead of the principle involved," was the answer. Continuing, he said: "We are going to have a school for mediums, and do what we can to stop the black tongue of scandal against them. We are going to have a Temple, and in that Temple we are going to have a sanctum sanctorum, and therein we are going to have a Pivotal Medium, and you will see in the White Cross the wonderful development of mediums."

"Are persons joining the Fraternity required to practice self-abnegation, abstaining from the use of narcotics, alcoholic beverages, and vice and crime of every kind?"

“There is no person that is not called; none so bad that they are not welcomed to the first degree of the White Cross. He who would be chief must be the servant. The White Cross is organized in degrees, and is a secret society.”

“If I understand you,” it was asked, “you condemn all secret societies in commerce and in finance, and if so, shall we follow by creating another secret order?”

“It is not the secret we complain of, but the business done. If they can do a bad thing in secrecy, cannot we do a divine thing in secrecy?” ...

The Lake Pleasant board of directors was apparently divided in their appraisal of the White Cross, but they managed to agree to let the organization use the grounds of the camp for a three-day convention immediately following the close of that camp meeting season, which took place September 5-7.⁷⁴ The opponents of the White Cross took their own steps to discourage attendees and speakers from showing up, and they seem to have been largely successful at that, but a few hundred people did attend. Orvis presided at that convention, and the Fletchers were both there. In addition, woman’s rights speakers Imogene Corinne Fales and Isabella Beecher Hooker spoke from the platform on the subject of woman suffrage. Hooker took the opportunity to out herself publicly as a Spiritualist of long standing.

The question about the White Cross’ secrecy, asked of Orvis during his August presentation, was one that had a long history among 19th-century reformers. New England Puritans and their religious descendants had criticized the Catholic Church for its secrecy—most particularly, its use of auricular confession and the secret political plottings, real and imagined, of the Jesuits. On the other hand, Protestants and “Infidels” were no strangers to organizing secret societies—the Masons and the Oddfellows, for example—with degrees of initiation and wheels within wheels, influencing both religion and politics. The Enlightenment ideal of openness and light, however, sought to bring light and transparency

⁷⁴ For the projected program, see “The Society of the White Cross,” *Banner of Light*, 23 August 1885. On the opposition to the convention, see “Meetings of the Mystical White Cross Association at Lake Pleasant,” *Springfield Republican*, 7 September 1884, and “The White Cross Fizzle,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 13 September 1884. Both Orvis and Spear also made recruiting efforts that season at the Spiritualist camp at Onset Bay near Cape Cod.

to all things, and this affected the New England reformers and Transcendentalists. William Lloyd Garrison was an influential figure who opposed the principle of secrecy and who aligned himself with anti-Masonic feeling in the lingering, decades-long aftermath of the public outcry over the disappearance and presumed murder of William Morgan by Masons in 1827.

Quite a few New England reformers of the Garrisonian stripe, such as John Spear's brother Charles, refused to join any secret society. Charles, in his diary, wrote about his friends' urging him to become an Oddfellow and his decision not to do so.

John's involvement with the Abolitionists, however, and especially his participation in the Boston Vigilance Society and the Underground Railroad, with its secret maneuverings, passwords, and so forth, clearly set him onto another track regarding secret societies and their possibilities for effecting social change. It was this experience, most probably, that led him into organizing one group after another in his role as spirit communicator for the new dispensation of Spiritualism in which the larger, more vague and unthreatening public membership and goals contained within it a far more radical and—if widely known—more scandalous inner core of esoteric initiates who practiced “more perfect” free love.

This was all in the background of the opposition to the White Cross Society encapsulated in the question from the audience to John Orvis. Not only were the greater number of Spiritualists opposed to this new organization because its leaders, most especially the Fletchers and Spear, were well known as Free Lovers, but the question of secrecy's place in Spiritualism was a matter of grave dispute at the time. Spiritualism was reputed by its followers as offering empirical evidence for communion with spirits. That evidence, if persuasive, should have passed the test of close inspection, which is to say, that it had to show itself “in the light” in order to be decisive. Instead, the movement was riven by the fact that its “phenomena” produced in séances tended to best manifest in the dark. For the Spiritualists, the dispute about secret societies—consisting of a public exoteric membership enclosing a secret esoteric one—dovetailed with an endless chronicle of fraudulent “phenomena” and their exposure within the ranks of the movement. The Fletchers were notorious by 1882 for their frauds and they were largely, though not entirely, marginalized in the movement by that time. This, too, made growing the

membership of the White Cross Society problematic. Indeed, it seems to have reached its peak membership during the late summer of 1884, just as its leaders were hoping it was about to take off.

The question for the old Spiritualists and reformers John Orvis and John Spear was to the point. It held up their constant railing against Capitalist trusts and monopolies—essentially secret combines of private interests—against their own advocacy, under the guise of socialist organization, of secret societies formed to act on social and political institutions, but out of the public eye. A few months before soliciting for members at Lake Pleasant, for example, Orvis had given a speech in Boston “under the auspices of the Fraternity of the White Cross,” to a labor organization advocating “the free and unrestricted exchange of the products of labor and of different climes” and that “all forms of monopoly are opposed to the principles of justice and dangerous to the liberty of the people.”⁷⁵

A Glance Inside Spear's Head

Spear once received serious head injuries from being stoned by a mob after an abolition speech he gave, and for a couple of weeks afterwards, while healing, he was delirious. But there is no evidence that his turn to Spiritualism was the result of an organic brain malfunction, such as would result, for example, in intermittent temporal lobe epilepsy. As far as I know, when he was not in trance or dreaming, he did not hear voices in his head or see spirits. And the trances in which he received messages generally were not random (as epileptic episodes would be), but were almost always self-induced, as when he would put himself into trance, step to a podium, and deliver an address. To an audience, it looked like this:

⁷⁵ “Anti-Monopolists; Discussions in the Interests of the Workingmen,” *Boston Herald*, 28 May 1884.

Mr. [James Henry] P[owell] stops in his discourse, and looking towards Mr. Spear, said he would discontinue his address, while Mr. Spear delivered himself of his “trance” speech. ... while Mr. P. was upon his legs, the American Trance-Medium appeared to have an attack of spasms, his eyes being closed and his venerable face exhibiting Grimaldi-like extortions. Gradually rising from his chair, he stood erect. At this juncture, Mr. P. observed him panting to express himself, and resumed his seat. Mr. Spear then, with his eyes still closed, made a long and rambling statement about Moses, Miracles, and the resurrection, connecting them with modern spiritualism. His trance oration finished, he slowly seated himself in the chair, and after several convulsions, and sundry sweepings of the hand across his brow, he opened his eyes—the trance had then terminated.⁷⁶

But discounting physical brain damage does not eliminate unselfconscious delusion, and, precisely because the trance-produced material was not believed by Spear or his sympathizers to have originated from him, it was more the matter for wonderment. He certainly may have been delusional, but that does not mean he was damaged. The practice of trance “opened” him up, in the sense that he no longer had the ability to distinguish his imagination from reality. Before his conversion to Spiritualism, he was supremely confident that his actions were directed by divine imperatives; after he was converted, he simply turned that into the belief that it was the spirits of the departed and exalted ones who directed him. Tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of people at the time were convinced to some degree that the spirits of the deceased had opened communications with mortals, and hundreds, perhaps thousands, acted as spirit mediums.

In the most fundamental sense, the John Murray Spear whose personality and career we encounter before he became a Spiritualist is just the same John Murray Spear we see after his conversion. He was both charismatic and forceful in a way that some saw as convincing, but others described as prickly. The difference seems only to consist in the fact that his conversion to Spiritualism gave him the cognitive framework that insulated his

⁷⁶ “‘Spiritualism’ in Maidstone,” *Maidstone Telegraph* (18 June 1864): 2. Powell was the editor of the *Spiritual Times* of Eastbourne and London.

imagination and his confidence from external criticism. In any event, even if we had enough material that directly revealed his inner life, and one were confident in diagnosing his mental condition, I think we would still find it necessary to resist dismissing him as a significant historical figure. He is much more interesting as a kind of instrument for diagnosing his culture and time, than as the subject of a diagnostic probe.

One might wonder whether he still identified himself as a Christian after he had taken up Spiritualism, for some Spiritualists thought of themselves as “higher” or “progressed” Christians, but many prided themselves on having transcended Christianity, being Freethinkers and atheists, even as being anti-Christian. No matter that Spear’s beliefs had virtually emptied out Christian terms and replaced their ancient meaning with others, leaving the economy of salvation as a sort of Gnostic liberation and Jesus as a sort of philanthropic teacher and spirit medium. It is clear enough that he thought of himself as a Bible believer and a follower of Jesus. In 1875, more than two decades after he had become a Spiritualist, he wrote a letter of encouragement to “Christian Spiritualist” Samuel Watson, the editor and publisher of *The Christian Spiritualist*:

I have from a child been a reader and a somewhat careful student of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. First I studied them to see their bearings upon the popular religion of fifty years ago. Becoming an advocate of temperance, freedom, peace, and spirit revelations, I discovered that the Bible could be successfully read to sustain and defend each of these movements; and I have regretted that leading Spiritualist lecturers have spoken contemptuously of that Book, and in a large measure ignored prayer and the religious sentiment in general. ... I am sure that, as reformers, we shall not reach a high success and a permanent conquest without the aid of the Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ “Christian Spiritualism,” *American Spiritual Magazine* 1 (1875): 43. One can imagine, however, that this was a mellowed, retrospective view he had eased back into towards the end of his career.

Here he says he read the Bible to find bits that would puncture the earlier reigning Puritan orthodoxy and then to reinforce his own settled views. He did not read it with a willingness to be taught what he did not already believe.

For Spear, Spiritualism was not a morbid, shaded nostalgic grasp onto the past, a regressive contact with loved ones no longer here. It was a forward leaning search for a happier future. Unlike the Transcendentalists who surrounded him and dominated New England's intellectual life at the time, he did not relax into abstractions or vague idealisms. He was a quintessential Yankee. For him, an imagined utopia was not just a mental construct; it was a prospectus, a schematic that a cunning tinkerer could materialize. Most of his fellow reformers came to dread his projects partly, I think, because he reduced their musings to absurdity. He tested them out in the real world, in all good faith, and they came to naught. Repeatedly. It is little wonder that the admiring retrospective histories of the reform movements sent Spear and his projects down the memory hole.

Still, the question remains: What did he really think he was doing? Did he have doubts? Given the history of Spiritualism, it is easy to slide into dividing those in the movement into the con artists and the suckers, the "operators" and their marks, the clear-eyed manipulators and the true believers. The new sources considered here clarify that John Spear did indeed resort to active manipulation of his patrons and coadjutors, that he was, in that sense, an "operator." But he did not act as a con artist would: If he had done so, he would not have repeatedly painted himself into corners. He did extract a considerable amount of money out his followers, but, on the eve of his prediction of the success of the New Motor or the Kiantone tunnel, he did not abscond with the cash. In his Free Love "Unitary Homes" he "consecrated" more than one of his female followers to a superior role in his group, inevitably leading to the groups' fracturing amid recriminations and accusations of betrayal. But he seems to have been taken by surprise when it happened.

Instead, he waited in faith with his followers for each predicted successful outcome, and when it did not occur, evidently had to come to grips as best he could with failure, by rationalizing it away in one way or another. What were the spirits trying to accomplish? Were their instructions more like tentative experiments than like fully detailed instructions? Most of the time, he seems naïve, a true believer, a man who, as one of my colleagues put it, "was just delighted that the spirits' wishes coincided with his own desires

and lusts.” Yet I cannot say that he did not sometimes help the spirits along when they were not forthcoming with their messages.

At least once, when he gave public testimony before the London Dialectical Society committee investigating Spiritualism, he said that he was disconcerted when people blamed him for the spirit messages he gave them when they did not prove correct—after all, he said, he was only the messenger, not the author. But that would be an easy excuse for him to make—or for others to make on his behalf—whenever he said something ludicrous, in or out of trance. In February 1865, at the first public gathering of Spiritualists in England, organized as the Spiritual Lyceum, stimulated by the furor over the performances there of the Davenport brothers, an unsympathetic attendee wrote:

Rev. J. Murray Spear offered prayer asking for a blessing to rest on the institution and its supporters, and *thanking God for what the people of London had lately been permitted to see in the exhibitions of the Davenports!* [italics in original] If any of our readers who may have attended one of the Davenport *séances* had been present at the Lyceum, we doubt whether they would have joined very heartily in this prayer; and to ourselves that part of it referring to the Davenports sounded very like blasphemy. We are astonished at being told after the meeting by one of the leaders of the movement, that Mr. Spear was entranced while praying, and that he really did not know what he was going to say till thoughts were given him by messengers from the spirit-world! In the official report of the meeting, too, the *Spiritual Times* states that “the Rev. J. Murray Spear, being entranced, offered prayer.” We hardly understand what this entrancement means, or how it can be discovered by other persons, as we certainly had no idea or intimation of it at the time. Mr. Spear merely stood on the platform and spoke as men usually do; he afterwards made a speech, when it seems that he was not entranced, but we failed to notice any difference between his state when praying and when addressing the meeting.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ “An Evening with Spiritualists,” *Monmouthshire Merlin* (25 February 1865): 8; reprinted from the *Christian World*.

Even if we grant that much of the time he was sincere (or, at least, partly sincere) however, I think he could not have avoided asking himself “For whose benefit are these spirit messages?” and “Are the spirits really who they say they are?” and “Are they really benevolent spirits or are they darker ones, impersonators, leading me astray?” But perhaps he could not have allowed himself such moments of self-reflection. On his own account, he read the Bible, not open to be instructed in what he did not yet know, but rather to teach it to say what he believed. Just so, one senses that he did not attend upon the spirits of the deceased to learn what they had to say, but rather to convert them post mortem into his angelic trumpets and make them urge upon the world a future that he envisioned.

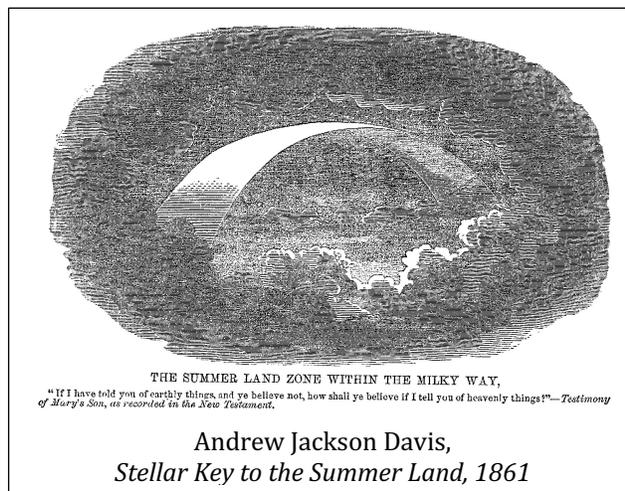
Spear had grown up a Universalist. Universalists who had converted from “Orthodoxy” (which is what they called the Puritan variant of Calvinism) before finally turning to Spiritualism, often described in their memoirs the enervating terror they had undergone at times as they reflected on the inhuman uncertainty and helplessness under “Orthodox” doctrine about whether they were to be among the Elect, predestined for salvation. They looked inward, where darkness and weakness arose, and wondered whether “the Day of Judgment had already passed,” and whether, despite their own efforts to hew to righteousness, they may really have been concealing even to themselves the final greatness of God’s just judgment upon their hypocrisy. The central question for them was whether individual humans were real agents at all or were merely puppets being moved by God or higher invisible agents and forces toward an inscrutable end. They may have tried to live righteously, but in truth no one could know or affect their predetermined end, nor could they do anything to change it. They could only look for favorable signs, presentiments, wonders, and prodigies; or for indications in the natural world (material success, for example) that God had indeed included them among the Elect. The churches that were generated from the Calvinist root stock, like Universalism, Unitarianism, and Congregationalism, provided a bountiful supply of Spiritualists, still looking for signs and wonders. It was in these terms, when confronted by qualms over his own and the spirits’ impersonations and possible hypocrisy, shadowy inklings of the invisible and indefinable “motive powers” inside him, that Spear would likely have confronted his moments of doubts. As the Calvinist writer, John Pollock, phrased it in his 1827 book, *The Course of Time*:

Great day of revelation! in the grave
 The hypocrite had left his mask, and stood
 In naked ugliness. He was a man
 Who stole the livery of the court of heaven,
 To serve the devil in; in virtue's guise,
 Devoured the widow's house and orphan's bread;
 In holy phrase, transacted villainies
 That common sinners durst not meddle with.⁷⁹

It was in these terms that some of Spear's contemporary critics saw him—neither guided by divine impulses, nor as a crank or lunatic, but rather as someone who, consciously or not, hid his unrighteousness under the “livery of the court of heaven, to serve the devil in.”

John Spear, however, lived already in the future whose shadows were cast before it. The ancient economy of salvation had been dissolved. Its doctrine of grace had become a superstitious imposition of malignant priestcraft; the supernatural itself had become irrelevant because unmeasurable, and heaven itself

had become only a place in the natural order that could be explored, mapped out, communicated with, and joined to the larger empire of the natural world with the calipers of imagination. Souls had become merely a rarified form of matter. They could be dissected and fragmented. Individual identities had become provisional fictions. No integral selves could be found, and so no responsibility, no guilt, and no merit existed among the wandering and tenuous spirits who imagined themselves as real agents. With such



⁷⁹ Robert Pollock, *The Course of Time* (1827), book viii, lines 614-621 (rev. ed. Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey, 1842), 223.

convictions, any judgment of sincerity became nonsense. The selves inside the head multiplied and jostled about, one rising to the surface for a time, then fading back into the deep as another arose. This is what I see in John Murray Spear. Not one person, but multitudes. A legion, even, of pretending actors taking their parts in turn, rattling about inside a hard head.

APPENDIX 1

PSYCHOMETRICAL PORTRAIT.⁸⁰

Boston, Nov. 19, 1852.

Description of the character of John M. Spear, given by Mrs. [Semantha] Mettler, of Hartford, from the impression which she received of him from a piece of his writing, sealed in an envelop[sic]. Mrs. M. had not seen the handwriting, and knew not by whom it was executed.⁸¹

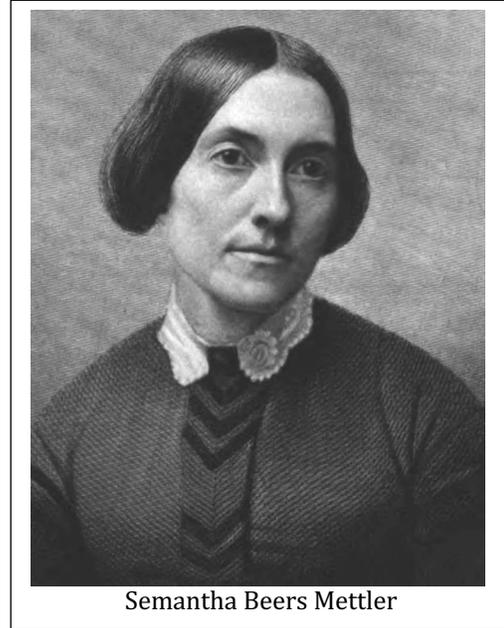
I perceive the writer to be a person possessed of much intelligence and purity of mind, and character. The character is opened and revealed, for in every act and deed he expresses the beauty of his character and intellect. His sympathies are very strong and his benevolence broad and diffusive. He is a great admirer of Nature, for in it he seems to behold many beautiful truths. He appears extremely anxious and energetic, and the mind is engaged in that which has a tendency to elevate and purify the *soul*. This person reflects much and deeply, is an earnest inquirer after truth, desiring ever to walk in a way that conscience may approve. He possesses strong combative powers, and in argument would sustain himself well. He has strong powers of concentration, and in any thing upon which the mind is fixed and interested, he becomes *much* abstracted. He relies mainly upon his

⁸⁰ *Spiritual Telegraph*, 20 November 1852. Note that this reading was done shortly after Spear converted to Spiritualism—at first, coming out as a spiritual healer under the guidance of spirits—and therefore mostly known to the public at this time for his philanthropic work among prisoners and the poor, and before he had become notorious for his practical spirit-guided projects.

⁸¹ Semantha Mettler (1818-1880) was an early spirit medium, based in Hartford, Connecticut, who specialized in healing by the power of spirits. Her practice included long distance diagnosis (and the marketing of her own brand of elixirs), which necessitated her ability to see into her patients, allegedly by way of close contact with their locks of hair or samples of their writing sent to her by mail. Nevertheless, I think it is nearly impossible to believe that Mettler did not know well her fellow healing medium John Spear when she was offered the piece of writing by him that she “psychometrized” here. Nor is it difficult to imagine that she had some clue beforehand that it was his. Her fellow Spiritualist, Frances Harriet Green, wrote *Biography of Mrs. Semantha Mettler, the Clairvoyant* (New York: Harmonial Association, 1853).

own judgment and intuitions; believing himself capable of judging far better for himself than others can for him.

Filial and connubial affections are large. He has a great love for home, with strong social qualities—loves to mingle with society. He loves the intelligent. I should think this person, at times, was governed much by INTUITION. He seems to follow the dictates thus received; as the inner life governs his actions. He *can not* feel otherwise than kind toward every thing created. His attachments are very strong to friends, lasting and enduring. He feels *sensibly* that there is another life to live for; and not all acts of kindness and benevolence which he administers are confined to the present, but that there is something more beautiful and divine to be realized, by the sympathies formed in this sphere of action. Order, time and promptness, are *strong characteristics*. He seems to be a person that can form many very beautiful and original ideas, within himself. He has a strong memory, particularly of little incidents, and of historical reading. He is a *very* good judge of human nature, and would be looked up to much, by all who know him. The poor and degraded would find him a benefactor. His *moral, spiritual, and intellectual* qualities predominate, and his sphere is very agreeable.



Semantha Beers Mettler

APPENDIX 2

Spear Psychometrizes Helena Blavatsky

H. P. B. Psychometrized.⁸²

In turning over an old box of papers the other day I came across my notes of a psychometrical reading of H. P. B.'s character by the late John Murray Spear, who for many years practiced the art of Psychometry as a profession. He was calling on us in New York one evening, and, at my request, gave the subjoined reading, I, writing out his remarks from dictation. The matter possesses the interest which attaches to all attempts to delineate the wonderful character of our great departed colleague. It is not so good or accurate, I think, as it would have been had Mr. Spear psychometrized a bit of her writing enclosed in a sealed envelope and handled elsewhere than in her room and presence.⁸³ It has a certain tone of flattery and exaggeration due, of course, to the overmastering influence of her magnetic personality on his sensitive temperament. However, it is best that it should be placed on record, and so I give it verbatim.

Mr. Spear said:—

“You have more knowledge than you can use. Things come to you like flashes sometimes; at others, like a flowing stream, and you seem to be able to give forth what comes to you, as a stream flowing from your being. You have the power of concentration. You can, as it were, gather from the four corners of the earth what you have seen, what you know, and you can compress it into a sentence. You belong to the nomadic class. You don't know anything of home. You don't care to know anything about home, because your home is the Universe. Wherever there is work for you to do, there is your home. You are born to direct; born to rule; and what you want is to gather around you some of the mightiest intellects of modern times, and you will charge them with the elements that are in your

⁸² Henry Steel Olcott, “H. P. B. Psychometrized,” *The Theosophist*, 17.4 (January 1896): 205-206.

⁸³ I believe Olcott means to suggest here that it would have been more convincing as a demonstration of Spear's psychic abilities if he had not been face to face with Madame Blavatsky. As it was, what would later be called “cold reading” and some previous knowledge of her background could be the sources for Spear's insights, such as they were.

being, and work through them as a sovereign works through his ministers. And yet you have the simplicity of a child. You can do the most menial services, if it is required of you, and feel that the little things you do are often the greatest. You seem to be divested of selfishness, in the ordinary sense of that term. You seem to live for others—for what religionists would call “the glory of God,” but you regard it as glory to man. You see that what the world needs is a knowledge of substantial facts, and on these facts to build a philosophy. And you take into that philosophy the Occult Sciences—you are as familiar with them as a financier with stocks; the merchant with trade; and you are the mightiest when you are apparently the weakest. If persons tread upon you, you come forth in a grand way, and you defy the world. You are immortal and know you cannot die. You belong to a class of persons—your ancestors—who have occupied positions of a most important character in the church, in the state, in the world; and if it were possible to run back—to inspect the events of the past, it would be seen that you are of royal descent. These nobles stand behind you, and, so to speak, the sap of their being re-appears in you. You live, and do not live—that is, the living world cannot see you. You live in your own way; you enjoy your own life; walk on your own feet; conceal yourself when you choose. You are very magnanimous—grieved sometimes you are, but do not cherish feelings of animosity to any living being. You see God in everything: in the claw of an eagle and in the animaculæ. You don’t care where you see Him—in what form He appears, how long He has lived, where He resides; these are not questions that concern you; but that which does concern you is the development of the common humanity; and to that work you have consecrated yourself. You withhold nothing. You cannot be appreciated to-day. When you shall have passed out of the mortal form, and the historian shall have gathered up the facts, then the world will regret that it did not know you. You have lived before. This is to you only one of a series of lives. You know it must be so, and therefore have but little anxiety for the future; rejoice in what you can do in the present. A wonderful Horoscope is yours! Whoever shall be able to accurately sketch that, will find it different in several respects from others. You have your own house. There are several aspects that can be described with wonderful accuracy. You look, as it were, through a clear glass—see the future, behold the present, and know what the past must have been. The spirit often is willing, while the flesh is sometimes weak. You can not do all you desire. If you had your true name you would be called *The Orientalist*.

You have more Oriental knowledge than any person with whom you ordinarily converse. It seems to come to you naturally. You seem to luxuriate in it, and seem to see its relations to the future of Humanity.”

In certain details, Mr. Spear has in the most extraordinary way hit upon aspects of H. P. B.’s occult history, but I cannot particularize to the general public.

H. S. O.

APPENDIX 3

Simon Crosby Hewitt's Description of the New Motor (Parts 1 and 2 of three parts)

History of the New Motive Power.⁸⁴

Number One.

THE MACHINE.

Almost the first question asked by those who may have read our *Announcement of THE NEW MOTIVE POWER* in No. 24, or who may have incidentally heard of the existence of such a thing, is, "What is the *Form* of the machine?"—Another question is, "How *Large* an instrument is it—how much room does it occupy?" And a third query is, "Does it still continue to *Move*?"

We have thought it might be as well as any way, to make the present, and perhaps one or two succeeding numbers, to consist mainly at least, of answers to these questions. And then in future numbers, trace the *History* of this New Creation, from its incipient stages, up through its various and interesting steps of progress—marking its wonderful *CRISES* as we proceed, and giving our readers some pretty fair view of the *WHOLLY NEW PHILOSOPHY* which this Motive Power embodies and illustrates.

1. WHAT IS THE FORM OF THE MACHINE?—Without diagrams, it is somewhat difficult to give the reader an accurate idea of its form; yet in their absence we will endeavor to do the best that we can. And here we may remark, that some persons, having heard of the *correspondence* to the Human Form, yet it is *only* CORRESPONDENCE. The *principles* involved, are the same as those of the Human Body, *so far as* MOTION is concerned—nothing farther than this, so far as *we* are at present made aware. Seeming intimations of something additional to the qualities of *motion*, have at various times been made, but we do not yet see any *principle* or any exhibition of anything additional. And we

⁸⁴ *The New Era; or, Heaven Opened to Man*, May 3, 1854.

must, of course, keep within the bounds of our own apprehensions in making these statements.

But to come directly to the point of Form: the main part of the instrument—the GRAND NUCLEUS of it—is a CIRCULAR TABLE. This is made of Black Walnut, about three and a half feet in diameter, with five legs—the centre leg being larger than the rest, and each of them perfectly *insulated* by large glass balls. On the top of the table, and in its very center, is firmly bolted an oval platform of neatly finished cast iron, whose average diameter is perhaps not far from seven inches, and whose thickness is about half an inch. This Platform, near its two oval extremes, takes two uprights, close at the top of which are two steel thumb screws, which in their turn suspend two cast iron balls, about one and a half inches in diameter, which form the extreme ends of a steel shaft, some eight or ten inches long, and half an inch through. Through the center of this shaft, passes an arbor of steel, about half the size, and of the same length. The points of the thumb screws take the ends of this shaft, and thus the balls are suspended for rotary motion. In the very extremes of these balls, are two very peculiar MAGNETS. After entering the surface of the balls, they become *wedge-like*, and the internal end comes to an *edge*, which is not far from three eighths of an inch long. This edge of the magnet RUNS EXACTLY NORTH AND SOUTH—the reason of which, the reader will apprehend, when the grand PRINCIPLE of the whole matter is fully stated and illustrated. Two other magnets, of somewhat peculiar form, are included in the Balls. And then, at the exact center of the rotary motion—the point where the shaft and the arbor come together, there is a peculiar *insulation*. It is effected by the insertion of a small *tube of zinc*, with a *plug of gutta percha*, the design of which would seem to be, *to turn the current* which is the moving power.

Passing down a little it may now be said, that the oval iron Platform before described has its immediate surface covered with a *plate of zinc*, of precisely the same shape. Then around the edge of the Platform, runs a zinc hoop, which, at its upper edge enfolds the zinc plate. A similar *copper* arrangement comes next in order, covering the whole zinc arrangement. And then immediately above these, rests a Plate Magnet, a trifle larger than, and of the same shape as, the copper, zinc and iron arrangement underneath it. This Magnet is held down in close contact with the Platform and its appendages, by a copper fastening on the *north* side, and a *steel* one on the *south*, both of which are held in

their places by wedge-like keys on the under side of the table. There is, however, this difference in them, that while the copper one *ends* a short distance from the under side of the table, the steel one is continued by a square iron rod, of several feet in length, from the under surface of the table, down through the floor, some nine inches into a solid rock—the said rod terminating below, in a neat *wedge-like edge*, about an inch and a half long, surrounded by dry sand, and running EXACTLY NORTH AND SOUTH. This rod is called THE EVACUATOR.

Proceeding upward again to the surface of the Table, we may remark that it contains two steel bars an inch wide, and half an inch thick, very highly polished, and firmly bolted to the Table. They are some fifteen inches apart, and their ends terminate with a graceful and finished sweep in harmony with a *quarter round edge* of the Table. Just above these steel bars, and resting on their upper surface, are copper and zinc strips of the same width as the bars, but several inches longer, and bending gracefully over the edge of the Table, rounded at the ends, and finally terminating in four steel balls, an inch in diameter, suspended by copper and zinc chains. The strips of copper and zinc are held in their places, by copper and zinc lappets near the ends of the steel bars. These bars with their copper and zinc appendages run with the grain of the Table, as nearly as possible, and range exactly with the Magnetic Currents, or, in other words, correspond with the Magnetic Needle—the *copper* strip being on the *West* side of the Table and the *zinc* one on the *East*, (the reader will please bear this arrangement in mind for future use) and these bars, with their copper and zinc coverings, are called ABSORBERS. The steel balls suspended at the ends of the copper and zinc strips are called CONTROLLERS.

Midway north and south, on the West side of the West or Positive Absorber, rises a slight copper Standard some five inches high, with a slight incision near the top, through which a small copper wire passes, terminating with a steel ball a little below the edge of the Table on the West side, and so passing upward and connecting with an important arrangement above the Motor Balls already delineated, which connection and arrangement will be described in its proper order. The copper Standard already spoken of, comes as near the positive Absorber as it possibly can and not touch—it is a very delicate arrangement. From the copper wire, at its point of contact with the Standard, runs a small copper chain, gracefully curving, till it terminates in a closely-fitting copper ring around the

West Upright of the Platform, and *between* the copper and zinc plates which cover it. This, too, is one of the nicest arrangements of the whole Machine. On the East side of the Table, which is the Negative one, there is a similar arrangement, with these two differences—viz.—the metals are *zinc* instead of copper, and the zinc ring, which terminates the zinc chain around the East Upright, is placed *under* both the copper and zinc plates, instead of *between* them, as in the case of the Positive side.

In concluding this part of the Mechanism, we may mention two additional arrangements of some importance, though they seem somewhat incidental to other parts—these are, first, two oblong, round magnets, which are inserted in the top of the Uprights, and through which, near their upper ends, pass the Positive and Negative Wires which go through the copper and zinc standards, and terminate in small steel balls below the Table. The second of these additional arrangements, is the Southern Magnet (so called) which passes from the very center of the large Plate Magnet, to the steel Fastening, before described (which Fastening, by the way is a *magnet*). The northern end of the Southern Magnet, is sharp, like a knife—the southern end is about three-eighths of an inch square. The reason of this shape, is simply one of accommodation to the peculiar form of the upper surface of the Plate Magnet, on which the Southern Magnet lies, and under the circumstances, allow the Rotary Balls to perform their revolutions, without obstruction.

And now, in finishing the present number we may observe, that the part of the Mechanism thus far described, *Corresponds* to the ABDOMINAL REGION OF THE HUMAN BODY. And as in the Human Organism, there would be no digestion, without the whole DIGESTIVE APPARATUS, so without this part of the ELECTRICAL MOTOR, there would be NO MOTION.

History of the New Motive Power.⁸⁵

The Great Spiritual Revelation of the Age

Number Two.

⁸⁵ *The New Era; or, Heaven Opened to Man*, May 10, 1854.

THE MACHINE – CONTINUED.

In NUMBER ONE, a hint was given of an important arrangement above the Motor Balls; that arrangement will be the next thing, in order, to be delineated. In the first place, then, a copper rod, three eighths of an inch in diameter, loops into a copper bolt, which, in its turn, screws into the ceiling of the room in which the Focal part of the machine stands, i.e., that part already described, including the portion we are now introducing. At the point where the hook of the rod meets the loop of the bolt, there is *perfect insulation*; and from that point, the rod descends within almost a hair's breadth of the Motor Balls, when they stand at their highest point, in making their revolutions.

This copper rod suspends four copper, and eight zinc plates, of an oblong shape, about fourteen inches one way, by eighteen inches the other, and separated from each other about one and one half inch. They are arranged in the following order: Within a quarter of an inch or so, of the bottom of the copper rod, an eighth of an inch incision is made, into which a small bolt is thrust, and two *zinc* plates rest upon it, ranging their longest way North and South. Then about one inch and one half above, comes another incision, with a copper bolt, on which rests a *copper* plate of the same dimensions, but ranging lengthwise, from West to East. And so the Plates come alternately—two zinc, and one copper, till eight sections of them are filled – each double Plate (so to say) of zinc, resting on an *iron* bolt, and each single plate of copper resting on a copper bolt. Moreover, the two zinc plates of each section, stand somewhat angling, in relation to each other—the corners presenting as many *points* as possible. (This fact may be somewhat significant to the scientific mind, and should be kept in remembrance for the future.) The several sections of plates are kept from touching each other – as they bend over at their extremities—by small pieces of glass; and they were chemically prepared in three different ways, at somewhat distant intervals. These plates are called CONDENSORS.

Underneath the Condensers, run the Positive and Negative, or copper and zinc wires, which terminate with the small steel balls (alluded to in *Number One*) through the upper ends of the oblong round magnets, (also spoken of in Number One) and into the lower incisions in the suspended copper rod. The two ends of these small, but important

wires, meet exactly and snugly in the center of the diameter of the copper rod, and are firmly keyed there—the copper one with a copper key, and the zinc one with an iron key. This is a third most important and delicate arrangement.

Proceeding now a step farther, we may remark, that around the lower extremity of the copper rod is a slight steel ring, coming down flush with the end of the rod, being fastened to it by a very slight steel bolt, which is magnetized. Through this steel ring—passing vertically—are four small incisions, into which pass small steel magnetized wires, from a very curious magnetic and electrical arrangement above. These wires pass through the Condensors, very near the suspended copper rod, but *without touching it*, and end below, even with the under surface of the steel ring. They correspond to the NERVOUS ORGANISM OF THE NECK.

And now it may be said, that, with very slight exceptions, at least, if any, the part of the mechanism, thus far described in this Number, (in accordance with the Law of Correspondence, as applicable to this Machine) CORRESPONDS TO THE BRAIN, i.e., in its relation to that part described in *Number One*. And as the Brain of the Human Body *condenses* vitality from outside nature, through various channels of reception, that it may have a competent command of all the other organs of the body, as well as of itself, so also the Brain of this part of this New Motive Power performs a similar, or analogous function, in its own proper sphere of action. Or, to use a simple *figure*, and not an *exact correspondence*, it may be said, that the Condensors, etc., supply the place of a *floom* [sic], which contains a large quantity of water, always on hand for direct and immediate use.

But leaving now, this part of the matter, let us pass down again, and note what some might feel disposed to call an inferior part of the Motor—i.e., those who make the Brain everything, and the feet and legs nothing, or next to that—the *head* saying to the *foot*, “I have no need of thee.” Running from the center of the oval iron Platform, already described—coming in close contact with the said Platform, and at the same time touching the copper and zinc hoops, of which we have before spoken, on their lower edge—and withal being kept in their proper places by the copper and steel fastenings which hold down the copper and zinc arrangement, over and around the Platform, are two strips of copper and zinc, which pass midway, on the very surface of the Table, between the two Absorbers, North and South—(the copper towards the North, and the zinc towards the

South) over the edge of the Table, and under it to the Center Leg. They then coil *spirally* around that leg, from top to bottom—one between the other—making a long double Spiral of copper and zinc, whose two lower ends terminate near the top of the large glass ball which forms the center Insulator. These ends are perforated with a square incision, and the copper one has a copper fastening, and the zinc an iron one. These copper and zinc strips are about one half inch wide, and made of common sheet copper and zinc. They *correspond* to the TWO LEGS OF THE HUMAN BODY—the copper to the *right* leg, which is *positive*, and the zinc to the *left* one which is *negative*.

Before passing on to the other main parts of the mechanism, we may here supply a slight omission in *Number One* of this series—we mean the connexions between the grand central arrangement and the Absorbers. These connexions are formed by strips of copper and zinc, which run from the Platform in the center, in an angular direction, till they come near the ends of, and into close connexion with, the Absorbers. There are two of these strips only—a copper one in the South—leading to the Positive Absorber, and a zinc one on the North—leading to the Negative Absorber. These Conductors, not only come into close contact with the Platform, but also with all its immediate apparatus, and also with the two copper and zinc strips with correspond to the Legs.

We come now to the great Magnetic and Electrical Conductor, which comes into contact with the suspended copper rod, already described, and passes horizontally fourteen feet, from the point of contact above noted, in a Southerly direction, and thence ascends, some twenty-five feet vertically—emerging, at last, some two feet above the extreme hight [sic] of the building where it is located, into the open air. The horizontal part of this Conductor is composed of copper and steel. The copper part is a round rod, half an inch in diameter, and connects at its Northern terminus with the vertical copper rod, which suspends the Condensers, near its upper end, or close to the point of insulation, as already described. At its Southern terminus, it takes the vertical part of the Conductor at right angles.

Around the copper, or Electrical part of the Conductor, and encasing it in an oblong square, are ranged four steel Magnets, each *fourteen feet long*. These magnets, at their Southern termination, come up snugly against the North side of the vertical Conductor—being held in that position by a nut on the Southern end of the ascending rod. This

ascending conductor is made of soft iron, and consists of three parts, and is screwed together at the ends of its several parts. Its form is square; and it gradually increases in size, as it ascends, so that its last and highest section is very nearly twice as large as its first and lowest one. At its upper extremity, it terminates in an iron and steel HAND. This hand has three FINGERS of steel—each of the upper ends of which, terminates in three very delicate points. And these fingers are very hard, and highly polished. They screw very neatly into a piece of soft iron, whose shape is very nearly the form of the palm of the human hand from the fingers to the wrist; and the lower terminus of this hand screws into the upper end of the iron rod, or Conductor below, at a point which corresponds to the wrist. The vertical part of this Conductor passes through two stories, and part of a third—it consequently passes through two floors and a roof. At each of these points, and above each floor and the roof, it takes a case-hardened iron plate magnet. There are three of these of different sizes—the largest being at the bottom, and the smallest at the top. There is a similar magnet—though smaller still—above the floor, around the EVACUATOR.

Passing up again, to within some forty inches of the very top of the Prime Conductor, we have the commencement of a very curious Magnetic arrangement. In the first place, comes a permanent steel magnet, twelve inches long, and three fourths of an inch square. This runs horizontally towards the Magnetic North—coming in close contact, at its South end, with the iron conductor, and kept snugly in its place by a U Magnet, which clasps both the conducting rod, and the twelve inch magnet together. In the second place, we have a permanent steel magnet, thirty-five inches long, and seven eighths of an inch square. This takes the twelve inch one at right angles, and passes vertically through the roof of the building, to precisely the same height [sic] as the Conducting iron rod; and then into the top of this large magnet, screws another Hand just like the former—excepting that these fingers are permanent magnets, while the others are not. This second Hand stands just as high as the first, and *exactly North* of it. And the whole arrangement, first described, is called THE FEEDER.

Starting now from the topmost connexion of this Conductor with the building—including the Feeder—and passing down to its opposite extreme, we find it *insulated* at every point, so that no part of the mechanism can be said to touch the building, except through the agency of INSULATORS.

We have now arrived at the vestibule of the Great Positive Force of the New Motive Power, but the reader must wait a little for the same point of the *Negative* one, before he will be able to see very clearly, the exact *Principle* from which Motion comes. As Nature never moves with orderly and worthy effect, by a single power alone, so any attempted copy of Nature for the attainment of mechanical force, must, in order to be successful, ever embody principles in perfect accord with the DUAL NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE AND OF DEITY.

Number Three will treat of the LUNGS and HEART, together with their appurtenances. It will also illustrate more definitely, the nature and correspondence of the Great Positive Force, spoken of above, and answer the second and third questions raised at the beginning of Number One.