

The Mental Mechanism of Dr. Sivartha



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I see a picture of a mind that has tried to draw itself. That mind is mysteriously enfleshed in a brain, and so has a form that has been dissected into parts, each of which has a name, a location, a specific function, and a spatial relation to every other part. All the parts, taken together, form a working association. The form and function of the brain impresses its signature upon the body it inhabits, and so makes the body a text that can be read with a key to the code.

The drawing is entangled with the mind that has drawn it. It is a self-portrait and a map. It is a guide to the brain as well as to the mind with which it is co-extensive. But it is more than that. It is also a guide to the universe, co-extensive with the mind of God. Its form is iterated at every scale, from the cosmos as a whole down to a single atom. It is a vast adumbrated and moving armillary sphere, enclosing other replicated spheres inside it, all dancing in synchronized harmony. Wheels within wheels—*rota in medio rotae*—and every wheel is alive with flame.¹ That is the mind drawn here. It encompasses and sets afire each glimmering atom as well as the entire shimmering universe. It was drawn and published by a man who gave himself the name of Arthur Merton. Later, he would call himself Alesha Sivārtha.

On Wednesday, June 29, 1870, Oliver Wendell Holmes, the physician, essayist, and poet, delivered an address entitled “Mechanism in Thought and Morals” to the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard College. He described once having experimented on himself by inhaling “a pretty full dose of ether, with the determination to put on record, at the earliest moment of regaining consciousness, the thought I should find uppermost in my mind.” Under the drug’s influence, he felt like an archangel. “The veil of eternity was lifted,” said Holmes, and “the one great truth which underlies all human experience, and is the key to all the mysteries that philosophy has sought in vain to solve, flashed upon me in a sudden revelation.” As he came out of his induced euphoria, he found the presence of mind to write

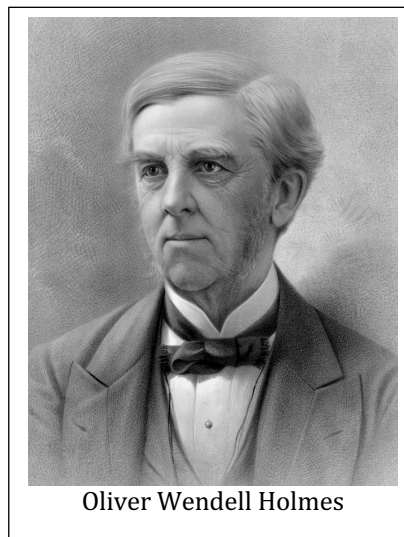
¹ “... and their appearance and their likeness was as it were a wheel in the midst of a wheel.” Ezekiel 1:16.

down the revelation in words. They were “A strong smell of turpentine prevails throughout.”²

The anecdote allowed Holmes to point to the enigmatic intertwining of the mind and the material body. Under ether, everything became a sign of everything else. A vast ocean of meaning opened up into the mind’s view and he embarked upon it driven by the burning power of unchained analogical links. Then Holmes remarked:

I have no doubt that there are many ill-organized, perhaps over-organized, human brains, to which the common air is what the vapor of ether was to my mind: it is madness to them to drink in this terrible burning oxygen at every breath; and the atmosphere that enfolds them is like the flaming shirt of Nessus. ...

What happens when one idea brings up another? Some internal movement, of which we are wholly unconscious, and which we only know by its effect. What is this action, which in Dame Quickly agglutinates contiguous circumstances by their surfaces; in men of wit and fancy, connects remote ideas by partial resemblances; in men of imagination, by the vital identity which underlies phenomenal diversity; in the man of science, groups the objects of thought in sequences of maximum resemblance? Not one of them can answer. There is a Delphi and a Pythoness in every human breast.³



Oliver Wendell Holmes

A few months after Holmes’ address to his Harvard audience, the Freethought newspaper *The Boston Investigator* published a pamphlet entitled “The Mechanism of Thought,” written by Arthur Merton, the possessor of the mind that tried to draw itself.⁴ That mind was very much aflame, although whether it was so merely by the combustion of

² Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Pages from an Old Volume of Life* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884), 283-84.

³ Ibid. 284, 286.

⁴ Arthur Merton, *The Mechanism of Thought* (Boston: Boston Investigator, 1871).

the oxygen that fueled it, is doubtful. The intensity of that flame would spark fires in other sympathetic minds. In 1887, more than a decade and a half after Arthur Merton began publishing his thoughts, one of his disciples anonymously wrote “Sivārtha: A Sketch of His Life and Work.” Its form is hagiographical, but it pushes the boundaries of that genre, and carries its subject’s banner into the territory inhabited by such characters as Hercules and Loki. For our purposes, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

It is said that the child is father to the man. But in most cases the child does not seem to know it. The subject of our sketch forms a strong exception to that rule. Coming into the world in the year 1834, he found the religious atmosphere full of excitement in both Western Europe and America. The second coming of the Messiah was being everywhere discussed, in the pulpit and through newspapers. The Christian church was looking for a stupendous miracle. A few of the more philosophical ones, like Doctor Thomas Dick, of Scotland, thought that the millennium might come about through the vast increase of human knowledge and a spiritual growth among the people. On this more rational, and indeed more hopeful, side of the great question were the immediate friends of the young Sivārtha.

But his mind scarcely needed such a stimulus as this. For as soon as he was able to talk easily, he declared he was not a little boy, but a man. That he had lived on the earth a great many years before, and that now he had come here to do a work which was to reach through the whole world. This project involved nothing less than making anew all the institutions of society, its forms of government, the methods of labor, the shapes of the houses, and the whole conduct of life. How will you do all this? was a question constantly asked of the “little philosopher,” as they called him. I will study man, I will find out all about the mind and the body, and then I will know what to do. This was his answer. But many great men have tried all this and failed, continued the objectors. “Well they did not begin right, and they did not think straight,” was the ready answer; and one which Sivārtha still thinks was true.

In 1838 Sivārtha formed a complete plan for his whole course of life. He would first learn all the general sciences and master their great laws. He would master painting and drawing, so that he could make diagrams to illustrate his own discoveries. At twenty-five

he would commence the work of solving the great problems of the social life and destiny of man. This work would take several years, and then the rest of his life should be given to teaching and carrying the great truths into the practical life of the nations. He would learn oratory and rhetoric, for truth must be made attractive, and it had a right to be clothed in the most graceful and beautiful drapery that speech could furnish.

Such was the large and formidable plan which the boy of four years formed for himself, and which he afterwards faithfully followed. Nothing could ever tempt him or force him to swerve from it. At the present day many persons would have a ready explanation. They would say that some spiritual being inspired or impressed the child's mind with this plan. But Sivārtha himself always insisted that it was his own plan, that no one gave it to him, or suggested it in any part. At that time it was a common thing for him to see and converse with spiritual beings, as it has been ever since. His plans were opposed by all the people around—they all pronounced such plans to be foolish or impossible. The independent boy never sought advice from any one. If he failed, he alone would be responsible.

The family and friends often taunted him with the challenge, "If you were once a man, where did you live, and what was your name, and what did you do?" To these challenges he always had an answer: "Once I lived in a warm country where there were trees that sent their branches clear down to the ground, where they took root again. When I was thirty years old I preached to the people under such trees as that. My father was a prince, but he did not know how to make the people happy. I did not know much about it myself, but I tried to find out. My father called me Arddhi Chiddhi, and sometimes Sivārtha.⁵ But I would not be called by that name. I told the people to call me Gautama when I was preaching. I tried to put every thing I knew into the shape of a wheel, but I did not understand it then. I lived in a great many places; and a great while afterwards I lived in a country where there was deep snow in the winter, as there is here. Then I was a king, and my men met at a round-table. I made each one promise that he would never tell a lie,

⁵ "Arddhi Chiddhi" is Merton/Sivārtha's garble of "Arddha Chiddi," which, I think likely, he knew from reading John William Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), 66-67, where Draper provides a short resumé of the life of the Buddha. Merton admitted that Draper's work influenced his own.

to measure, and to classify all the facts observed, so that they could be readily used in making or in verifying discoveries.

With all this love of exactness, this sharp precision of thought, Sivartha was gifted with extreme sensitiveness to every form of beauty, to all poetry and inspiration. In all of his discoveries and plans the elements of beauty and of spirituality have the fullest recognition. The scenery of his childhood, lovely and picturesque, “Where flows the Medway smooth,” was a fitting stimulus to this intense artistic tendency.⁶

During the first year of Victoria’s reign Sivartha was brought to this country, and lived among the New England Christians. But the preachers and the deacons said that “he had religion in the natural way and did not need the ordinary conversion.”

In 1841 a mere chance threw into his hands a phrenological almanac. Somebody had given a lecture on the subject, some miles away, and he heard about it. Here was a new door opened, here was a coveted key to unlock man’s nature. With great eagerness he learned the definitions and locations, and set about making observations for himself. Seven years later he had procured elaborate works on this subject and on physiology, and long before his twentieth year he had read thirty thousand pages on these sciences, committing more than a thousand pages of it to memory. At sixteen he commenced public speaking, in the form of lectures and sermons. His prolific brush furnished him with abundant illustrations in the form of paintings. It furnished these for other lecturers also. Happily now, some of the paintings have been lithographed in colors, and are being rapidly distributed through the schools and colleges of the country. They all bear the impress of clear, original, and ingenious thinking. He had received the ordinary education of our medical colleges, but considered this only a trifling contribution to what he required.

The year 1859 witnessed the beginning of all his remarkable discoveries. He felt himself fully equipped for the work. He had trodden all the paths yet opened, from Thales and Aristotle down to Priestly, Humboldt and Fourier. He would be in no danger of wasting time in doing work which was already performed, or in speculations already

⁶ This suggests the county of Kent, although he claimed to have been born in Bristol. The phrase “Medway smooth ...” is from one of John Milton’s poems.

proved futile. He found, first, that the mental organs in the brain were all governed by the strict laws of geometry, and thus all mental action was brought within the clear field of mathematical demonstrations. To verify this law he not only measured the curves in a great number of human forms, but he examined and compared these curves and lines of structure in twenty thousand species of animals, and a hundred thousand species of plants. Other discoveries followed in quick succession. The law of classification; the colors of the nerve-spheres, radiating from the brain and body; the polar responses of all the faculties, with the musical chords governing them; the evolution from the base to the top of the brain, or the successive phases of history; and, greatest of all, the entirely new system of government and life based upon the complete nature of man. The full plan and meaning of the New Jerusalem were found seventeen years later. A new world of science was now opened for study. It was an unexpected world, too. For the boldest of scientific men did not dare to hope that the science of mind and of society would ever be reduced to the exactness of mathematics. Yet they should have expected this, for the prophets had foretold it all in mathematical figures.

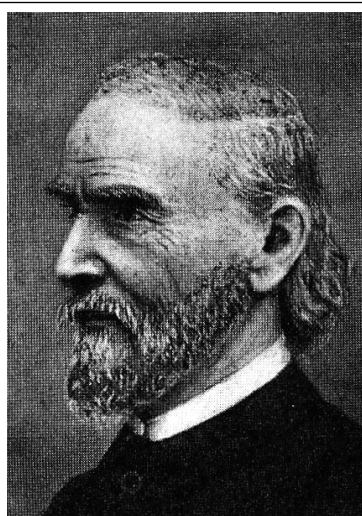
The seventh year after the first discoveries were made, Sivartha embodied them in a carefully written but still a condensed work, "The Book of Life." This was published in 1872, and has since passed through six editions. Although the author had at first recognized the fact that the New Jerusalem symbolized the mental constitution of both man and society, yet he did not perceive until 1878 that the parts of the great city had exactly the same arrangement and detailed significance as the groups of faculties. Thus he had reached what he regarded as the supreme altitude of his labors. It commanded the entire field of social science, of prophetic promises and of historic evolution. In the last of these phases of the subject, his latest work on "The Book of Life" was done in 1884, when he took up the vexed question of Chronology. As a result of the most complete examination of all the facts concerned, in geology, astronomy, and history, he came to conclusions quite at variance with the loose notions usually entertained by geologists in regard to the length of time belonging to the geologic ages and the date of man's first appearance on the earth.⁷ These conclusions are put forward by Sivartha

⁷ "B. C. E. 4124. Adam placed in Eden, and eats of the Tree of Life."

simply as hypotheses, yet no man living is better entitled to have an opinion of his own upon these questions.

Such is the character of Sivartha, as it appears to those most intimate with him personally, and as it has been described by the most eminent readers of character in this country. With thirty years more of active work before him, the world will, without doubt, be able to realize the varied extent, the honest thoroughness, and the practical value of his labors in the fields of science.

In personal appearance Sivartha stands above the average man, is slender and graceful, with brown eyes and brown hair, now sprinkled with grey. His features are



Arthur E. Merton

regular, strongly marked, and yet very delicate, mobile and expressive. His whole organism is marked by extreme mental and physical sensibility. His manners are dignified and bland, with that unobtrusive polish which comes from having seen much of the world. In conversing and in public speaking his language is graphic, fluent, and exact, without any superfluous words, and is always to the point. His intellect is marked by the capacity for the most minute analysis, no less than for the broadest and most exact generalization. He is a swift thinker, because his store of facts is always ready for use. But his unusually

large faculty of caution prevents him from forming hasty or inconsiderate judgments. His mind has an all-sided symmetry, so that nothing seems exaggerated and nothing omitted in his estimates and plans. To the mass of the people, this very balance of parts makes these plans seem less great than they really are.

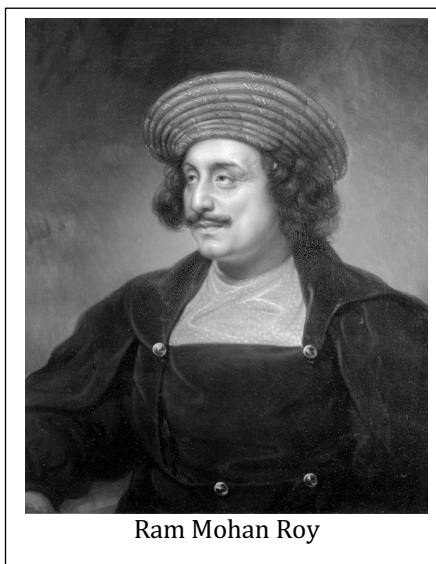
The work of verification in science is long and laborious. Sivartha now spent more than twelve years in the work of comparing critically the immense array of facts bearing upon each branch of his discoveries. Those who have listened to his course of thirty-five lectures in the School of Culture may realize a little of the vast field gone over in such an examination. His wealth of erudition is a constant surprise to the hearer. It is something more than encyclopedic, for he speaks as a master familiar through direct study with each branch of science, art, or history. During all the years since his important work

began, Sivārtha has been more or less before the public as a lecturer, in various colleges and on the rostrum. Everywhere, in public or in private conversation, we realize that he is THE TEACHER.⁸

I pass over the claim that Sivārtha was the reincarnation of Sivārtha Gautama with the simple observation that Buddhas do not reincarnate; that is the whole point of becoming a Buddha. (Merton first came out as “Sidarta” and then “Siddartha” before settling on “Sivārtha,” with some late swerves into “Swartha”). And I also pass over the claim that he was the reincarnation of Arthur Pendragon, King of the Britons, without comment except to say that this may have been the character from whom Sivārtha had appropriated the first part of his earlier name of Arthur Merton.

As eager as the disciple’s article is to garland its subject with wonders and miracles, it is curiously hesitant to unfold one other tale that Arthur Merton/Alesha Sivārtha told about his origins.

As an adult, Merton/Sivārtha would say he was born May 16, 1834 in Bristol, England, the unheralded offspring of the Indian politician, reformer, and educator Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Merton said that Pandit Roy, during his extended visit to England, where he died in 1833, had illicitly impregnated an English woman named Mary Merton. This Mary, whom our Merton alleged was descended from Walter de Merton, the founder of Merton College, Oxford, brought her son, the issue of this union, from England to America in 1837.⁹ It is not surprising that the author of the laudatory article about Sivārtha only alluded vaguely to this story, for if it were true, it would have soiled the reputation of the honored Pandit Roy and it would have made Sivārtha (not



Ram Mohan Roy

⁸ *The World’s Advance Thought* (Salem, Oregon) 2.1 (March 1887): 1.

⁹ For his claim about maternal descent from Walter de Merton, see Harold Hutchings, “Face Up to It: You May Win Job by a Nose!” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 January 1955.

to put too fine a point on it) a bastard. Yet Merton/Sivārtha persisted in the fiction throughout his life.¹⁰

I pass over this claim as I did the tales of the Buddha and of King Arthur. But this leaves us with a character who seems to have sprung fully formed from out of nowhere.

One pointer to his true past, however, is found in the U. S. passport issued to Alesha Sivārtha on December 30, 1889. On the application, Sivārtha solemnly swears that he was born in Rochester, New York, on May 16, 1834, and that his father was a native-born citizen of the United States.

We can go further. In 1888, a year after the glowing hagiography reproduced above, phrenologist Joseph Rodes Buchanan wrote a review of one of Sivārtha's later works. Buchanan was convinced that Merton/Sivārtha had appropriated and distorted Buchanan's own writings and discoveries, claiming them as his own, and had achieved some considerable financial success by doing so. Buchanan wrote:

[EDITION OF JULY, 1888.] [FORM FOR NATIVE CITIZEN.]

No. 11126. Issued Dec. 30/89

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

STATE OF Illinois. } ss.
COUNTY OF Cook.

I, Alesha Sivārtha a NATIVE AND LOYAL CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES, do hereby apply to the Department of State at Washington for a passport for myself, ~~and wife and my minor children, as follows:~~

~~born~~ on the 16th day of May, 1834, and

In support of the above application, I do solemnly swear that I was born at Rochester, in the State of New York, on or about the 16th day of May, 1834; that my father ~~was~~ is a native citizen of the United States; that I am domiciled in the United States, my permanent residence being at Chicago in the State of Illinois, where I follow the occupation of Publisher; that I am about to go abroad temporarily; and that I intend to return to the United States within three years with the purpose of residing and performing the duties of citizenship therein.

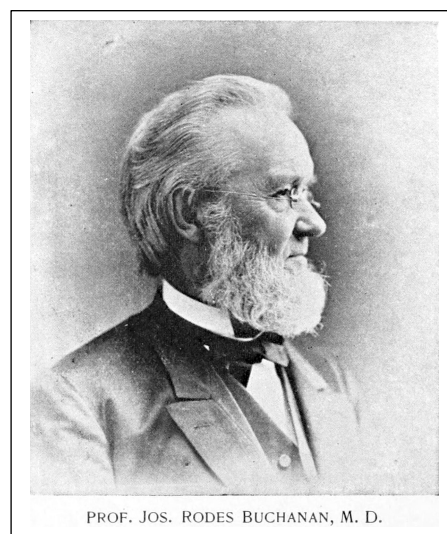
OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.

The reader may feel some curiosity to know who this individual is, who performs such literary tricks. He is rather an amusing specimen of the literary crank, who passes under various names. His original name is said to be Dodge, but he has long since dodged into the more romantic name of Arthur Merton; but that also has been laid aside as unequal to his high pretensions and he now presents himself as the re-incarnated Buddha, and calls himself Sivārtha and Siddārtha. In this book he presents his picture with his royal starry crown, in the clouds of Heaven, with his name as Prince—PR. ALSHAH SIDARTA, INCARNATED MAY 16, 6190, A. M., 1834, C. E. LIKENESS of 1884, by—. This is seriously his claim. He was re-incarnated, or, as common people say, born in the year 1834 of the

¹⁰ The federal censuses of 1880, 1900, and 1910 have him listed as having been born in England; in the 1900 and 1910 censuses, he listed his father as having been born in India and his mother as having been born in England.

Christian Era, or 6190 *Anno Mundi*, and consequently is fifty-four years old, or as Siddartha, anywhere from 2919 years, according to Chinese dates, to 4022 according to the old Mongolian opinion; but what he has been doing from the death of Buddha till 1834 he does not inform us. Will the believers in reincarnation accept him as a sample?

Being an experienced proficient in the art of puffing himself in the newspapers, he represents himself not only as a paragon of intellectual power, surpassing all the great philosophers before him, but as the great modern Messiah, the greatest of all Messsiahs, and in this volume he has a page or two devoted to showing who and what the Messiah must be, so as to fit the definition to his own conception of himself—"the Messiah is the founder of a universal and perfect system of life and government on this earth,"—this is what Prince Sidarta or Siddartha proposes to do.



PROF. JOS. RODES BUCHANAN, M. D.

Jesus, he says, failed as a Messiah, but the Messiah to come now is to come into the world by natural birth, like other men, and to show his superiority by great discoveries and great reforms—not at all by *love*—that is a vulgar mistake of the religious.¹¹

Although Buchanan wrote that a sketch of the personal career of Dodge-Merton-Sivarta would be "quite amusing," unfortunately he did not write one, for "such small game is not worth the ammunition." But he did give an essential clue to us. It was the name Dodge.

Was there a boy whose last name was Dodge, who was born in New York State around 1834? Yes, there was. That boy was Elisha Holmes Dodge, born on July 19, 1835. He was one of nine children of a farmer, Franklin P. Dodge (1804-1855) and his wife Mary (Andrus or Andrews) Dodge (1806-1883), neither of whom were English. Franklin was of Irish descent and had been born in Onondaga County, New York.¹² Mary was of a sturdy

¹¹ J. R. Buchanan, "Anthropology," *Buchanan's Journal of Man* 2.5 (June 1888): 152-54.

¹² Franklin Dodge was "killed in a well" in March 1855. Two of Elisha's brothers died in or immediately after the Civil War; another of his brothers, Leicester Burton Dodge, became a

New England lineage and had been born in Springfield, Massachusetts. She had married Franklin Dodge in August 1823. From the time of their marriage, they had resided in Canandaigua, New York, then almost certainly stopped in Rochester on their way west, across Lake Erie from Buffalo to the city of Commerce, Michigan, just west of Detroit, where they would appear in the 1840 census.

Elisha Holmes Dodge, who was named after Elisha Holmes, the husband of his mother Mary's sister Irene, was born just at the time that Franklin and Mary Dodge were transiting upstate New York on their way to Commerce. That fits Alesha Sivartha's passport



Mary Andrus Dodge

statement of his place of birth, Rochester. A couple of other facts reinforce the identification of Elisha Dodge with Arthur Merton: Elisha Dodge's mother was indeed named Mary, though she was neither English nor was she ever in England. There is also the similarity of the name Elisha to Alesha. "Arthur Merton," who we argue was Elisha Holmes Dodge, would name his firstborn son *Holmes* Whittier Merton, and when our subject died at the home of a daughter many years later, he was buried in that family's plot, and his memorial plaque would read "Arthur Elisha Henry Merton," so the name Elisha stuck to him all through

his life.

What we can say about the early life of Elisha Holmes Dodge amounts to very little. He grew up on his family's farm in Michigan. Assuming that he was the future "Arthur Merton," I turn to a part of Sivartha's hagiographical history, where he was said to have been "placed" among New England folks during his childhood, and that they had evolved from Congregationalist—that is, Puritan Calvinist—beliefs into Unitarianism. This would fit the maternal branch of Sivartha's kin.¹³ Mary Andrus' Massachusetts and Connecticut family, like many other New Englanders, were former Congregationalists (in her

Methodist minister, and another brother, James, first made his living as a blacksmith, but then became a physician of some kind.

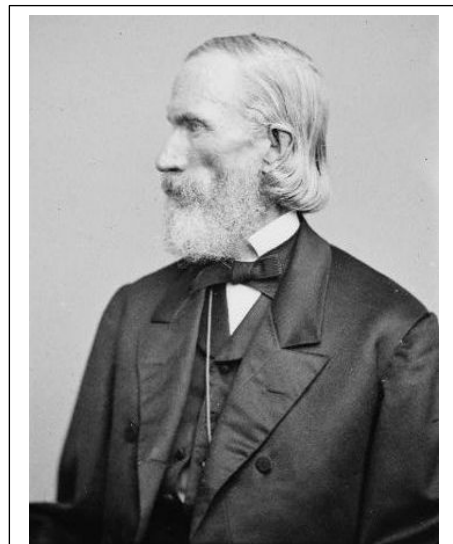
¹³ See Thaddeus D. Seeley, *History of Oakland County, Michigan*, volume 2 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 569-70.

grandfather's generation), but by the time Elisha Dodge was born, they had broken away. Many others in upstate New York during the late 1830s who were moving west across the Great Lakes to Michigan and beyond had embraced a belief that the Millennium was imminent. As Congregationalists who had become Unitarians, the Andrews may well have believed that end-times might come about by some such effort as was described by the Scottish Presbyterian minister and astronomer Thomas Dick, who endeavored to reconcile religion to science by arguing that his fellow believers, who were tied to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, ought to open themselves up to the study of science as well, for it would reveal the majesty of God's handiwork.¹⁴ It would be the work of science, in other words, to bring about the Millennium.

¹⁴ Thomas Dick, *The Philosophy of a Future State* (Glasgow: W. Collins, 1829) and *Celestial Scenery; or, The Wonders of the Planetary System Displayed* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838).

Phrenology: Form Equals Function

I have no reason not to accept another tidbit from Sivartha's hagiographical essay: that at age sixteen—in 1850 or so—he stumbled onto a work on phrenology and was captivated by it. He does not name the title, but there were many available, perhaps the most famous and consequential were Johann Gaspar Spurzheim's *A Sketch of the Natural Laws of Man* (1844) and George Combe's *The Constitution of Man in Relation to External Objects* (1835). Or, it may have been Orson Fowler's work, *Fowler on Matrimony; or Phrenology and Physiology applied to the Selection of Congenial Companions for Life, Including Directions to the Married for Living Together Affectionately and Happily*, first published by the brothers Orson and Lorenzo Fowler in 1841.



Orson Squire Fowler

More than likely, however, Sivartha's memorable, formative reading experience was with Lorenzo Fowler's *Illustrated Phrenological Almanac* (for the year 1850), a little issue charting moon phases, tides, and so on, but also including a section introducing phrenology and depicting anecdotes of individuals—good, bad, gifted, and deprived—that purported to prove the notion that character could be read from physiognomy. An immersion in the Fowlers' phrenological speculations, however, was also an introduction to other Progressive reformist notions of the time. These were reflected in the many books written by the Fowlers and others, which the brothers sent out into the world from Fowlers & Wells (Samuel Wells, their brother-in-law, was also a phrenologist), the publishing branch of their Phrenological Institute in New York City. Other subjects the Fowlers linked to phrenology included hydropathy ("the water cure"), dietary reform, mesmerism, marriage reform, woman's rights, domestic architecture, sex education, and social engineering.

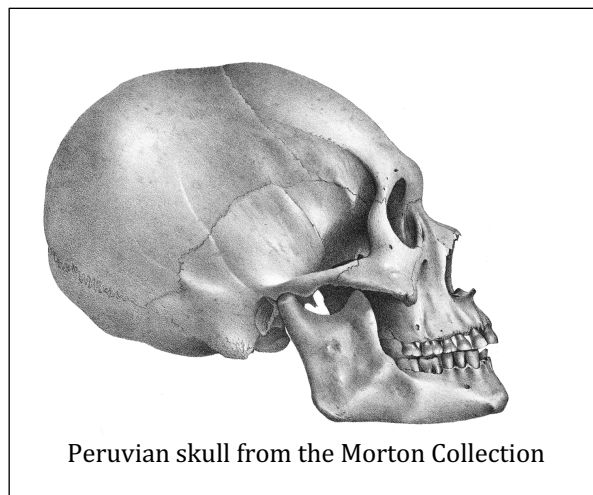
Phrenology was not simply about mapping out bumps on the head. It assumed a principle that was just as important: to submit human moral law to scientific investigation and clarification. Combe, for example, quoted with approval British geologist Adam Sedgwick to the effect that, “I do affirm, that the moral government of God is by general laws, and that it is our bounden duty to study these laws, and, as far as we can to turn them to account. ... If there be a superintending Providence, and if his will be manifested by general laws operating both on the physical and moral world, then must a violation of these laws be a violation of his will, and be pregnant with inevitable misery.”¹⁵ Phrenologists believed that the tools of science could and should be applied to morals, and that the results would yield more than nonsense.

Phrenology helped to popularize the idea that the thinking brain was not just a unitary lump, but was a cluster or ensemble of organs that were the seats of various mental functions. It ratified physiological experimentation that, in its more cautious form, was able to locate sites within the brain that controlled sensory-motor functions. But phrenology had much larger ambitions and made further alleged discoveries about the intracranial locations of complex capacities, propensities, and sentiments, including such things as benevolence, self-esteem, hope, wit, ideality, veneration, and love of approbation.

Because such things were located in supposedly defined regions of the skull, their size could be measured. Phrenologists reckoned that the capacities of single individuals as well of entire ethnic groups for things like benevolence and veneration could be calculated and ranked. The combined interactions of such sentiments in the brain, they believed, produced the full array of moral behaviors. This conviction motivated them to attempt to rank ethnic groups from lowest to highest, not just in their capacity for general intelligence, but also in their moral abilities. To do that, phrenologists marshaled supporting evidence—data on cranial capacity and the observations about stereotypical behavioral characteristics of various ethnic groups alleged by explorers, missionaries and travelers.

¹⁵ George Combe, *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects* (Boston: William Ticknor, 1835), x.

The Philadelphia physician and skull collector Samuel George Morton measured and published his findings of the cranial capacities of hundreds of skulls from around the world, drawing conclusions about the intelligence of various races, representative examples of whose skulls were in his vast collection housed at the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences.¹⁶ Morton also invited phrenologist George Combe, on tour in America in 1838-39, to remeasure with him a subset of these skulls (noting their ethnic origin) for the relative



sizes of the various locations of the phrenological categories in which Combe believed. They undertook the re-examination of the skulls and published the data in tabular form in Morton's 1839 *Crania Americana*, along with an essay by Combe.¹⁷

Cranial contour was measurable and fixed. For phrenologists, it therefore determined and predicted the individual's future. The advocates of phrenology, however, always regarded their "science's" implications as progressive. It may have been deterministic, but it also seemed to turn those human scientists who understood it into the determining masters of the evolutionary destiny of the race: Phrenologists' fundamental principle was "Form Equals Function," and so believed that a person's moral character was encoded in and upon the body and could be interpreted with exactness by reading its external signs. Therefore, it was possible to diagnose character and to compensate for deficiencies, and to guide the future by manipulating the material environment and the conditions that produced the physical forms (perhaps through changing the environment or prescribing a regimen of training). Thereby one could force the *moral* character to

¹⁶ His data have been much disputed over the years, most famously by Stephen Jay Gould in his 1981 book, *The Mismeasure of Man*.

¹⁷ George Combe, "Phrenological Remarks on the relation between the natural Talents and Dispositions of Nations, and the Development of their Brains," in Samuel George Morton, M. D., *Crania Americana; or, A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839), 262-91.

change for the better, if not in the present generation of individuals, then in the following ones through controlled breeding.

Phrenology assumed that the elevation of the human race depended on a variety of therapies, applied to the individual but also to society as a whole. One of its advocates, Dr.

NATIONS AND TRIBES.	Plate.	No. in Catalogue.	Amitiveness.	Philoprogenitiveness.	Adhesiveness.	Self-esteem.	Apprehensiveness.	Firmness.	Combativeness.	Veneration.	Hope.	Murderousness.	Ideality.	Reverence.	Causality.	Individuality.
Peruvian.	8 & 9	87	2.05	2.8	3.25	4.4	4.25	4.65	4.7	4.55	4.6	4.55	4.4	4.55	4.2	3.8
Peruvian.		100	2.	3.	3.4	3.95	4.	4.4	4.25	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.	4.4	4.2	3.8
Peruvian.		93	2.15	3.	3.3	4.2	4.2	4.85	4.7	4.8	4.6	4.55	4.3	4.7	4.4	4.
Peruvian.		403	2.25	3.1	3.6	4.2	4.1	4.7	4.45	4.8	4.6	4.4	4.25	4.75	4.3	4.
Peruvian.		96	2.2	3.4	3.5	4.4	4.3	4.6	4.45	4.5	4.4	4.35	4.1	4.5	4.1	3.7
Peruvian.		73	1.8	3.	3.5	4.45	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.65	4.55	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.3	4.
Peruvian, (Mound.)		68	2.2	3.5	3.9	4.5	4.65	4.9	4.8	4.85	4.7	4.65	4.4	4.85	4.4	4.15
Peruvian, (Mound.)	58	412	2.1	3.3	3.7	4.4	4.4	4.6	4.55	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.15	4.4	4.1	3.75
Chimuyan.	6	11	2.3	3.4	3.5	4.35	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.35	4.15	4.05	4.45	4.1	3.8
Mexican.	61	714	2.4	3.5	4.2	4.9	1.7	5.1	4.9	4.95	4.8	4.55	4.3	4.8	4.5	4.1
Mexican.	60	716	2.1	3.4	3.8	4.55	4.5	4.8	4.55	4.8	4.6	4.55	4.1	4.6	4.35	3.95
Mexican.	59	715	2.15	2.9	3.5	4.4	4.3	4.85	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.45	4.1	4.6	4.25	3.9
Mexican.	17	559	2.45	3.25	3.75	4.55	4.4	5.1	4.9	5.15	4.85	4.6	4.1	4.9	4.4	4.05

Detail from Combe's measurements in Morton's text

Thomas Low Nichols, in his 1853 book, *Esoteric Anthropology*, wrote, "The laws of the Grand Man, Society, are precisely analogous to those of the Individual. And society has its complex and beautiful Anatomy; its wonderful and mysterious Physiology, its terrible Pathology, and its simple and efficient Therapeutics."¹⁸ To those who were struggling against their inherited

Calvinistic determinism, which had no place in its economy of salvation for grace acting upon nature, phrenology opened up a conviction that man was a free agent and could direct and evolve his own destiny.

Oliver Wendell Holmes' father was a Congregationalist minister and had hoped his son would follow him into the ministry, but that did not happen. Holmes, early in his career, was skeptical of phrenology, but in his later years, mellowed in his judgment, reportedly writing in 1881, "We owe Phrenology a great debt. It has melted the world's conscience in its crucible and cast it in a new mould, with features less like those of Moloch and more like those of humanity."¹⁹ Here, whether Holmes was conscious of it or not, this Moloch resembles Calvin's implacable God. Holmes was suggesting that phrenology had spread the idea that humans are reformable by natural means. They are not helplessly predestined. Human actions are amenable to change and improvement by empirically measurable means, fashioned by ingenuity and science. Science gives Man a prevision of

¹⁸ Thomas Low Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology* (Port Chester, NY: 1853), 458.

¹⁹ Quoted in J. A. Fowler, "Is Phrenology a Dependable Science?" *The Word* 15.5 (August 1912): 306.

the future encoded in present signs, and he can guide his present actions toward or away from that future. Phrenology, in other words, is a form of augury. It establishes an elect of “seers” who have mastered the ability to look into the future and comprehend it. It seems give man back his free will. However, phrenology (and related progressive reforms) also forces upon man the urgent necessity to consider the future as a construction project and to recognize himself as its revelator and its remediator, its creator and instrument.

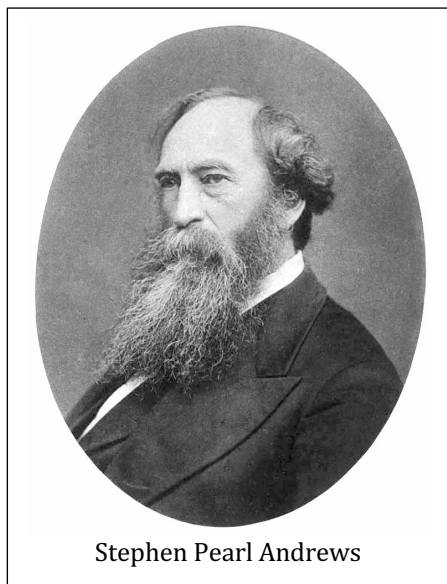
Holmes’ contemporary, James Russell Lowell, diagnosed the reformist itch of the times as an inherent effect of the Puritanism that both compressed minds into a system of helplessness against a God who moved humans like dolls “at His good pleasure,” and who also urged those same minds to revolt against traditional forms and expressions of authority as “idolatrous,” as every Protestant had proudly done. The whole system exploded under pressure and a frenzied rush to revolutionary reform began, which would make man the master of his future. As Lowell put it, in an article he wrote about Henry David Thoreau,

Everybody had a mission (with a capital M) to attend to every-body else’s business. No brain but had its private maggot. ... Some had an assurance of instant millennium so soon as hooks and eyes should be substituted for buttons. Communities were established where everything was to be common but common sense. ... All stood ready at a moment’s notice to reform everything but themselves.²⁰

The social reformers of the time were inclined to see their projects as the second wave of the Protestant Reformation, a wave so powerful that it would “perfect” Christian institutions and sources of authority by sweeping them away altogether under the principle of *private judgment*, or, as radical reformer and utopian socialist Stephen Pearl Andrews referred to it, “individual sovereignty.” In 1851, Andrews gave a lecture in which he tried to explain this to such timid souls as might still have wished to cling to the remnants of Christianity *per se* and hesitated, therefore, to join the socialist revolution:

²⁰ Quoted in Ferris Greenslet, *James Russell Lowell: His Life and Work* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), 38-9.

Protestantism, Democracy, and Socialism are identical in the assertion of the Supremacy of the Individual—a dogma essentially contumacious, revolutionary, and antagonistic to the basic principles of all the older institutions of society, which make the



Stephen Pearl Andrews

Individual subordinate and subject to the Church, to the State, and to Society respectively. Not only is this supremacy or sovereignty of the individual a common element of all three of these great modern movements, but I will make the still more sweeping assertion, that it is substantially the whole of those movements. It is not merely a feature as I have just denominated it, but the living soul itself, the vital energy, the integral essence or being of them all.

Protestants and Protestant churches may differ in relation to every other article of their creed, and do so differ, without ceasing to be Protestants, so long as they assert the paramount right of private or individual judgment in matters of conscience. It is that, and that only, which makes them Protestants, and distinguishes them from the Catholic world, which asserts, on the contrary, the supreme authority of the church, of the priesthood, or of some dignitary or institution other than the Individual whose judgment and whose conscience is in question.²¹

Andrews was by no means the only contemporary observer who saw the ultimate goal of the Protestant Reformation to be the actual undoing of the Church in favor of a State whose authority was entirely vested within itself, in the mystical person of “the People” whose voice and will was that of God. Former progressive radical Orestes A. Brownson had realized the same thing, but he had drawn back from what he recognized as an abyss and had converted to Catholicism. He published an essay, entitled “Protestantism Not a

²¹ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Science of Society—No. 1. The True Constitution of Government in the Sovereignty of the Individual as the Final Development of Protestantism, Democracy, and Socialism* (New York: W. J. Baner, 1851), 12-13.

Religion,” a couple of years after Andrews’ lecture, in which he made essentially the same point:

Refute any Protestant doctrine, save the denial of submission to authority, and you affect no one’s Protestantism. The Protestant may abandon the doctrine refuted as indefensible, and strike it from the list of genuine Protestant doctrines; but he is no less, in fact he is even more, of a Protestant than before. Protestants have given up, one after another, all the points principally discussed in the outset between them and Catholics, but they are just as well satisfied with their Protestantism as ever they were, and as ready to proclaim the transcendent merits of their glorious reformation. All this proves that the peculiarly Protestant doctrines, the theological doctrines, the special heresies, at first promulgated and insisted on, were mere accidents in the movement, and by no means essential elements of Protestantism. Protestants did not break from the church for the sake of liberty to hold and preach their heresies, but they held and preached their heresies as the means of enabling them to break from the church; or to crush the church that they might revel in freedom from all spiritual authority, and live as they listed, without any one to call them to an account.²²

That was one view—not the only one; there continued to be plenty of reformers who believed they could reconcile Christianity with socialism—but the socialists of the time who held this post-Christian perspective (and who recognized that the fissiparous nature of Protestantism was a feature of the principle of private judgment) generally believed that the result would not be a chaotic anarchism. The old structures of authority would be replaced by a socialist State engineered on scientific principles. That State would be omniscient and omnipotent. It would guide and regulate all aspects of individual life. It would replace all other levels of authority—the family, the community, the nation, the church, the political party. Because it would be constructed on the natural principles discovered and organized by science, the individual would flourish in harmony with those

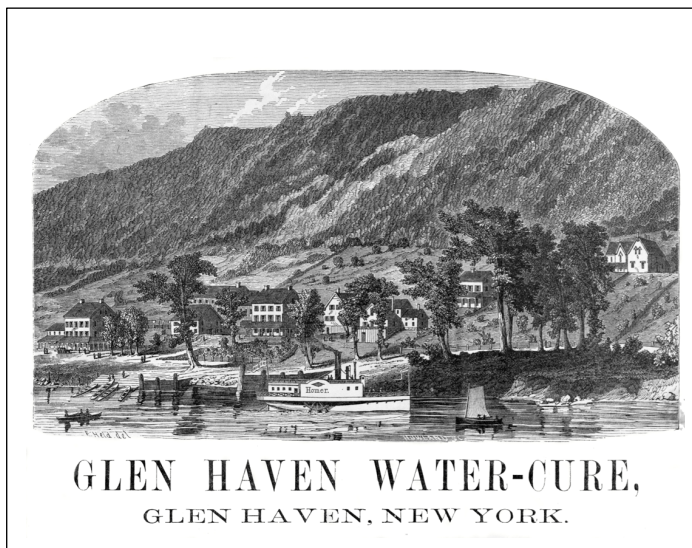
²² Orestes A. Brownson, “Protestantism Not a Religion,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, 3rd series, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1853): 97.

principles. No mere anarchy would be possible because every individual's natural impulses and desires, already naturally reformed within society, would fit perfectly into the possibilities that society would have naturally anticipated and provided for or required. Adjustments would be made to meet that future perfection in which the individual and society would work together seamlessly. Individuals would have to undergo therapeutic "crises"—physical or psychical—as would societies as a whole, in which toxic, retrograde elements would be purged.

In other words, individual sovereignty would be perfect in a society that had eliminated individuality. Private judgment would be perfectly possible in a society where there was no privacy. Free will would be made perfect when each one's will aligned with that of the whole. It is no wonder that schemes for such utopian societies seemed to most people to be inherently impossible, based on a precarious science—like models of perpetual motion machines or towers of Babel—but fatally flawed because the science on which they were built was at least incomplete, if not profoundly incorrect, and thus inhumane. It was a problem for which Arthur Merton would come to believe that he had found a solution.

From Elisha Dodge to Arthur Merton

On July 16, 1853, the nineteen-year-old Elisha Holmes Dodge married Martha Judd. She was a thirty-one-year-old woman from Commerce, who had recently returned to Michigan, having completed a two-year nursing apprenticeship at the Water Cure establishment at Glen Haven near Skaneateles, New York, under Dr. James Caleb Jackson, a nationally known hydropath, the inventor of dry breakfast cereal (“granula”), and the editor of *The Water Cure Journal*.²³ If the difference in ages seems somewhat unusual, we must assume that the pair had measured their compatibility under the principles outlined in the phrenological literature and had determined they were a good match for each other. Orson Fowler had written, “Select a companion whose feelings, sentiments, objects, tastes, desires, and intellectual and moral qualities harmonize with your own, at least in all their leading elements. That is, select one for a companion whose *temperament and phrenological developments* nearly agree with your own organization.”²⁴ In September 1854, in Commerce, Martha gave birth to their daughter, Cornelia Stella Dodge.



If marriage was viewed under what the reformers, including phrenologists, regarded as a higher (meaning natural) law, its social expression was binding only as the result of the mutual harmony of a couple’s respective temperaments. It followed that when that harmony of temperament abated, the institution that yet bound the two together was contrary to nature and their marriage was no longer in effect. This was the reasoning that justified the doctrine of Free Love. Any law that sought to maintain the union of

²³ On Martha Judd at Glen Haven, see “To the Readers of the Journal,” *Water-Cure Journal* 14.5 (November 1852): 123.

²⁴ Orson Squire Fowler, *Fowler on Matrimony* (Philadelphia: O. S. Fowler, 1841), 15.

unharmonious couples was a trespass upon their freedom and an outmoded and repressive social structure. Conversely, any sexual intercourse was pure if it was between people in harmony with each other. The institution of marriage had nothing to do with it. As Sivartha would later explain, “Purity is in the right and normal use of any organ, not in its disuse, or suppression. It is a positive and active, not a negative quality. ... We must not define sexual purity as the absence of all sex-relations. Nor must we imagine that an external ceremony is sufficient to secure purity here.”²⁵

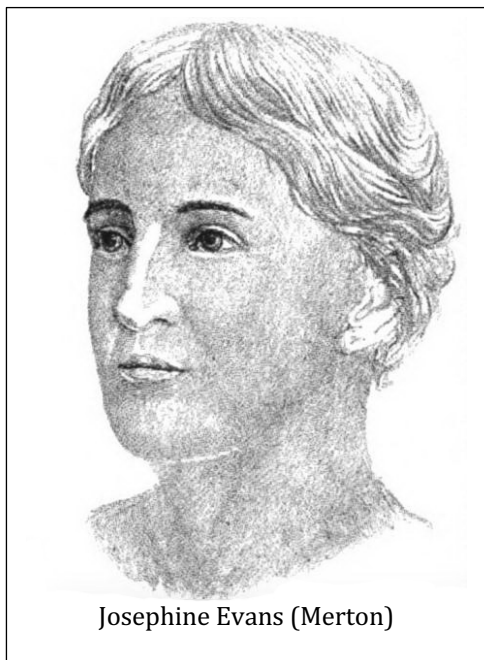
In 1856, Martha Dodge was “widowed,” as her later obituary would put it, which meant, in plain language, that her husband Elisha abandoned her and their daughter, and walked out of her life, into a new one altogether, for which he adopted an entirely new name, Arthur Merton.²⁶ His change of name, of course, made it possible for him to elude his birth and married families’ efforts to trace him. The Dodge family’s bible, owned by his mother Mary, has inscribed in it that he died on February 1, 1878, which was likely the day the family finally abandoned hope of finding him.²⁷ As for Dodge/Merton, he seemed to regard changing his name as the token of a new destiny. He would later write, “A name may act either as a blessing or as a curse. It may degrade, or, it may elevate the wearer. Half the names given in Christendom are blank lies, and their owners despise the cognomens they wear.” He then listed several famous people who had changed their names and remarked, “No one could accuse these people of evil intentions or motives. They simply had a little more conscience in the matter than the general public.”²⁸

²⁵ Alesha Sivartha, *The Book of Life; Vonisa* (Chicago: School of Culture, 1884), 390; see also his *Book of Israel* (Chicago: R. H. Wisdom, 1882), 132-33.

²⁶ For the date of her being “widowed,” see her obituary, “End of a Useful and Interesting Life,” *Pensacola Journal*, 29 October 1905. After being abandoned, Martha continued in nursing practice, including serving the Union Army during the Civil War. She and her daughter moved to St. Louis, and then eventually to Florida, where she lived with her daughter and her son-in-law. Martha did not remarry.

²⁷ That bible also records Elisha Holmes Dodge’s birthdate as July 19, 1835, as well as the date of his marriage to Martha Judd. If the 1878 death date were true, we might expect to find Elisha Dodge in the censuses of 1860 or 1870, but he is not there, and no Elisha Dodge is buried in the family cemetery in Commerce, nor are there any other Dodge matches buried elsewhere that I can find in the public records.

²⁸ Dr. Alesha Sivartha, *The Book of Life; or Spiritual, Social, and Physical Condition of Man* (Stockton: Leroy S. Atwood, 1898), 27-8.



Josephine Evans (Merton)

If he wished to change his name and identity, however, that would naturally present a problem. A potential long-term sexual affinity and mate—a wife, as the world would call her—would be at least curious about his background and his forebears. Creating a story of his being conceived in secret and away off in England and of his parents (Ram Mohan Roy, in particular) as illustrious though deceased would answer the need. In this tale, Pandit Roy played the part of the Holy Spirit to Merton's mother Mary. And Arthur could more easily hint at being the reincarnation of Sivarthia Gautama via the esteemed Indian sage.²⁹

In March 1861, Merton married Josephine Evans in Dayton, Ohio. She was born in Waynesville, Warren County. When she married Arthur Merton, they moved to Lebanon, also in Warren County. Their son Holmes, who had already been born at the time of their marriage, later went to live with another family started by his father some years later. A daughter of that family, Holmes' half-sister, would later remember information she had gathered as a child about Holmes' mother. Josephine, she said, was from Pennsylvania, and taught at Oberlin College. I can find no evidence for either of these claims. "She was one of the first lady doctors of the United States," she said.³⁰ That is another claim for which I can find no evidence. Holmes himself would later say his mother had been a pioneer female doctor—"a biologist and the third woman to become a doctor of medicine in the United States."³¹

²⁹ No Arthur Merton is traceable in the U. S. censuses of 1840 or 1850, when he alleged that he was growing up in the United States; nor is there any Mary Merton. During the time that, according to Arthur Merton, he was conceived, Ram Mohan Roy was sick unto death with meningitis and was being cared for, in practical isolation, in a country estate in England, constantly attended by his young male Indian secretary and travelling companion.

³⁰ Zaida Marie Worden Ross, "My Parents, Edward Oliver Worden and Leona Merton" at <http://pounceatron.dreamhosters.com/nichirenscoffehouse.net/gen/worden20.html>

³¹ Harold Hutchings, "Face Up to It: You May Win Job by a Nose!" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 January 1955. Lydia (Folger) Fowler, the wife of Lorenzo Fowler, was said to have been the

If true, it seems likely to have been a vocation that Josephine pursued some years after marrying Merton. When Holmes, later in his life, wrote a book that included his own phrenologically-influenced analyses of various physiognomies, he compared the visage of Josephine Evans, not mentioning she was his mother, to that of reformer Jane Addams, to the advantage of both. They were “wonderful women, talented, courageous and mentally beautiful,” he wrote.³² Of his mother’s facial physiognomy, he commented, “The Aspirations are high, supported by the Culture group, and by almost too evenly balanced Intellect and Will faculties. ... [She] was devoted to the philosophy of mental life and sociology, to the study of woman’s place in the world of civil and educational life.” The 1870 census captured Josephine as head of household, together with her children, on a farm in Malcolm, Iowa, not far from the college town of Grinnell.³³

I do not know how Arthur Merton came to meet Josephine Evans and eventually to marry her. For that matter, I do not know what he was doing in the years immediately following his departure from his previous life as Elisha Dodge in 1856. Nevertheless, based on the trajectory of his later life, I believe that he took up a concerted, but almost certainly self-guided, study of physiology, phrenology, and medicine. He surely spent considerable time studying human anatomy, especially focusing on the brain—not surprising, given his interest in phrenology. He would eventually present himself as a medical doctor and say he had studied medicine at the University of Michigan, but the university has no record of him. If he did study medicine in any organized way, it would likely have been at some fringe, eclectic, or unaccredited institution; but I have yet to find evidence of it.

He also had a talent for drawing and painting, but I have no idea how he developed this talent for what Joseph Buchanan called his “comic illustration.” It probably gave him an additional source of income above what he made as a lecturer. As the hagiographical article

second woman to have earned a medical degree in the United States. The first was Elizabeth Blackwell in 1849.

³² Holmes Whittier Merton, *Vocational Counseling and Employee Selection: The Art of Judging People*, volume 2 (New York: Merton Institute), 915.

³³ While moving from Grinnell to Delphos, Kansas in 1879, she died of a heart attack immediately following a terrific tornado that hit Delphos on May 31. In a cruel irony, her eighteen-year-old daughter Clara Eva Merton, a year later, was visiting a friend in Grinnell, and was killed, with forty other people, in another monstrous tornado that swept down suddenly on the town.

suggests, his skill at illustrating his ideas with drawings and paintings would be an important part of what attracted people's attention to his ideas, then and now.³⁴

More than this, it is reasonable to suppose that, at least by the time he had met Josephine Evans, he had embarked on a career as an itinerant lecturer on the subject of phrenology and physiognomy and had begun giving phrenological readings and demonstrations as well. As one of Merton's granddaughters reminisced that Mark Twain would sometimes visit their home to chat with Merton, Twain's later description of the species of itinerant phrenological lecturer is apropos here:

One of the most frequent arrivals in our village of Hannibal was the peripatetic phrenologist and he was popular and always welcome. ... Phrenology found many a bump on a man's head and it labeled each bump with a formidable and outlandish name of its own. The phrenologist took delight in mouthing these great names; they gurgled from his lips in an easy and unembarrassed stream, and this exhibition of cultivated facility compelled the envy and admiration of everybody. By and by the people became familiar with these strange names and addicted to the use of them and they batted them back and forth in conversation with deep satisfaction—a satisfaction which could hardly have been more contenting if they had known for certain what the words meant.³⁵

³⁴ As just a hint at the lingering fascination with his illustrations, try Googling him: https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&sxsrf=ALeKk027_xDx0WIYLo6qdc37BwehcDug%3A1611063672389&source=hp&biw=1442&bih=1234&ei=eOEGYJrLFYOyOPEP4syTiAU&q=Sivatha&oq=Sivatha&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQAzIECCMQzIECAAQGD0ICAAQsQMqgwE6BQgAELEDOgiIADoGCAAQBRAeOgQIABAEogYIABAKEBhQ7wdY-BFgwxdoAHAAeACAAT2IAYYDkgEBOJgBAKABAaoBC2d3cy13aXotaW1n&scient=img&ved=0ahUKEwia55rvj6juAhUDGTQIHwLmBFEQ4dUDCac&uact=5

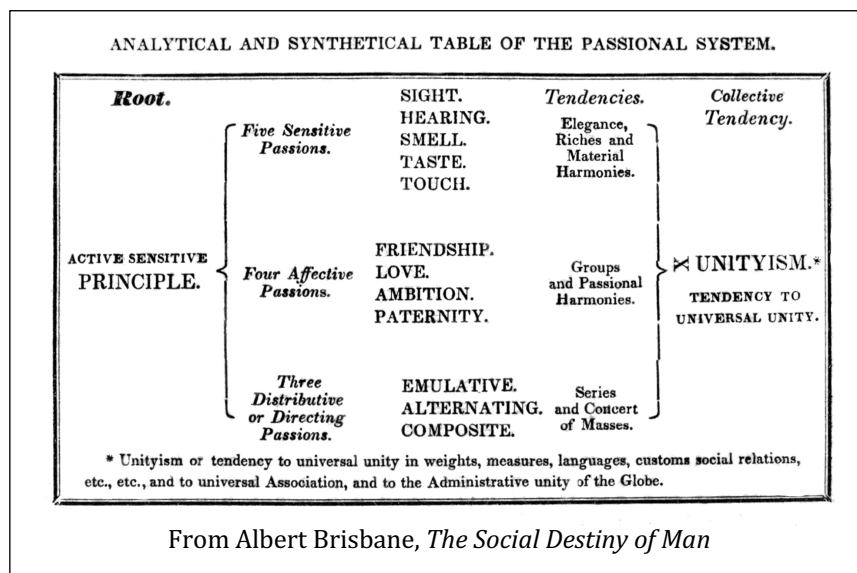
³⁵ Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (London: Chatto & Windus, 1917), 64.

Fourier and the Spirits

Given Merton's full range of interests when he began appearing in the public press, I think he was already a fervent advocate of the notions of French socialist writer Charles Fourier (1772-1837), whose convoluted fancies were organized and introduced to the American public through the summary of his social theorizing recast by Albert Brisbane in his columns in the *New York Tribune* and in the book *Social Destiny of Man*, published in 1840.³⁶ Arthur Merton was stricken with a severe case of Fourierism. "Fourier must ever be regarded as the grand pioneer in Social Science," he wrote. "He was the first, I believe, to distinctly perceive and teach that the true laws of social structure and action are included in the nature of man, and that here we must search for it."³⁷

Fourier believed the "passions"—which is what he named the elements of human character—were twelve in number. When expressed in combination, these resulted in 810 types of human beings.

Assuming an equal number of males and females, he theorized that a perfectly representative universe of people, which he called a "phalanx," could be realized with 1620 persons, brought together in a communal group, living in a



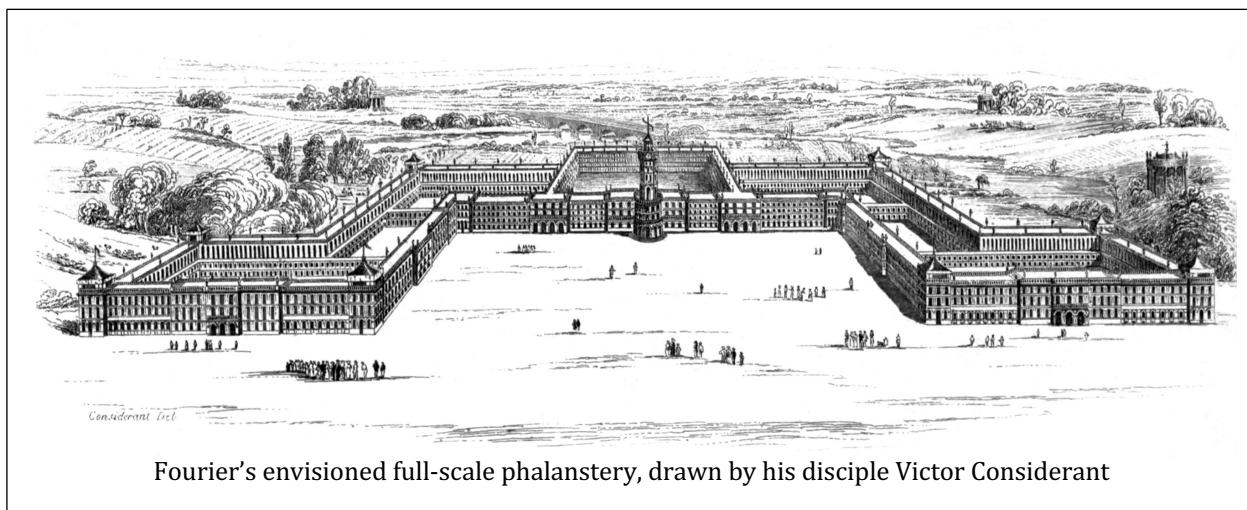
geometrically arranged conglomeration of buildings, a "phalanstery." The physical form of the settlement was important, like that of a machine. The form would facilitate the movement of its members to each one's "attractive labor"—what their "passions" drew

³⁶ *Social Destiny of Man; or, Association and Reorganization of Industry* (Philadelphia: C. F. Stollmeyer, 1840).

³⁷ Arthur Merton, *Safena; or, The Mental Constitution* (Philadelphia: The Matuna, 1872), 183.

them to—as a magnet draws certain elements to itself. The labor of the phalanx would be analyzed according to each job’s constituent passional components, and people whose own nature matched them would gravitate or be assigned to those jobs according to their complex passional index.

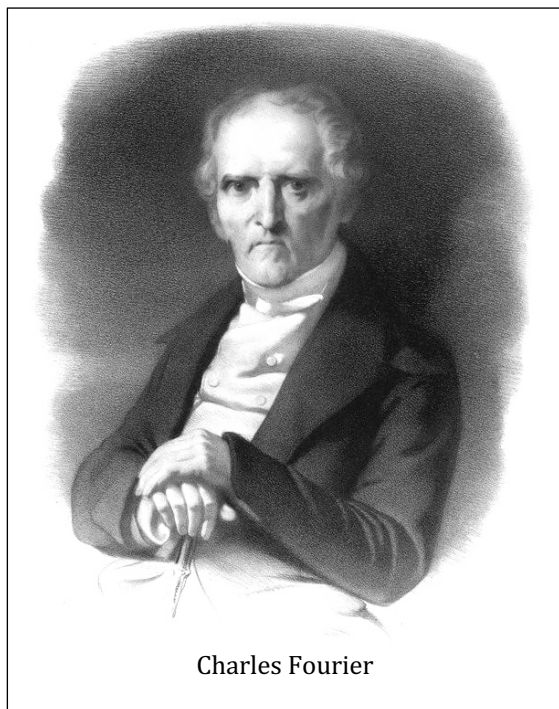
This design, Fourier believed, would free each individual from traditional society’s forcing of people into work that was unsuited and unagreeable to them. The principle also applied to the phalanstery’s social arrangements. Because it was communal, the traditional “isolated household” (i. e., single nuclear and extended families living together) would be eliminated and no longer form the basic element of human society. Sexual relations would be “freed,” because individuals would gravitate or be assigned to sexual partners who matched their evolving passional affinities and harmonies. Any children that resulted from these couplings would be new members of the community as a whole and would be raised and educated by those whose own passions drew them to that work.



Fourier believed that phalansteries would liberate human passions to evolve into ever greater forms, driven by their members’ enthusiastic affinities for one another and for the work to which they were drawn. He envisioned a progressive, bootstrapping evolution of human nature ever upwards, with the physical world itself evolving along with it. He theorized a grand scheme of the historical evolution of human society, reflecting what he believed were universal laws of the distinct stages of societal development, and he labeled

them with such names as “Edenism,” “Savagery,” “Barbarism,” with each stage governed by a particular ideological and social structure.³⁸

When Fourier’s social scheme first broke upon American shores in 1840, most people evidently shrugged their shoulders or scratched their heads at the thought that



Charles Fourier

anyone could ever find cleaning latrines or washing dirty diapers, as examples, to be “attractive labor.” Nor did most see how joining a group that severed individual effort from its reward could be equitable. And people generally did in fact cherish their biological kin and their own nuclear families and placed their primary loyalty there. Nevertheless, many people, who came to be referred to as “Associationists,” were stirred to organize themselves into Fourierist associations. During the early and mid 1840s, at least thirty-five hopeful phalanxes were set up in the United States, none of them with anything

like the 1600-plus members in Fourier’s perfect community. Most had just a few dozen settlers, but all of them looked for inspiration to the French philosopher’s principles of organizing labor and social relations. Nearly every one of them lasted less than a few years before failing.

The Trumbull phalanx in Ohio was one of them. It issued its call for members in 1844. By 1845, the two hundred stockholders were already bankrupt and, fortunately for them, were bailed out of financial ruin by an infusion of private money; but it only limped along, and the experiment was over by the end of 1847. During the first rush of its excitement, however, a visitor to the place wrote:

³⁸ Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ Press, 1991), 17-18.

The liberal views and kindly feelings manifested by the various speakers were such as I never heard before. They spoke of the near relations they sustained to each other, and of the many blessings they looked to receive in the future, meanwhile, the present Unity gave them an idea of Heaven. One spirit of joy and gladness seemed to animate them, viz: that they had escaped from the wants, cares, and temptations of civilization, and instead were placed where public good is the same as individual good, hence, nothing save pre-conceived prejudices, fast giving away, prevent their loving their neighbors as themselves. This is the spirit of Christianity. Their position, then, calls for union; no good can arise from divers sects, no good ever did arise, and they will all unite, Presbyterians, Disciples, Baptists, Methodists, and all, and if any name be needed, under that of *Unionism*. After meeting, the Sacrament was administered, then followed a Bible class, and singing exercises closed the day.³⁹

What was this principle, "Unionism," that had taken on such an air of sacredness? It was Union *per se*, not this or that particular union, that was being elevated into a Holy Communion. It was none other than the Ideal, Transcendental "One" as filtered via Fourier, but also urged by New England ultra-Unitarians like Emerson and Theodore Parker. That "Union" was not a particular example of skillfully contrived Constitutional machinery, as it had been conceived by the founders of the Republic decades before. It had become the mystical, indivisible, immutable, and eternal embodiment of God's will (at least by Northern lights). For its preservation from taint or division, a civil war would be fought, for countenance that Union's division would have been a sacrilege.

Merton was too young to have taken any active part in the decade of Fourierist experimentation on American soil during the 1840s, but despite the evident lesson in the universal failure of such communities, Fourier's influence continued forward among socialists. His plan looked something like a scientific scheme. It had numbers and classifications and referred to purported laws of nature and to human engineering. But it also touched a sensitive quasi-religious yearning for a way that people might "come ye out"

³⁹ Letter from a visitor to the Trumbull Phalanx, *The Constitutionalist* (Vicksburg), 17 August 1844.

of a Babylonian captivity in a larger society run on allegedly repressive principles. Coming upon Fourier's social scheme in the mid-1850s, Merton made it fundamental to his thinking.

Despite having almost no direct evidence for Arthur Merton's actual whereabouts and activities until around 1870, we can extrapolate many of the characteristic interests of his earlier years: freethinker, free lover, social and labor reformer, Fourierist, evolutionist (but not a believer in Darwin's principle of random selection), phrenologist, physiognomist, and adherent of irregular systems of medicine.

One other descriptor surely applied to him, at least as early as 1859-60, when he was newly attached to Josephine Evans: He was a thoroughgoing spiritualist, a seeker after communications with and wisdom from the spirits of the departed. In the works he began publishing around 1870 and continuing into the following decades, Merton repeatedly spoke of a raft of spectacular discoveries he had made about the inner workings of human nature and of their occult ramifications throughout space and time. These discoveries—really, spirit revelations—focused on what he called the “Matuna.” Their content will become clearer when we turn to the texts he published, but they came to him during the period of 1858 to 1860. In 1876, he issued a “Proclamation,” referring to his earlier “discoveries”:

A Grand Council or Congress of the Spirit World, led by Gautama-Buddha, Fourier, and Confucius, elaborated the Plan and Constitution of the Matuna in the years 1858 and 1860 After Christ. It was then published by me (in an abridged form) with its present symbol, a twelve-rayed sun, and with appropriate diagrams.

The magnificent Era of universal wisdom, happiness, and peace, painted in the glowing visions and rich promises of ancient poets and seers, is only to be obtained through an intelligent obedience to the laws of man's intellectual, spiritual, and physical nature.

The purest light of Inspiration and the profoundest truths of Science, have here been united to produce in this Constitution an exact statement of these great natural laws.

The Spirit World is now being organized on this Plan, and it is presented to the world as the final and perfect Charter of a harmonic social life and civil government for all the nations of humanity.⁴⁰

It was signed Arthur Merton, M. D., and dated Philadelphia, June 7th, 1876. It was issued to coincide with the celebrations surrounding the United States Centennial, which were held in Philadelphia. His “proclamation” was printed as an insertion into a pamphlet he published entitled, *The Matuna, or Natural Republic: Elaborated and Published in 1858-60, by Gautama-Martona*. This “Gautama-Martona,” along with Confucius, and Fourier—all in spirit form—had worked up a constitution for a “natural republic” that they called “the Matuna,” which one of its later advocates dubiously interpreted *post facto* to mean “measured unity.” The pamphlet reported the constitution’s articles and provisions. All of this was communicated to Merton in some fashion by the spirits during the period he was making all his foundational discoveries. I do not know if he was the spirit medium himself, or if he received his messages through another person acting as a medium. This occurred around the time Merton impregnated and eventually married Josephine Evans, although, despite what he wrote here about having published something then, I can find no remaining notice or even mention of Merton as a writer or lecturer until 1871.

Perhaps one piece of evidence exists for this period of Merton’s life. During that time, he said he received messages from disembodied, reformatory spirits intent on remaking the world and giving him the mystic key to enable him to lead the way. Also during that time, he transformed himself from Elisha Dodge to Arthur Merton, English-born, secret son of Ram Mohan Roy, who married Josephine Evans of Ohio, his alleged student at Oberlin. Hannah Frances M. Brown, then living in Cleveland (thirty-five miles east of Oberlin), was a radical Free Love spiritualist. She published a monthly spiritualist newspaper, *The Agitator*. In the March 1860 issue, she inserted an editorial notice:

⁴⁰ *The Matuna, or Natural Republic: Elaborated and Published in 1859-60, by Gautama-Martona* (Philadelphia: n. p., 1876).

ARTHUR DODGE, a professed reformer, must cease to do evil and learn to be a wise man. American girls are not so partial to “English Noblemen” with borrowed names as he may imagine. We regret the necessity of exposing duplicity and downright deception, but Arthur Dodge, alias Arthur Lynd, alias Arthur Morton, a live English lord, has duped too many honest men and good girls to go at large, unexposed.⁴¹

Immediately after this entry, Brown recommended to her readers a spirit medium who, she said, was “a genuine English woman.” If this Arthur Dodge/Lynd/Morton was Elisha Dodge/Arthur Merton, as I think likely, it captures him as a skirt-chasing Free Lover and con artist, imposing himself on the circle of Brown’s acquaintances in Cleveland, and provides a fuller picture of how Merton’s relationship with Josephine Evans and the birth of their son came about.⁴²

While he was seeding a family, as it were, with Josephine, he was away from that family most of time, touring and lecturing. On November 12, 1869, he was in Vineland, New Jersey, and was married there “according to the order of the Friends of Progress” to one Olivia F. Stevens, the ceremony being officiated by Mrs. Lucinda D. Ladd, a minister of the Friends of Progress, the local spiritualist society.⁴³

Vineland was a planned community founded by Charles K. Landis after the Civil War, on land in the New Jersey Pine Barrens south of Philadelphia, halfway to Cape May. Landis had been particularly interested in attracting Northern Progressives to settle there, with many spiritualists and radical social reformers among them. In 1866, spiritualist visionaries for whom Vineland was not quite radical enough to suit them would try to establish and organize their own versions of utopian communities nearby, in Hammonton

⁴¹ Mrs. Hannah Francis M. Brown, “Editorial Items,” *The Agitator* (Cleveland) 3.11 (1 March 1860): 85. Thanks to Pat Deveney for pointing this out to me.

⁴² This link to H. F. M. Brown puts Merton at only one remove from spiritualist eccentric John Murray Spear, who received messages from associations of the departed notables of the past—such as Benjamin Franklin and Isaac Newton—that guided him in describing new forms of society and new “millennial machines,” including a mechanical messiah, “new motive power,” and perpetual motion machine. Brown was one of Spear’s coadjutors.

⁴³ “Marriages,” Camden, New Jersey *West Jersey Press*, 24 November 1869; also “Vital Records of Vineland, New Jersey,” *Vineland Historical Magazine* 5.2 (February 2014).

and Blue Anchor.⁴⁴ Vineland itself, however, had a large, militant spiritualist population known for their socially advanced views. Merton was likely there on a lecture tour to publicize his own ideas about the ideal form of social organization. We can also guess that



Louisa Annette Wolfe (Merton)

the marriage ceremony conducted by the Friends of Progress was nothing more than an expedient to legalize the temporary cohabitation of Merton with a new “affinity.”

As confirmation that the marriage was lightly assumed, six months later, on April 1, 1870, in Boston, Merton married yet again, this time to Louisa Annette (“Lunetta”) Wolfe, a farm girl brought up in rural Indiana.⁴⁵ The marriage took place just a few months before the 1870 federal census found his wife Josephine near Grinnell, Iowa, taking care of her and Arthur’s three children.

At the time he married Lunetta Wolfe, he already had three wives living in different places, none of whom he had divorced. He regarded marriage laws as a shackle and he preached to that effect. He took such obligations as the laws of marriage imposed very lightly indeed. There is no reason why he would not have entered into other unions, of varying durations, that cannot be documented via the public record because he was averse to submitting them to official, public recognition.

I do not know how long Lunetta accompanied her new husband in his travels, but ten months after the marriage, she was back in the Midwest, at her parents’ farm in Yates, Woodson County, Kansas, giving birth to twins, Artino Merton (who did not survive his first year) and Arthur Llewellyn Merton.

⁴⁴ John Benedict Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 262-64.

⁴⁵ The Massachusetts marriage records list Arthur Merton’s declaration that his father’s name was Arthur H. Merton, and that his own occupation was that of a portrait painter. This was one more piece of evidence that Arthur Merton was actually Elisha Dodge: a genealogical account of the Dodge family, published in 1872, described Elisha Dodge, son of Mary (Andrews) and Franklin Dodge, as being a portrait painter; Alfred Andrews, *Genealogical History of John and Mary Andrews, who settled in Farmington, Conn., 1640* (Chicago: A. H. Andrews, 1872), 452.

Meanwhile, her husband was still back East, in Philadelphia. During Merton's time there he may have used the Morton collection at the Academy of Natural Sciences. In Philadelphia, too, Merton was likely trained in the use of the microscope by Professor David Shepherd Holman of Girard College, who invented and marketed apparatus for studying live specimens under the microscope. Merton would later cite Holman as having made discoveries about the characteristic angles in specimens that marked one species of microbial life from another.

The Matuna

In March 1871, under the aegis of “The Matuna,” Merton published his first substantial work, *Safena; or, the Mental Constitution*. In that work, we can begin to see clearly what he had been thinking and lecturing on for the decade preceding its publication. “Safena,” he wrote, meant “mental science.” “Dr.” Merton’s close study of the human body, especially of the brain, had uncovered the details of its form and function. This had also provided a plan for constructing society that would reproduce the form and function of the individual human organism. With those two statements, we can already see his deep assumptions to have been those of phrenology and Fourier.

The great society he outlined in the book was the “Matuna.” That word was likely invented by whatever spirit medium had mumbled out messages to him in 1858-60 from “Gautama-Martona,” who, as we have learned, was Merton’s previous incarnation. Though Merton by no means worked through the implications of this, it meant that the plan outlined in the book was what Merton, in one personification, had been saying to himself in another. He told his readers that he had received the plan in germinal form a decade previously and had written it down and published it as a diagram, including the logo of the Matuna, as early as 1861 and that he had made the plan the subject of many lectures he had given since then.

His mental science or “safena” referred to his revelation that the gross anatomy of the brain had meaningful implications for how society ought to be shaped. For his readers’ convenience, or to blow smoke



Logo of the Matuna

in their eyes, he listed a few works in the back of the book as sources for this, including William Benjamin Carpenter’s *Principles of General and Comparative Physiology; intended as an introduction to the study of human physiology; and as a guide to the philosophical pursuit of natural history* (1839), Samuel Solly’s *The Human Brain: Its Structure, Physiology and Disease; with a description of the typical forms of brain in the animal kingdom* (1848), and John William Draper’s *Human Physiology, Statistical and Dynamical; or, The Conditions and*

Course of the Life of Man (1856). However, Merton explained, “from neither of these will the reader gain so clear an idea as from the *Safena*.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Merton’s detailing of brain anatomy actually drew very little from his “sources.”

In his book, Merton describes the brain as an ellipsoid whose center is a point he calls the “Nadane.” Along the ellipsoid’s horizontal axis lie its two foci, which he names “Artu” (toward the front of the brain) and “Latu” (toward the rear). He correlates these with the striatus and the thalamus. The two foci plus the center make up a “Trinity of Life.” That threesome, in its “higher elevation,” somehow comprises Intellect, Affection, and Action. These, he reckons, are physical regions at the top of the brain. Or Wisdom, Love, and Will, as the Matuna emblem was inscribed. This trinity is where Merton’s project shows itself most clearly aligned with Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Transcendentalism. In his 1841 essay, “The Over-Soul,” Emerson had written:

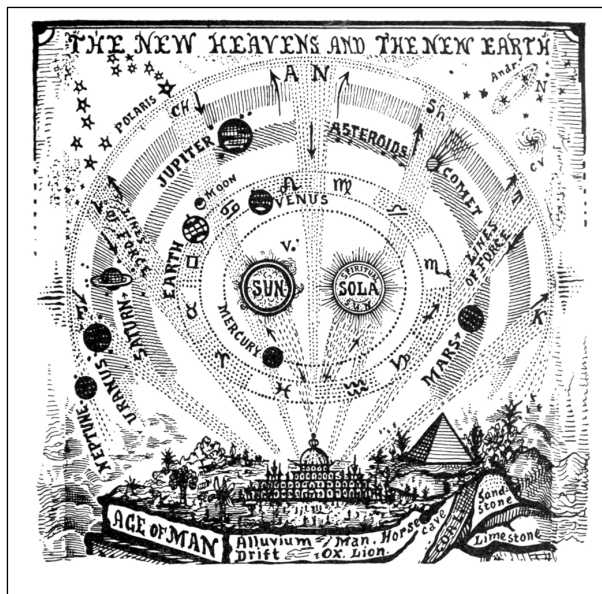
What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins, when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins, when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims, in some one particular, to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey.⁴⁷

The same trinity of faculties in the Matuna emblem are the three faculties at the top of the human brain, as Merton located them. They are the magical trident by which the human brain hitches its form to Emerson’s Transcendental star. I would not wish to class Merton’s talents with Emerson’s, but their epistemological assumption—based on the fundamental primacy of intuition—made their method of constructing their truth somewhat like that of a magpie allegedly building her nest from shiny, found bits and

⁴⁶ Merton, *Safena*, 182.

⁴⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays; First Series* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Company, 1854), 246-47.

pieces. Merton's influences lay in the shadows, mostly unacknowledged, just under his text. But it is undeniable that Emerson's confreres and admirers, such as fellow Unitarian (turned anarchist) William Batchelder Greene, by the time Merton published his work on the Matuna, had contemplated at length the similarity of Emerson's Transcendentalism to the vision of the universe in the Kabbalah, in which the form of man (as the emanated actuality of God) is the form of all things.⁴⁸ Merton's conviction that the microcosm's form was the same as the macrocosm's led him to project the brain's ellipsoid form onto the solar system. It was an ellipse with two foci—the Sun and a spiritual counterpart, *Sola*, which would become manifestly visible as human consciousness evolved.



In Merton's explanation, the center of the brain's ellipsoid form defines its vertical axis, which he describes as co-extant with the spinal cord, which, he writes, is composed of a twinned bundle of nerves, one set of which branches out in the brain and terminates in the "Artu"—which he calls the "motus" in describing its nerve function—and the other set of which branches out and terminates in the "Latu"—which he calls the "sensus."

He describes the "Artu" and "Latu" as situated and functioning in the brain rather like the anode and cathode of a galvanic battery, sending and receiving impulses to the rest of the body. The vertical axis, in a way that Merton but vaguely explains, continues to rise above the center of the ellipsoid to the top of the brain. In a vertical transection, the whole arrangement forms a shape like a cross or a tree—the Tree of Life, as Merton saw it.

⁴⁸ William Batchelder Greene, *The Blazing Star; with an Appendix Treating of the Jewish Kabbala, also a Tract on the Philosophy of Mr. Herbert Spencer, and One on New-England Transcendentalism* (Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1872); see especially 50-60. I am somewhat struck by the similarity between the names "Matrona," the last of the ten sephiroth, and "Matuna," and ("Gautama-) "Martona."

section of the human brain, therefore, one sees that the phrenologist locates such “organs” as “wonder” and “reverence” at the top and “combativeness,” for example, at the bottom. Looking at a phrenological cross-section corresponds to looking at a trench in the earth, which reveals geological strata laid down in time, one atop the other. As a result, a cross-section of the brain displays the history of human evolution. For Merton, the same view also shows the growth of each individual, from the infant’s lower, primitive capacities into the mature individual’s higher, more intellectual and spiritual capacities.

Merton’s other listed source is Dr. James Wakeman Redfield’s widely influential *Comparative Physiognomy; or Resemblance Between Men and Animals* (1850). Redfield’s

thesis is grounded on the phrenological maxim of “Form Equals Function.” He reasoned that this applied not only to the brain, but also to the entire body, with the form of each part of the body—the face, the limbs, the abdomen, and so on—encoding in each individual specific propensities and capacities. Individuals with dominant propensities and capacities that were shared with lower species manifested in their body’s physiology a resemblance to those species. What was true of a single individual was also true of ethnic groups; thus, his book became a mine of what passed as scientific evidence for ranking ethnic groups, likening the Irish to “mongrel dogs,” for example, Jews to

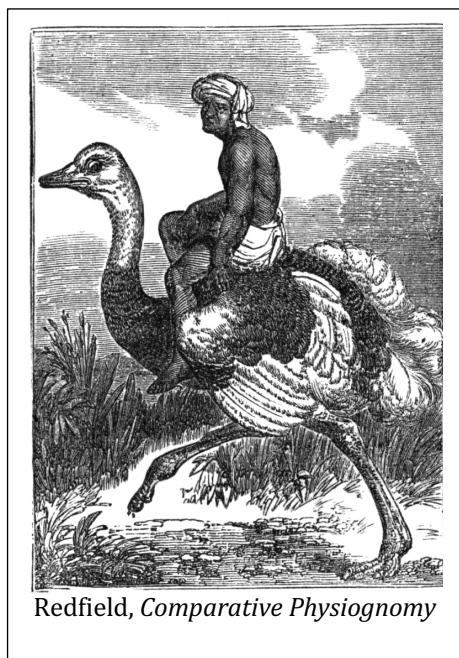
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goats, negroes to elephants, and on and on. From a modern viewpoint, his drawings, which he thought demonstrated his thesis are so caricatured as to be comical, except for the rather horrifying knowledge that many people took them seriously.

Merton adopts Redfield's conclusion concerning the ranking of ethnic groups, and incorporates it, for example, into his explanation of the recombinant harmonies of skin colors:

The dominant color of the skin in the Caucasian race is formed by mixing that of the Sensitive and the Vigorous groups. Were we to draw an inference from this, it would be that this race would be distinguished above all others for the union of sensibility and energy, for the elevated use it would make of the senses, and of the knowledge acquired through them; or in other words, for the greatest capacity for advancement.⁴⁹

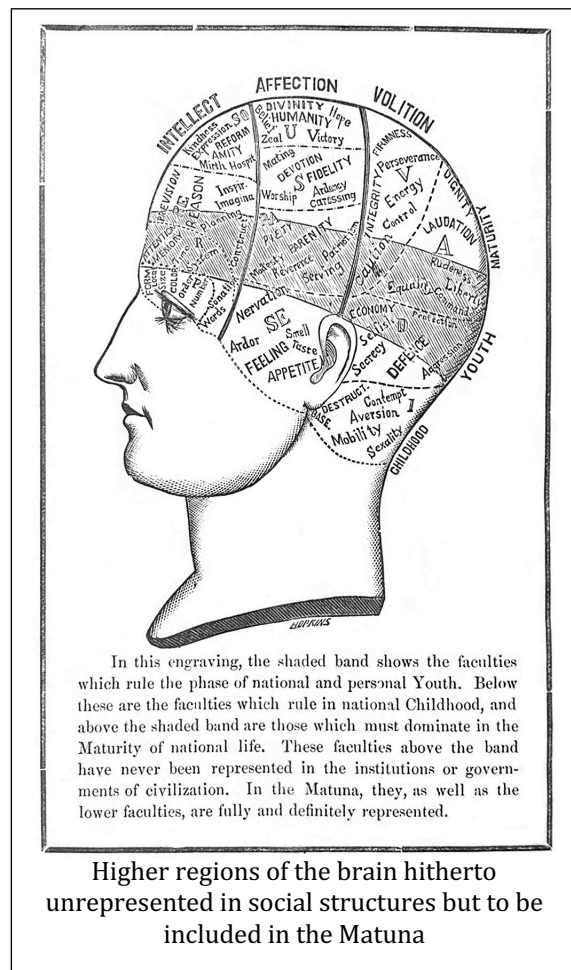
Nevertheless, the main idea Merton gathers from Redfield is that the phrenological categories are embodied not just in regions of the brain, but also extend out all over the body. The exterior of the body is a topographical map of character that can be read in the code it embodies. This points to the real physiological functions of the body evidenced by the specific connections of the nerves emerging from regions of the brain. The organ of "Benevolence," for example, is connected to those parts of the body involved in works and gestures of benevolence, such as certain fine facial muscles that draw the mouth up into a smile. The brain's phrenological regions ordinarily work in combination with one another, with perhaps one region predominating in any gesture or action. Long before



Postmodern literary critics took up the idea of "the body as text," nineteenth-century physiognomists declared that the entire range of human sentiment and action was expressed in the body, and consequently could be measured and predicted by analyzing the shape of the face or the hands, for example, treating physical measurements as a book of code translating a true record of inner capacities, propensities, and passions.

⁴⁹ Merton, *Safena*, 131-32.

Redfield's scheme was by no means universally accepted, but many Progressive reformers hailed it as a major advance in knowledge.⁵⁰ The aficionado of physiognomy Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, for example, wrote that Redfield held "the Eureka of this secret"



of God's thoughts as made manifest in the human body, the secret "with which the Sphinx, whom Oedipus did *not* kill as the classics assert, but who continues to devour this ignorant human race which cannot guess the secret of its own existence, has been twitting us from the days of Oedipus until now."⁵¹

All of Merton's allegedly scientific presentation of the anatomy and functioning of the human body have consequences for how human society should be run. For, as he puts it, "THE INDIVIDUAL IS THE ARCHETYPE OF SOCIETY."⁵² Here his debt to Charles Fourier is evident. Fourier's idealized phalanstery was an actualized machine, driven by arranging its constituent humans and their activities in such a way that each would move according to his or her attractions to one another and to types of

work and recreation. It was meant to lessen friction among its moving parts, one could say, and make possible the free movements of natural propensities and inclinations, all scientifically determined for each individual. Fourier based his scheme for his communities on what he believed were the elements of human nature. The community was built and run

⁵⁰ For a satirical review of Redfield's book, see the New York *Knickerbocker* 41 (February 1853), 189-90.

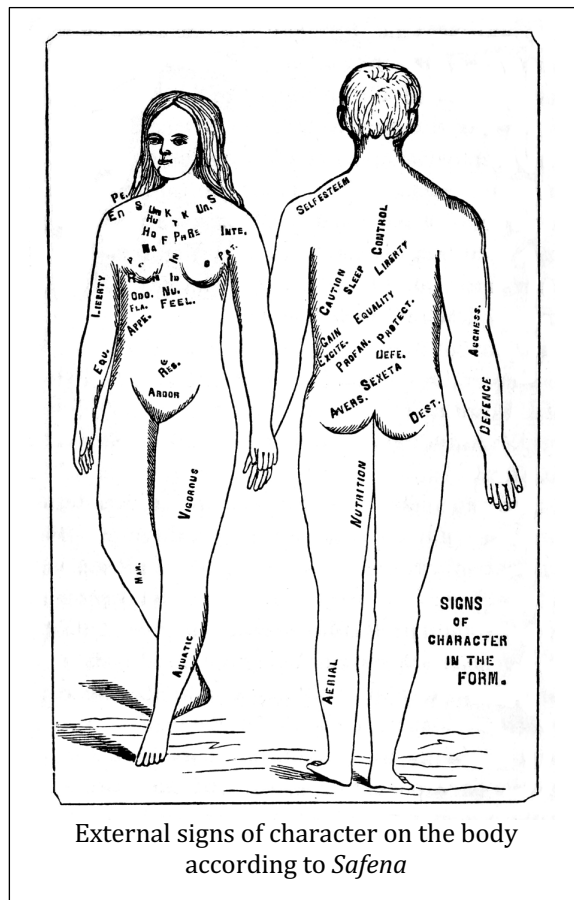
⁵¹ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *The Human Trinity; or, Three Aspects of Life: the Passsional, the Intellectual, the Practical Sphere* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851), 15-16.

⁵² Merton, *Safena*, 17.

on the primary constituents of that nature and was therefore its reflection. The community was the individual writ large.

It is the same with Merton's plan for society. The scheme itself is the Matuna; individual exemplifications of its principles—actual fledgling cell groups of the Matuna—are called "Tavu." In a fully populated and functional Tavu, each of the seventy-two aspects of the human mind (as grouped into twelves) is headed by an individual in whom that aspect is dominant. They each have a name, or job description, one might say. Merton tabulates all of these and assigns names to them: Parenters and Pieters, Previsors and Balancers, Exalters, Lauders, and Destroyers, are examples of these offices, which have layers of ranks, from high to low. Other laws that govern the form of Merton's Matuna include Polarity, Symmetry, and Harmony, which are manifested in the brain as the division of the hemispheres, and in the twin and complementary functions of the Artu/striatus and the Latu/motus.

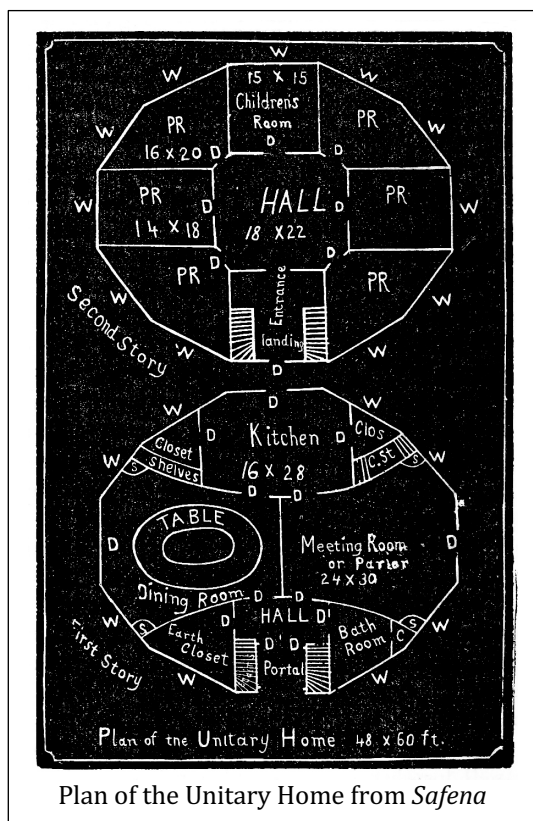
In the body itself, the presence of symmetry is obvious in the right and left parts of the organism, the governing brain and the governed body, as well as in the complementary relationship between male and female. These things take form and therefore must be made part of the working Matuna.⁵³ Everything from the microcosm to the macrocosm has the form most clearly seen in the human brain.



⁵³ His scheme for making each level of office a male-female pair had its origin in Fourier, but also was preceded by Margaret Fuller's proposal for setting up an entirely female Congress (guided by intuition) to offset the entirely male Congress (guided by reason). For a bizarre spiritualist plan to set up an alternative female government, see "Spiritualism Run Mad; Formation of a New Religio-Spiritual Empire; Woman the Interior Power and the True Source of Light; Euphemia Regina, Princess of Jerusalem," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 September 1868.

The floor plans of a single dwelling, for example, function best when the design is based, in some fashion, on the arrangement of the brain; or, at least, on the human body.

The same is true of entire settlements. They take the form of a brain in that Merton



lays them out in the shape of the horizontal and vertical bisections of an ellipse, as if one were looking down on one of his geometric diagrams of a brain. The Matuna, therefore, is the Grand Plan of human society, a temple of natural perfection for living, the portals of which one can enter by realizing the plan in a practical form. This lends a phrenological (“Form Equals Function”) and physiological justification for architectural design already broached by Orson Fowler’s 1851 publication of plans for octagonal buildings, *A Home for All*.⁵⁴ Merton’s *Safena* includes his own rudimentary designs for domestic buildings, which is to say, for the Matuna’s “Unitary Home,” obviously influenced by Fowler’s, but as Merton

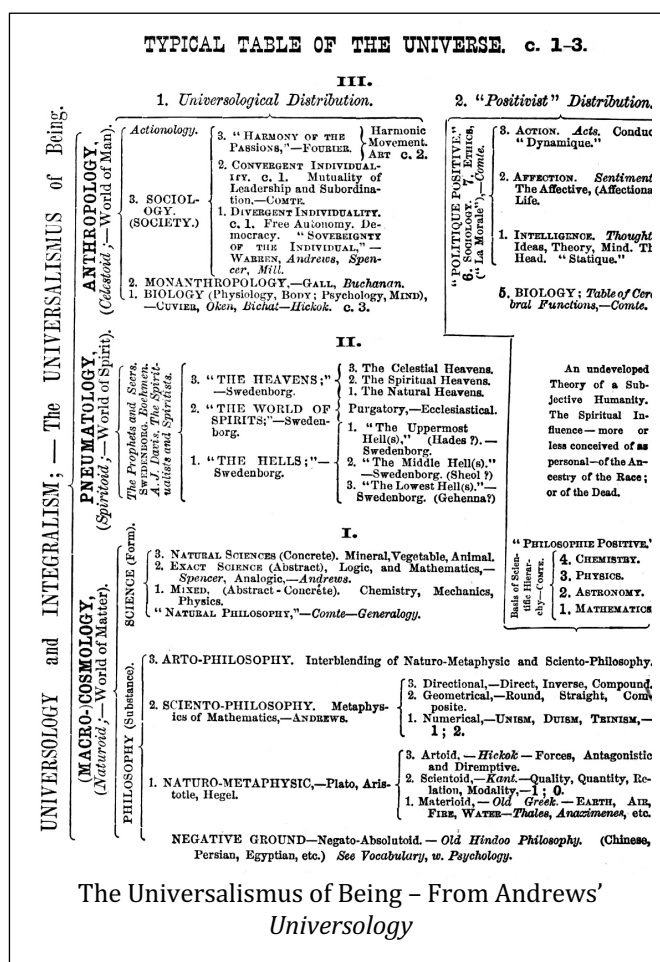
bases his design on the shape of the brain, his designs are roughly ellipsoid, not octagonal, and are twelve-sided (twelve being the foundational numerical building block in nature, according to Merton). Over the following years, as Merton focused more intensely on the form of the axes of the brain’s ellipsoid shape, his architectural designs reduced themselves to reproducing that cruciform shape.

⁵⁴ Fowler’s 1853 edition of his book added information on poured concrete wall construction; Orson Squire Fowler, *A Home for All; or, The Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building New, Cheap, Convenient, Superior and Adapted to Rich and Poor* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1853). Spiritualist Simon Crosby Hewitt also detailed plans for domestic architecture, dictated to him by spirits, which were said to be based on the form of the human body; see Simon Crosby Hewitt, “Architecture of the Future—Designs for Homes of Harmony; Transmitted from the Spirit World,” *Millennial Gazette* (London), ed. Robert Owen (1 July 1856): 3-11.

Draper, but leaves out Charles Darwin. Merton would, in fact, deliver lectures entitled, "The Ascent of Man; or, Man Not an Ape," in opposition to Darwin's *The Descent of Man*.⁵⁵ Darwin's theory places the mechanism of evolution as always acting in response to fit present conditions. It makes incoherent a notion like Merton's, that a complex organ like the human cerebral cortex, with its various capabilities, can evolve to fit a not yet realized environment that must be created by a pre-existent design, either in a present hothouse like a phalanstery or projected into a future world.

In the end, Merton's argument against society as presently constructed is simply that its form does not embody the functions and abilities of the human mind as it has evolved into a higher stage, but instead still merely functions along the lines of a lesser-evolved and earlier form of mind. Humans, he argues, have acquired higher abilities that are unrepresented in current social structures, which he calls "Civilism," but will be represented in the Matuna, which he refers to as "Familism," even though there is no structure in his schema for what most people refer to as a "family"—father, mother, and their children. The "top" of the old governmental structures of Civilism are the tripartite divisions of

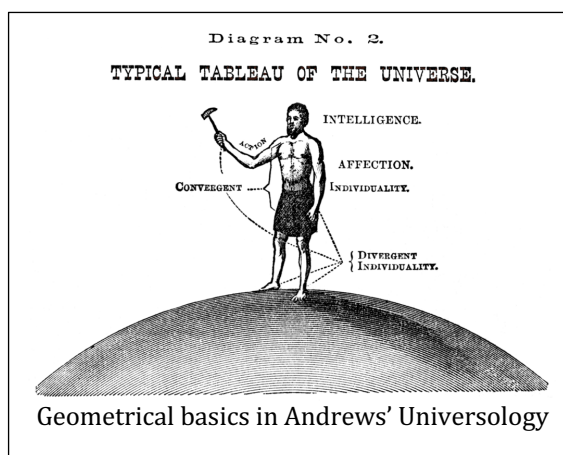
Executive, Legislative, and Judicial; whereas, according to Merton, to order society in line with the evolved human form, they ought to be Wisdom, Love, and Will.



⁵⁵ Advertised in the back matter of *The Matuna, or Natural Republic* (Philadelphia, 1876).

It was likely not a coincidence that Merton published *Safena* when he did, for he had a strong competitor among those proposing socialist utopias in the person of Stephen Pearl Andrews, who published his own universal scheme for society at the same time.⁵⁶ Loosely speaking, what Merton called “safena,” Andrews called “universology.” What Merton called the “Matuna,” Andrews called the “Pantarchy.” And Andrews, who had a great interest in studying languages and linguistics, invented one he called “Alwato,” which probably convinced Merton that a complete redoing of society needed to include the adoption of a scientifically constructed language, thus motivating him to produce one, his “Sytal.”

The mix of influences on Merton was different than the ones on Andrews. Merton had his vision fixed on Fourier and Buchanan, but also predominantly on phrenology and physiology. Andrews, while also inspired by Fourier and Buchanan, was also a devoted student of Auguste Comte’s Positivism, and of socialist theories of economics and monetary policy.⁵⁷ And Andrews’ attempt to ground his utopian theory on science took the form of an appeal to geometry, not physiology.



Nevertheless, I think that Merton conceived his Matuna as a competing alternative to Andrews’ Pantarchy and so published his manifesto and plan when he did.

Was *Safena* a hit with the reading public? It does not seem so. I can find only the *New York World* having reviewed it, and that review was thoroughly negative:

⁵⁶ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Primary Synopsis of Universology and Alwato: The New Scientific Universal Language* (New York: Dion Thomas, 1871) and *The Basic Outline of Universology. An Introduction to the Newly Discovered Science of the Universe; Its Elementary Principles; and the First Stages of Their Development in the Special Sciences* (New York: Dion Thomas, 1872).

⁵⁷ Andrews’ fascination with radical socialist reform of the economic system would bring him into association with Josiah Warren in setting up the “Modern Times” community on Long Island.

The unfortunate predilection of men who have little real knowledge and no logical discipline in scientific researches for constructing general systems of the universe, and of mental physiology and sociology in particular, is too well known in this day to need even a passing word. There has become developed in these “thinkers,” too, a love not so much for using words in unnatural senses as their metaphysical predecessors did, but for inventing words of their own. Now, bad as the former custom was, this system is worse. By reading the context carefully one could formerly have a reasonable probability that he apprehended in part the meaning of his author, but now nothing could give one an inkling of the meaning but constant reference to a glossary to which there is no means of access—as every writer invents a system of his own, to which he supplies no key if he has one.⁵⁸

The reviewer then offered *Safena* as “a glaring instance” of what he was referring to, and then added, “Here is news. The little volume is illustrated with drawings which would make the fame of some comic artist.”

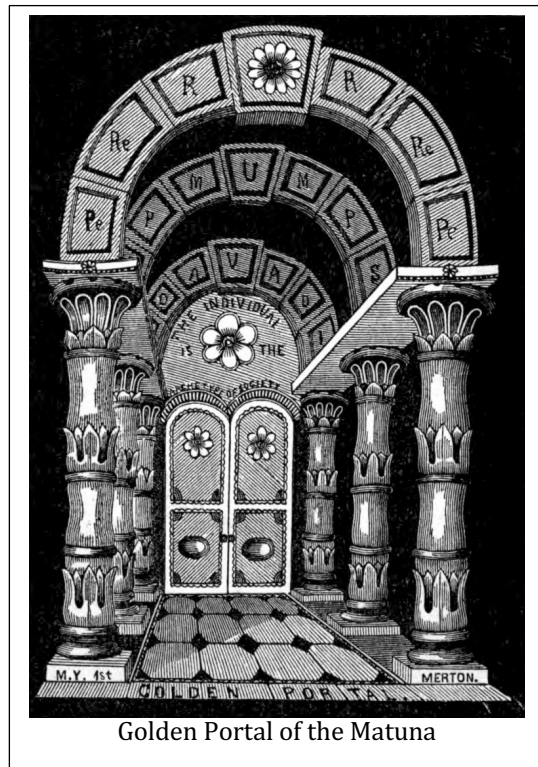
Although *Safena* did not make a public splash when it was published, it elevated Merton among a certain class of radical reformers and spiritualists as a serious thinker and even perhaps the second coming of Charles Fourier. One of Merton’s sympathizers, for example, was ex-Congressman George W. Julian, the prickly and belligerent radical Republican who had consulted spirit medium Cora Scott Daniels for regular advice from the spirits while he sat on the committee to draft impeachment articles against President Andrew Johnson. In 1873, Julian was making a fortune as a lawyer for clients involved in claims under the Homestead Act, which legislation he had taken the lead to draft while in Congress. In 1873 he addressed a convention of reformers and gave his opinion of Merton’s *Matuna*:

These natural plans apply to the whole scope of both city and farm life, and it is my conviction that they are destined to become the basis of all future statesmanship. It seems to me that in their elaboration [Merton] has reached the very foundation of all

⁵⁸ “Literary Notes,” *New York World*, 29 January 1872.

these questions, and that in his work he has displayed the most profound thought and extensive scientific knowledge.⁵⁹

A strictly human engineered society (as opposed to an organically grown one) has to be reductionistic. The bald principle “Form Equals Function” necessarily makes it so, for it studiously eliminates the mysterious fullness of things into which human inquiry has not



Golden Portal of the Matuna

perfectly penetrated and perhaps never will. A peremptorily structured society is a reduction, an abstraction, a procrustean bed. A glance through Merton's drawings is instructive: They look at first to be impressively complex and almost absurdly florid, but on closer examination, one is struck with the impression that in many cases it was as if he had a ready-made pad of paper on which the outer profile of a woman's head was printed, and no matter what he wished to illustrate, he simply mapped it out onto the head, stretching and clipping here and there, based on a simplistic cruciform pattern derived geometrically from an ellipse. He was forcing

Function to fit into a basic Form. Who would think that was a good way to order a society? Who would choose to live in one that was thus contrived?

Merton believed his scheme would overcome that inherent rigidity. He believed it would evolve, along with the society it described and with those who inhabited it. He believed his model society would be a living organism, a homunculus. “The functions of living bodies,” he wrote, “are performed by organs, that is, by regular structures having definite and inter-related offices, and these organs maintain a constant adjustment of

⁵⁹ Because all of society would become the State, statesmen like Julian would consolidate all power. Quoted in Katherine V. Grinnell, *Woman's Place in Government; from the Scientific and Biblical Viewpoint* (New York: Holmes W. Merton, 1914), 185.

internal to external relations, and are capable of self reparation and reproduction.”⁶⁰ He believed his model society would be more than a machine. It would learn and direct its own evolution. Looking at one of Merton’s drawings of what seem to be intricately tattooed ladies, one is reminded of ancient efforts to animate the statues of the gods by combining the right syllables in invocation.⁶¹

Merton assumed that the truth was one, and from that truth all effects and forms emanated, combining in various ways, to create the multiform universe. Let us say that he apprehended the universe as a predetermined unity in which all effects are simply folded up, in potential, and are rolled out and developed in time—Merton’s meaning of evolution. No original acts occur that are not already predetermined. There are no true independent agents except the first agent, the first cause. Calvin’s God, ironically, was preserved, but instead of that inscrutable tyrant, the mystical Man had replaced Him on the throne. Thus in Pearl Andrews’ utopian community as well, the apex of individual sovereignty would come when the individual, as recognized in his unregenerate guise, was completely effaced and merged into the whole, in Emerson’s term, the “Oversoul.” In other words, the individual would stand aside and allow the One to unfold itself through him or her, no longer an anomaly, no longer an obstruction to the One will, its direction, its evolution in history. This made “individual sovereignty” mean, in the realm of practical politics, the absolute sovereignty of the State. Supreme authority was transferred from God to Man. Octavius Frothingham described the history of the movement of which he was a part:

Transcendentalism was a distinct philosophical system. Practically it was an assertion of the inalienable worth of man; theoretically it was an assertion of the immanence of

⁶⁰ *The Book of Israel*, 278.

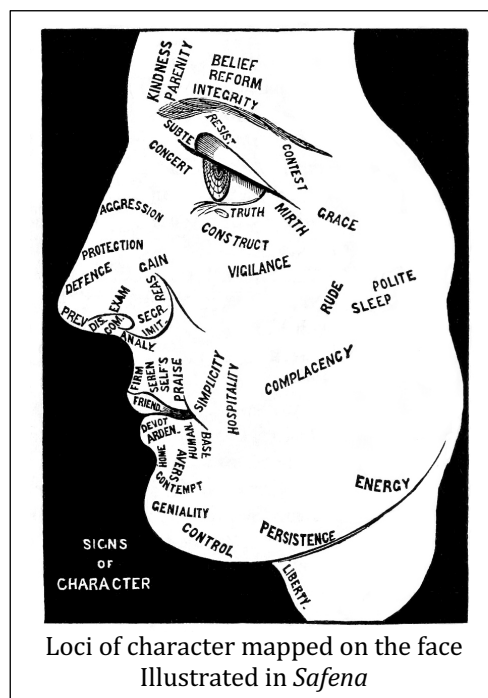
⁶¹ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 129-59. Merton’s near-contemporary, spiritualist John Murray Spear, was thinking along the same lines when he attempted, under the guidance of spirits, to create a “new motor” and “electrical infant” that would “go of itself,” a type of updated version of the Deistical machine that the framers of the U. S. Constitution had thought to create with its various checks and balances.

divinity in instinct, the transference of supernatural attributes to the natural constitution of mankind.⁶²

Science, then, was simply a tracing back of the multitude of effects to their one cause, by teasing out the coded laws of transformation by which all things are combined. Under this understanding, it was a kind of kabbalistic endeavor.⁶³ The sort of biblical hermeneutics this approach indicated was one in which scriptures were to be analyzed by a sort of “science,” including comparative philology (rather than through consulting traditional commentaries) and then recombining the results in a new synthesis. Advances in this science were simply intuitions or illuminations of the hidden source of unfolding forms.

This was in the air during Merton’s time. It gave him license to seek knowledge from seers and spirit mediums to make sense the findings of contemporary biology, physiology, and ethnology: Despite the fact that churchmen denounced spiritualism as a primitive superstition, all around Merton were progressives, free thinkers, and reformers of the most modern inclination who sought truth from intuition via the utterances of seers and spirit mediums tapped directly into the primordial unconscious. They acted on Emerson’s conviction that the true world was behind a curtain:

The idealist, in speaking of events, sees them as spirits. He does not deny the sensuous fact: by no means; but he will not see that alone. He does not deny the presence of this table, this chair, and the walls of this room, but he looks at these things as the reverse



⁶² Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England; a History* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903), 136.

⁶³ Isidor Kalisch, trans. *Sepher Yezirah; a Book on Creation; or, the Jewish Metaphysics of Remote Antiquity* (New York: L. H. Frank & Company, 1877), 5.

side of the tapestry, as the *other end*; each being a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact which nearly concerns him. This manner of looking at things, transfers every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without there, into the consciousness.⁶⁴

The same assumptions led Merton to map out systems of the supposed elements of society onto heads, as if he were creating a golem by inscribing emblems of sacred words on their crania. He was led him back into the scriptures, with his synthetic “science,” and it justified him when he discovered there his own identity as the revealer, the prophet, and the Messiah, who held the key to create a living, autonomous society.

The publication of *Safena* helped radical reformers place Merton in a familiar context or intellectual lineage because several times in the book, Merton characterized the Matuna as a “Unitary Home.” That was a code phrase with a history, referring to an organized co-operative in which the nuclear family had been deliberately dissolved and all the members of which were “free lovers,” unconstrained by the wider society’s laws limiting sexual relations to married couples.

Fourierist phalanxes were Unitary Homes, at least in theory, though they differed in practice. Other experiments at establishing utopian communes during the 1850s, while not necessarily Fourierist in inspiration, also sometimes referred to themselves as “Unitary Homes.” An example was the so-called “Free Love Club” in New York City, inspired largely by “Universologist” Stephen Pearl Andrews and by Thomas and Mary Gove Nichols, which evolved into a co-operative boarding house run by newspaperman Edward Underhill.

The contradictions in such places were rife: They were declared by their advocates to be the only places where, because the marital ties that bind were dissolved in practice, people were truly free, the only places that could insure a person’s “Individual Sovereignty,” in Pearl Andrews’ phrase. Yet what sort of individual sovereignty was possible under a regimen such as Merton outlined in which every aspect of one’s life and behavior was measured and regulated, including one’s clothes and even the shape of one’s

⁶⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Transcendentalist, a Lecture read at the Masonic Temple, Boston, January, 1842,” *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 312-13.

thoughts and language? Where one was assigned a rank based on skin color or the shape of one's brow? What sort of individual sovereignty was possible in Pearl Andrews' scheme of improving the race by the selective breeding of individuals and the disallowing of the mating of undesirables, which he called "stirpiculture," but which later theorists would call "eugenics"?

Underhill's Unitary Home in New York City was a case in point: It was touted to the public simply as a co-operative boarding house in which living arrangements made it possible to live cheaply, by buying food at wholesale cost, preparing it in a common kitchen, and serving it in a common refectory. Other work, such as minding the children and doing the laundry was also done in a co-operative arrangement, relieving women, it was said, of many of their daily chores. Eventually, however, investigative newspaper reporters uncovered something more. Among the residents, there existed an outer group who more or less kept their individual social relations tied to their families, but there also existed an inner, but ever-expanding secret group, made up of adults and children, whose sexual arrangements could only be described as the freest sort of debased libertinism. And the laundering and cooking was done largely by hired help. The place was broken up amid the resulting publicity.⁶⁵

Unitary Homes, despite much talk by their advocates of higher laws of purity, were almost always rightly understood by the public to mean free love (meaning, precisely, free sex) communities that challenged traditional families and marriage laws under the banner of Socialistic freedom. Merton's proposed Matuna fit that description very well. His own serial bigamy, though not admitted in public or even apparently to his own families, proved that he put his principles into practice.

⁶⁵ "The Unitary Home," New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, 16 May 1858; "Practical Socialism in New-York—Revival of the 'Free-Love' Meetings—The 'Unitary Household,'" *New York Times*, 22 June 1858; "Associated Households," Lancaster *Daily Evening Express*, 1 August 1859; "Closing of the Unitary Household," *Buffalo Weekly Express*, 12 June 1860; "Free Love—Expose of the Affairs of the 'Unitary Household,'" *New York Times*, 21 September 1860; Edward F. Underhill, "The Unitary Household," *New York Times*, 26 September 1860.

Free Love Spiritualism

From its very beginning in the late 1840s, the spiritualist movement had been associated with free-love doctrines. People who had, in their view, freed themselves from the hidebound shackles of the traditional sources of the dogmas and creeds of Christianity and opted instead for spiritual guidance from seers and mediums could easily include Christianity's moral strictures on sexual behavior as yet one more bond from which they must be freed to reach a higher spiritual state. By the end of the 1860s and into the early 1870s—when Merton began publishing—the controversy about free-love within the spiritualist community was coming to a climax, with a schism imminent between those who saw themselves essentially as Christian but now with “sure Knowledge [via the spirits] added to Faith” and those who saw themselves as having disposed of Christianity, and having now embraced Freethought and radical social reform. Merton was in the latter group.

After publishing *Safena*, Merton traveled to Kansas, gathered his wife Lunetta and their son, and moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, where he hoped to find a good number of progressive reformers who would help him set up a working example of the Matuna.⁶⁶ At least one other group of radical reformers and free-love spiritualists also made an attempt to model little communities based on his plan, as the vanguard, within spiritualism, of the principle of free-love. Because that principle was anathema to the larger society, even within the spiritualist movement, the organizers considered their closest coadjutors as members of a secret or esoteric order within spiritualism. That group was organized in Chicago by Daniel Hull, the brother of Moses Hull, his co-worker in the cause of radicalism, spiritualism, and free love. In August 1873, Daniel Hull wrote a letter to Victoria Woodhull, which she published in *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, under the title “More About the Secret Order”:

⁶⁶ The first evidence of him back in Michigan I have found is a notice of Merton giving a talk on the proper use of the microscope to a meeting of the State Microscopical Society of Michigan in March 1872, where he was reported to have been visiting from Philadelphia; “The State Microscopical Society of Michigan,” *Quarterly Journal of Microscopy and the Allied Natural Sciences* 1.2 (April 1872): 122-23.

We have organized upon the plan of Matuna—that is, upon the basis of the organs of human intellect. It is well known that each individual is a representative of some class of organs. He is either perceptive, retentive, ambitious, defensive, or impulsive. Our system is so arranged that each one attracts to his place, and every one finds work to do in their own particular field of labor. ... It is bound to be a success. Mr. [Andrew Jackson] Davis started on the grand idea in his arrangement of the lyceums but did not reach all the details. His idea of colors was correct, only to be beautiful it should be carried up to the entire costume. Only think how like a beautiful bouquet [sic] would be a set of dancers on the floor, having all the colors of the prism, and then going through all the changes! This we propose to do, and it will be easily accomplished.⁶⁷

That June, Dr. Merton had attended the annual meeting of the Michigan Spiritualist Association, which was held in Battle Creek. A well-known itinerant test medium, Lucy M. Blair from Vermont (“the Flower Medium”) excited the delegates by demonstrating how she could paint portraits and flowers while blindfolded (under the spirit control of a deceased Italian artist). Merton “closely examined the bandages as they were removed from Mrs. Blair’s eyes, and stated to the audience that there had been no chance for deception.”⁶⁸

The meeting attendees elected Merton to be a delegate to the annual convention of the American Association of Spiritualists. Daniel Hull was also a delegate, from Indiana. That convention would elect Victoria Woodhull, the most vigorous and well-known (and notorious) advocate of Free Love at the time, to be the



⁶⁷ Daniel W Hull, “More About the Secret Order,” *Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly*, 9 August 1873.

⁶⁸ “The Spiritualists; Their Grove Meeting at Battle Creek,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, 10 July 1873. For Mrs. Blair’s mediumship, see “Spiritual Painting,” Barton, Vermont *Orleans Independent Standard*, 8 February 1870; and *Spirit Gallery of Art* (November 1883): 107-108.

association's president.⁶⁹ Woodhull then ran a series of articles by Merton in *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* in which he staked out his ideas on social relations and organization.⁷⁰

The following year, in May 1874, Daniel Hull wrote an article entitled "Unitary Homes" for *Hull's Crucible*, the paper that he and his brother Moses published. He wrote, "We would merely advocate the *necessity* at this time, (when the iron hand of oppression will be made heavier than ever, if possible,) of having places of refuge for the fugitives from matrimony, where they may rest and recuperate their wasted health; also secure the conditions necessary to the practice of the doctrines of Individual Sovereignty." He then described Merton's scheme for the Matuna and Merton's effort to organize a Unitary Home in Battle Creek. Hull concluded, "We are organizing societies wherever it is possible to do so, upon the plan of the Matuna. In connection with it we have some secret signs which we give to adults that they may be able to understand each other in case of an emergency. We should be glad to see Unitary Homes established everywhere, and we should recommend that they be organized upon the plan of the Matuna."⁷¹ Also in May, Merton attended and addressed the first Michigan Woman-Suffrage meeting and was introduced and lauded there by George Julian, as already quoted above.⁷²

Late the previous year, in 1873, with his current wife at least temporarily with him in Battle Creek, Merton had fathered a daughter, whom Arthur and Lunetta named Leona.⁷³ By the end of 1874, however, Lunetta and her children were back in Kansas, living with or near her relatives in Bayard, where she gave birth on January 28, 1875 to another daughter, May Irene or "Marena." From that time, for several years, Lunetta and her children would reside on land adjoining her parents' farm, while husband Arthur visited them only occasionally, spending most of his time touring and lecturing.

⁶⁹ For Merton's speech to the convention in support of the radical Free Lovers, see *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of the American Association of Spiritualists* (Chicago: 1873), 11-12.

⁷⁰ "The Social Fanatics," *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 22 November 1873; "The Temple of Socialism.—No. II," 17 January 1874; "The Temple of Socialism.—No. III," 20 June 1874.

⁷¹ "Unitary Homes," *Hull's Crucible*, 14 May 1874.

⁷² "The Michigan Woman-Suffragists," special dispatch to the *Chicago Tribune*, as reprinted in the *Vicksburg Herald*, 8 August 1874; *Proceedings of the Michigan State Woman-Suffrage Association* (Lansing: Daily Telegraph, 1874), 17.

⁷³ Born October 15, 1873 in Battle Creek.

In 1876, the same year, Arthur published *The Matuna, or Natural Republic*, keyed to the U. S. centennial celebration. He also published his first version of *The Book of Life*, this edition subtitled, “the human constitution with its cosmical relations.”⁷⁴ Over the next several decades, he would revise and update *The Book of Life* and have it issued by different publishers, with the contents, including his illustrations, expanded, reduced, or re-written each time, depending on his current thinking.

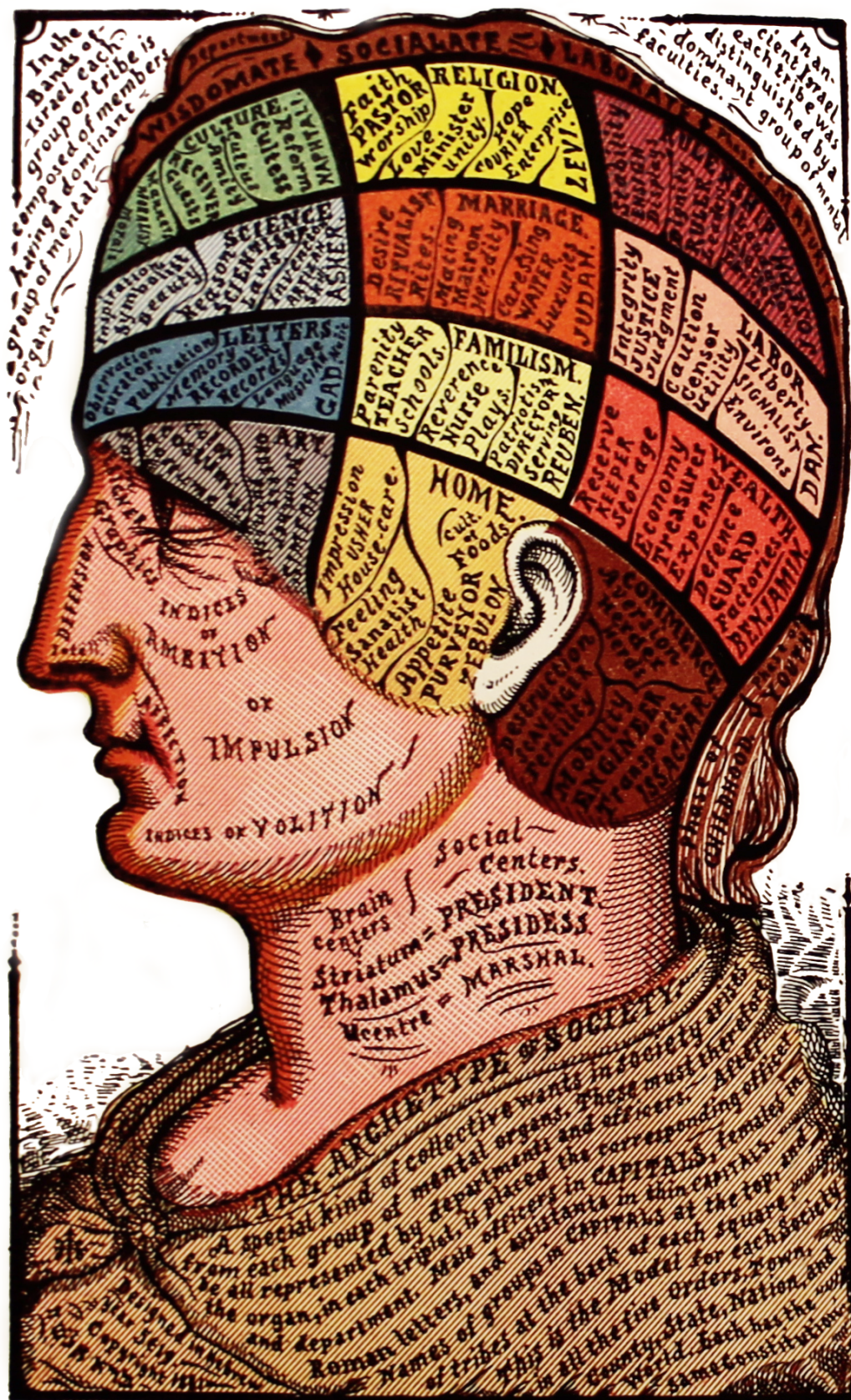
In 1877-78, he was residing in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was listed as a non-allopathic physician, with his home and office in Cambridge. Later, he would vaguely claim to have been Professor of Physiology and Zoology at Harvard, but there is no evidence of that whatsoever, although it is certainly possible that he supplemented his study of anatomy there. The records do show, however, that in August 1877, he attended the annual meeting in Boston of the Free Religious Association, headed by Octavius Frothingham and composed of such worthies as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lucretia Mott, Robert Dale Owen, Lydia Maria Child, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Minot Judson Savage.⁷⁵ The discussion at the meeting was devoted to the principle of co-operation and the need to promote labor organizations to counteract the capitalist corporations that controlled industry. Both Arthur Merton and Stephen Pearl Andrews, among others, participated.

Merton organized a local section in Boston of the United States Workingmen’s Party that year, and in January 1878, he formed the Social Evolution Club, whose primary goal, it seems, was to discuss his ideas.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Arthur Merton, *The Book of Life; or, The human constitution with its cosmical relations* (Philadelphia: Caxton Press of Sherman & Company, 1876).

⁷⁵ “The Annual Meeting of the Free Religious Association,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 1 June 1877.

⁷⁶ *Boston Post*, 31 August 1877; *American Socialist*, 8 August 1878.



The New Jerusalem

On February 1, 1878, back in Commerce, Michigan, his mother, Mary Dodge wrote in her family bible that her son Elisha had died. Perhaps he had arranged for someone to send her that news. The sparse evidence indicates that he left the country, perhaps for most of the year, and did not return until the end of January 1879. The passenger manifest of the SS *Canada* listed Professor Arthur Merton returning from England to the port of New York on January 31, 1879. Where had he been and what had he been doing during that year? It appears he had made his way to the Holy Land, as one historian has noted:

The Anglo-Israelite crank is of course one of the common objects of Jerusalem life, and is of various degrees of sincerity and reasonableness. His *raison d'être* ranges from pure ignorance and assertiveness up to the complex eccentricities of a certain Doctor Sivatha, who by dint of complicating the historical question by those of phrenology, physiology, and astrology, succeeded in rendering the so-called study a very serious affair. He was in Jerusalem about 1878 and among the older inhabitants are some still in possession of elaborate maps or charts showing that the missing Ten Tribes consist of Norse, Saxons and Fellahs to the number of fifty-one millions, while the Jews, recognized as such, amount to only about a sixth of that number. He produced, moreover, a plan of Salema, the New Jerusalem, showing the return of the missing tribes and assigning to them their proper places in the Holy City according to their relation (ascertained from Ezek. xlviii and Rev. xxi.) with the mental faculties, of which, he observes, institutions are but an outgrowth. Hence, to put it briefly, the various departments of the New Jerusalem will be distributed in accordance with human faculty as exhibited by phrenology; Asher, for example as Science over the eyes, Naphtali and Judah above as Culture and Marriage, and Gad and Simeon below as Art and Letters.⁷⁷

This grand scheme would not show up in Merton's public writings for a few years, but in October and November 1878, while he was in Jerusalem, a "Pre-Millennial

⁷⁷ Ada Goodrich-Freer, *Inner Jerusalem* (New York: Dutton, 1904), 38.

Conference” was held at Holy Trinity (Episcopal) Church in New York City where Protestant divines from various denominations read papers on their ideas of when and how the biblical Millennium would occur.⁷⁸ Merton was not there, but he would later list the conference as an event of universal significance in his chronology of the world, apparently seeing it as a providential echo of his own trip.⁷⁹

As hinted above, his ideas about the restoration of Jerusalem and the initiation of a Messianic Age by Anglo-Saxon “Israelites” did not appear from out of nowhere. They found their place among other speculations—seemingly reinforced by then-current theories of the evolution of the various nations and peoples—that gave substance to a centuries-old, vague congeries of myths to the effect that the British were descended as a race from one of the lost tribes of Israel. As such, they had a fundamental part to play in the fulfillment of the biblical prophecies that Jerusalem would be restored and would become a blessing to all the Earth. In the nineteenth century, that conviction materialized from time to time, with more or less substance, in Anglican circles. It prompted some to wonder if such an Anglo-Saxon millennial age might be anticipated and even calculated beforehand, taking as evidence both scriptural prophecies and a scientific reading of the signs of the time, and its initiation be deliberately triggered by Britain’s foreign policy.⁸⁰ Merton found the signs of the time written in the evolved physical and social constitution of the human race.

Less than a month after Merton returned to the United States, back in Boston, he took part in a meeting of the Social Science Club on the subject of co-operation. Merton addressed the group and said “he would like to see a co-operative movement in any direction, but expected nothing from a one sided co-operation. He advocated a grand union of the leading interests, which included the rights of women and labor.”⁸¹ In April, Merton attended another meeting of the Social Science Club, held to commemorate the birthday of Charles Fourier. Merton was called upon to give the group a brief sketch of Fourier’s life and doctrines. A few former residents of the Brook Farm commune were also present, and

⁷⁸ “The Pre-Millennial Conference,” Bellows Falls, Vermont *Chronicle*, 9 November 1878.

⁷⁹ *Book of Israel* (1882), 258.

⁸⁰ See the various essays in William Robert Fremantle, ed. *Israel Restored; or, The Scriptural Claims of the Jews upon the Christian Church* (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1841).

⁸¹ “The Social Science Club,” *Boston Globe*, 22 February 1879.

one of them, John Orvis, was called on to speak after Merton. Orvis, like Merton, was a fervent spiritualist, and looked to guidance from the spirits in various attempts he had made to set up utopian communities and solve the problems of the laboring class. "One great defect in Fourier's system," Orvis said, "was his ignoring the moral and religious part of man's nature so much. ... Fourier was almost the first one to attempt to study the social wants of man in the way known as the study of social science, and the reason why his practical success had not been greater was ... because the knowledge of the subject was so small in his day."⁸²

Later that year, also in Boston, "The Workers" published a pamphlet Merton authored, *The Crowned Republic; or, The New Demands of Scientific Knowledge, Association, and Industry* ("Is it possible to secure Personal Freedom, Social Unity, and Universal Wealth?"). It briefly argued for a version of what he had called the "Matuna," but stripped of all its invented nomenclature and detailed occult speculations on biology. It argued against the basic structure of the U. S. Constitution. Merton pronounced:

If the statesmen of civilization had been guided by science instead of imitating the surface facts of history, then they would not have made the three departments of government to be Legislative, Executive, and Judicial. For these do not express the great classes of wants which now exist in civilized society. They were better adapted to ancient times, when war was the trade of nations, and national robbery was the pastime of rulers.⁸³

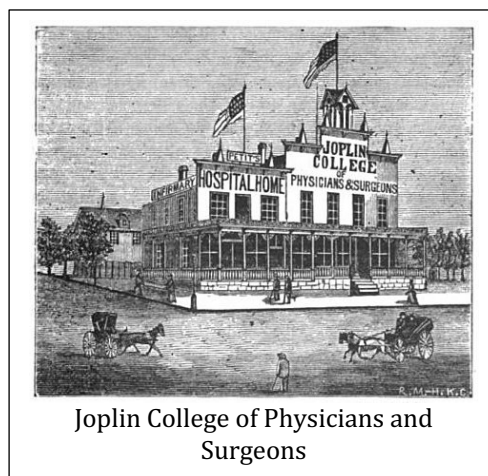
His new three branches of government were to be based, in effect, on the (Matuna) trinity of Intellect, Affection, and Volition; or, as he, put it, "in older terms, Wisdom, Love, and Will." How these necessarily implicated his Socialistic replacement was not explained, but the Labor vs. Capital problem would be solved, he was certain, by the establishment of labor bureaus (to provide work for all), and the common ownership of property.

⁸² "The Birthday of Charles Fourier," *Boston Journal*, 8 April 1879.

⁸³ Merton, *The Crowned Republic*, 4.

Although the pamphlet's back page listed various testimonials for "Dr. Merton's" views, his name appeared nowhere as its author. Instead, the title page listed the author as "Dr. מרש" [sic—perhaps his far-fetched attempt to render "Merton"?], making this the first time (at least in his writing career) that he showed any interest in Hebrew or that he considered himself an "Israelite." Elisha Dodge had indeed died to the world, although the name "Arthur Merton" would persist for a while, even after he adopted yet another.

At the beginning of January 1880, Merton was made a director of the Joplin (Missouri) College of Physician and Surgeons, the year it graduated its first class. The 1880 federal census in June shows him living in nearby Carthage with his wife Lunetta, their children (Arthur Llewellyn, Leona, and Marena), and his daughter Clara Eva (by his previous wife, Josephine). Its lists his occupation as "lecturer." The school was defunct, however, by 1884 because the state licensing board refused to recognize its diplomas. The school gave a year's worth of course credits for three years' worth of past practice of anything even vaguely resembling medicine, and so found its pupils from among those who wished to get a medical diploma in a few months or less, rather than a few years. In other words, it was a diploma mill.⁸⁴



Joplin College of Physicians and Surgeons

I do not have any definite evidence that Merton stayed attached to his wife Lunetta and their children (or even ever saw them in person again for decades) after the 1880 census listed them all together in Carthage. In addition, I do not have any evidence that he ever sought or obtained divorces from any woman he married.

When Arthur made his next extended move, perhaps the following year, Lunetta took their children to Kansas, where she would continue to live with them (Arthur

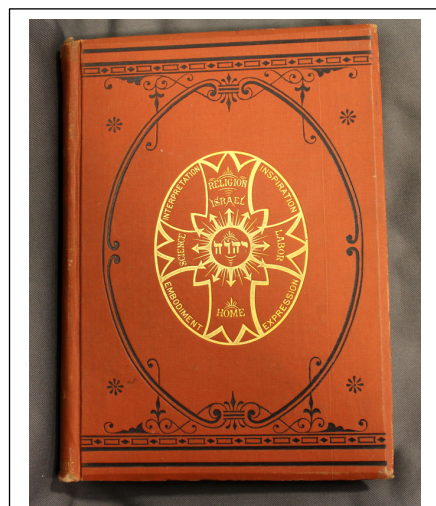
⁸⁴ "Medical Colleges 'in Good Standing,'" *St. Louis Clinical Record* 8.11 (February 1882): 325; "News Items," *Saint Louis Medical and Surgical Journal* 43.5 (February 1882): 568; *The History of Jasper County, Missouri* (Des Moines: Mills & Company, 1883): 448-50; "Joplin's Medical College Closed," *Decatur Herald*, 17 January 1884.

Llewellyn, Leona, and Marena) on farms owned by or adjacent to those of Lunetta's kin, as the children grew up and married.⁸⁵

In 1881, after Merton's brief time in Joplin, he moved to Chicago and began lecturing. He quickly gained a following of steady adult students and disciples—fifty or more—whom he dazzled with his seeming erudition and whom he set about organizing into a community of belief. At least some of those in this group formed an inner order whose living arrangements and social practices were essentially those Merton had earlier referred to as the “Matuna,” but which he now called the “Band of Israel” or the “Messians.”⁸⁶ A smaller number from within that inner group especially attached to Merton helped him to incorporate the “Salema University” in Chicago in October 1882. This was to be “a school of integral culture to teach the entire circle of the arts, letters, and sciences, to institute systematic mental training, and to secure normal physical development, with power to confer the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and the subordinate degrees.”⁸⁷

Three members of this inner group who were listed as trustees of Salema University were from a single family: Graham Grinnell, his wife Katherine (née Van Allen), and their daughter Grace. Their home on Tolman Avenue was where Merton boarded. It was the physical location of the embryonic Salema University.

Also listed as trustees (besides Arthur Merton) were Martha A. Bridges, a widow in her mid-forties; Richard James Bickerdike, a recent graduate of Northwestern University; and Robert Henry Wisdom, a wealthy businessman who had long run a lumber planing mill in Chicago with his father. Wisdom's accumulated fortune provided the funds for the publication of two profusely illustrated compendia of Merton's



The gilded edition of *The Book of Wisdom; Sepher Hakeyim*

⁸⁵ Toward the end of her life, Lunetta was blind, and lived with her daughter Leona and her husband and their children in Osage and then Bayard (Allen County), Kansas. She died on October 28, 1911.

⁸⁶ S. C. Gould, “Arcane Societies in the United States II,” *Rosicrucian Brotherhood* 2.4 (October 1908): 168.

⁸⁷ “A Certificate of Organization,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 October 1882.

“discoveries.” They were: אלשה ברא ספר החיים [sic]; or, *The Book of Israel; Sepherva* and *The Book of Wisdom; Unsealing the Mental, Social, and Physical Life of Man; Sepher Hakeyim*. The books had mostly the same content; but some of the illustrations and the production quality varied from one to the other. I do not know whether the two books were meant for different audiences of readers, but *The Book of Wisdom* has a larger format, the cover is sturdier, its cover label is gold leaf, and its pages are each encircled by a fancy border printed in a separate color and consisting of words and phrases in both Hebrew and English. Booksellers, librarians, and the reading public understood that the author of these books was Arthur Merton, but no author’s name appears on them, although some of the Hebrew characters listed in the title of *The Book of Israel* might be his ungainly attempt to render “Alesha.”

A modern reader who might pick up one of these books would certainly be struck by the illustrations, which are detailed, well-wrought and executed, but which confront one with a bizarre extravaganza of notions dealing with human physiology, biological and social evolution, and biblical prophecy. The illustrations constitute what has gained for Merton a small, but fascinated coterie of modern-day aficionados of what might be called the “art of insanity.” Merton’s text itself does lead the reader through a presentation of his scheme of phrenological and physiological analysis of the natural world. That included his eccentric



The Nazarene, drawn by
Sivatha

explanation of how certain ethnic groups were descended from the lost tribes of Israel.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ His speculations about this occult connection with Israel appeared at a time when other amateur archeologists and armchair theorists were batting about the same idea, although their proof texts and evidence and conclusions differed. Such writers—like George Moore, *The Lost Tribes and the Saxons of the East and of the West; with New Views of Buddhism and Translations of Rock-Records in India* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861) and Edward Hine’s revised edition of his own book, *Forty-Seven Identifications of the Anglo-Saxons with the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel; Founded upon Five Hundred Scripture Proofs* (1878)—laid the loose groundwork for the “Anglo-Israel” movement that counted adherents in both England and the United States.

The bulk of his text, however, is devoted to explaining and justifying his rejection of Jesus as the messiah and savior and to replacing him and the messianic kingdom with himself and the reconstituted society he wished to build in Jerusalem. This formed the major portion of the material that appeared in these new editions of *The Book of Life*. Of the Christian claim that Jesus is God and the Messiah, he wrote:

He, the Creator of the World, stands thirty years among men, speaking familiarly three languages, and yet does not so much as explain how a single plant grows, or a single pebble is formed. How could he have avoided displaying his superior knowledge, when he so constantly used these natural objects to illustrate his discourses?

Healing a few sick people by miraculous power was a poor substitute for great sanitary systems, which should banish disease, and its causes from the world.

A few noble precepts about love and unselfishness have proved powerless against the organized injustice of governments and aristocracies of wealth, which have ground down the life and fed on the spoils of the people.

The command to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect, was a poor substitute for a system of integral education, which should secure to every child the glory of a mind and body trained and developed in perfect symmetry.

To bless little children, and say "Of such is the kingdom of Heaven," seems like a dreadful mockery in a Christian civilization which allows one half of the children to die before the age of five years, from easily preventable causes of disease.

The spasm of conversion and the hope of escaping hell was but a sad substitute for the spiritual unity of mankind and the conscious and perpetual communion with the angelic world. The scope of religion is immensely broader and deeper than the Christian definition and example.

No system of doctrines and of life was formulated by Jesus. Cut off while his mission was scarcely begun, the work was left to other hands. Christianity was molded into form by monastic teachers, who substituted impractical and false dogmas for the simple precepts of their professed master.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *Book of Israel*, 236-37.

For Jesus' answer to such a notion of what the Messiah should do, there is no need to speculate. We already have it: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23; Luke 4:4:8). For Merton, the "imposters" (the Apostle Paul, foremost among them, and presumably the other Apostles and Gospel writers) were the ones who crafted and taught the doctrine that the crucifixion of Jesus was a divine sacrifice that effected an atonement for the sins of the world. Merton seems to have received some strong opposition on this from his readers, for the following year he published a pamphlet, *Jesus and the Prophets Against Paul*, to defend his position.

The thrust of Merton's argument rejecting the divine atonement was in line with "Liberal Religionists," such as Unitarians and Universalists. It was not at all original to him, but was a matter of contention as far back as the earliest days of the Reformation. Likewise, Merton's assumption that human salvation lay in the amassing of knowledge about the natural world and the systematic ordering of that knowledge into a guide for structuring society was not unique to him. He shared that with other Liberals of the time, who located sin not in individuals' actions, but in societal structures. "Salvation" was construed as a physical and ideological reconstruction of society, guided by wise scientific seers. It meant the human engineering of Earth into a Heaven.

Merton's explanation of the evolution of society included the notion that each of the ethnic races represented ranked phases of biological evolution, from lowest to highest. He thought each of the main, higher races had produced a teacher who drew together the wisdom of that race. As he reckoned it, the world had already seen six such teachers—Confucius, Lao-tsu, Gautama, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Mohammad. But none of these teachers were the Messiah, foretold by the prophets of old, the one who would lead the world into the messianic kingdom of universal harmony, heaven on earth:

To lead the present age, the seventh great teacher must be cast in a more composite mould. He must be great as a master of exact science, as a spiritual seer, and as the organizer of a new life for humanity. On entering the phase of maturity it is perfectly natural for the nations to produce a great mind, able, through the high methods of

science, to discover the interior laws of man's nature, and through these to organize anew thought, the life, and the conditions of all society.

The six great teachers all taught noble precepts and seemed inspired by lofty motives. But none of them saw clearly how the doctrines of religion must be expressed through every department of knowledge and every form of industry, not less than through the perpetual fountain of human emotions All this was reserved for the growth of a later age.⁹⁰

This idea that human eras were epitomized in particular seers was already widespread with spiritualist and occult-leaning thinkers. James Martin Peebles' 1869 *Seers of the Ages* outlined such a notion, for example, as did Kersey Graves' 1875 book, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*. Such schemes would shortly coalesce around the idea that the "era" of Jesus was ending and a new era was beginning (for example, the Piscean Age yielding to the Aquarian Age). The motive for proposing such grand schemes was to restrict the authority of Jesus and of his teachings to a term that was passing away and to open up the present age to a new teaching. This family of schemes was conceived and wrought by those who wished to dismantle the Christianity that dominated their cultural landscape.



Merton's notions fell into this category, though the public advertising of his lectures often confused the issue, saying, for example that they "reveal the great doctrines of the Bible and prove them by the exact methods of science."⁹¹ He expressed it in terms of stages of evolution. But his notion of evolution was always teleological; he always conceived it as directed, ever onward, ever upward, ascending to greater heights of perfection and human happiness. Evolution, therefore, did not occur through random selection; like many other

⁹⁰ *Book of Israel*, 264.

⁹¹ "Sidarta, whose scientific articles have attracted attention ..." *Inter Ocean*, 7 February 1886.

spiritualists who embraced a form of evolutionary thinking (such as Alfred Russell Wallace and James Martin Peebles), Merton believed that historical evolution was goal-directed.⁹²

To assist him in laying out and justifying his scheme of the evolution of society, he used two “scientific” methods: psychometry and numerology. The pseudo-science of psychometry was initiated by Joseph Rodes Buchanan as early as 1841, when he came to believe he could locate the intracranial locations of various phrenological organs by touching various parts of people’s heads and thereby suppressing or concentrating the psychic valance, as one might say, of the organs beneath them. This, he believed, would result in increases or decreases in the person’s array of emotions and behaviors. These would correlate with the locations he was touching externally and demonstrated that thoughts and emotions were projected externally from the brain. The memories and thoughts were inscribed onto the material basis of the skull. As the notion was developed over the years, by Buchanan, by spiritualist William Denton, and by others, psychometry was reckoned to allow sensitive psychics to read images from the past of even inanimate objects—like geological or archaeological specimens, for example, or the paper on which letters had been written—to learn about the objects’ past, or to describe the person who wrote a letter. This was one of the methods that Merton allowed he had used in compiling his evolutionary chronology.

With numerology, Merton also sought to apply mathematical operations to the divine mind (as revealed in the structure of the natural world) and in the evidence found in inspired revelations—namely the prophetic books of the Old Testament, Revelations, and Daniel. He applied “science,” in other words, to inspiration, to discern the chronology of events that marked the passing of one age to another and to discover the date of the beginning of the Messianic Age. This was not a new strategy, but a very old one. It was applied to the scriptures over the centuries by both Jews and Christians. In his own numerological analysis of the scriptures, for example, Merton cited as predecessors the Episcopalian professor Milo Mahan, who had published *Palmoni; or the Numerals of*

⁹² Spiritualists and occultists were not alone in insisting upon framing evolution in this way; it is fundamental to such philosophers as Spencer, Hegel, and Marx, as it has been to many theologians of the modern age, even heterodox Catholic ones like Teilhard de Chardin.

Scripture, a Proof of Inspiration in 1863, and the Evangelical preacher and missionary Henry Grattan Guinness, who had published *The Approaching End of the Age in the Light of History and Prophecy* in 1878.

Merton used numerology also to fortify the extended system of harmonic correspondences that he had already incorporated in his earlier schemes of utopian



Rt. Rev. Milo Mahan

societies, arguing now for a base-twelve numbering system, a refashioned calendar system, a renaming of the days of the week, and a detailed regimen of dress, behavior, architecture, landscaping, diet, ritual, and language, supposedly reflecting mathematical resonances. Merton believed he had reconciled mind and matter (and religion and science) by “discovering” that spirit was actually a form of matter, which ordinarily eluded measurement. “The reason why spirit has no weight or gravity,” he wrote, “is because its atoms are smaller than the length of the waves of gravity, and therefore these waves cannot set the atoms

of spirit into vibration, and consequently the attraction of gravitation has no effect on them.”⁹³ These vibrating atoms of spirit, when emitted by the brain were projected as a psychic force that could extend far outside the brain. He explained that this was the principle that made possible mesmerism and telepathy.⁹⁴

Merton also “found” that thoughts—which emanated as combined “waves of nerve force” from the phrenological “organs” of the brain—all had geometrical shapes as well, differing “in form, in length, and in altitude.”⁹⁵ Memory, for example, had a rounded form; but the form of waves of Reason were “constructive.” Those of Amity or Friendship were “articulated”; but those of Religion were “smooth”; and those of “Sexlove” were looped. Dignity had “angulo-curves”; Integrity and Liberty had sharp angles; the angles of Defense

⁹³ *Book of Israel*, 52.

⁹⁴ George P. McIntyre, “Occult Matter; Mesmerism, Hypnotism, Telepathy or Thought Transfer; and Their Relation to the Science of Mental Healing,” *Progressive Thinker* 5.26 (23 April 1892): 5.

⁹⁵ *Book of Israel*, 53.

were “acute”; and Aversion’s waves were “hooked.” From the “high” organs at the top of the head, he thought, waves of psychic forces were received and emitted. In people whose higher faculties were especially strong these formed an array of energies that were sometimes visible as light; thus, in the drawings that one can recognize as his self-portraits, this array is shown as a kind of vertical nimbus, looking from the side like a Mohawk haircut, as in the drawing with which we began our consideration of Sivartha.

Alesha Sivatha: Messiah at Large

Everywhere Merton looked, from the smallest to the largest scale of the universe, he found correspondences, harmonies, resonances, and reflections.⁹⁶ God, through the mumbled, uninhibited mouthings of mediums, had spoken to Man in his unhappy world and had told him He would send him messages in code, in the words of ancient seers, in the colors of the rainbow, in the geometrical ratios in the human frame, in the growth of plants, in the cycles of history. If someone could only comprehend this patterned code, it would all contain *the very key* to unlock man from his present confinement and open for him the portals to the coming kingdom. Merton thought he had deciphered the universal code; what was left was the job of engineering the world to fit it.

Merton, working his psychometric method upon crania, and his numerological method upon the scriptures, discovered his own personal history—his date of birth, for example—to be implicated in the salvation of the world, and implicated in the chronology of the appearance of the long-awaited seer of the Messianic Age. Moreover, he calculated the date for the public appearance or declaration of the New Era and the renovation of the human race, which was to be capped by the gathering of the “tribes of Israel” (the various ethnic peoples of the world) in a reconstituted Jerusalem. It happened to coincide with the writing of his *Book of Israel*:

In the early ages of the world, and up to the time of writing this Book, the base and back brain, the lion and the wolf in man, have always devoured the lamb and its work. The Lamb in man, in all men, has been slain from the foundation of the world. But the prophets declare that in the age of the Messiah these shall be at peace, the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox, shall dwell in unity, and a little child shall lead them.⁹⁷

To put all this in as plain a way as possible: The year 1881 was the beginning of the Messianic Age. This very book (or, capitalized, as he put it, “this Book”) was its

⁹⁶ *Book of Israel*, 53.

⁹⁷ *Book of Israel*, 183.

proclamation and gospel. And Arthur Merton, now appearing under a new consecrated name, Alesha Sivарtha, was the long-awaited Messiah, the restorer of Jerusalem, the guide and savior of humanity.⁹⁸ He was the “little child,” the hitherto unrecognized descendant of noble, but hidden, lineage, who had come from humble beginnings.

Merton spent nearly the entire decade of the 1880s in Chicago, expanding his researches along the lines he had already staked out, publishing a few more books, lecturing, and organizing those who accepted his schemes. He lived with the Grinnells on Talman Avenue, and Katherine Grinnell became his most loyal and dedicated follower. He contributed articles to the nationally distributed Chicago-based Spiritualist newspaper, *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* on occult topics, first under the name “Sidарtha,” then “Sivарtha.”⁹⁹ He also became a close associate of Andrew J. Swarts, an ex-Methodist, ex-Unitarian minister, who published a magazine from Chicago, *Mind-Cure*, devoted to spiritualism and New Thought (which had developed alongside Christian Science). Both Merton (as Sivарtha) and Katherine Grinnell (as “Adasha”) contributed illustrations and articles to Swarts’ magazine.

In July 1882, he gave a lecture on “A System of Integral Education” to the Chicago Liberal League. In October, he addressed a meeting of the Social Science Association. In May 1884, he attended the National Greenback Convention held in Indianapolis; and in November 1886, he attended the National Bible and Prophetic Conference in Chicago.¹⁰⁰

Chicago during the 1880s was a fitting place for Merton to locate himself. The city was the center of a raft of entrepreneurial thinkers and commercial schemers who ran their operations, often via fraudulent mail-order courses, subscriptions, and memberships.

⁹⁸ He eased into the name “Sivарtha,” first rendering it “Sidarta,” then “Sidарtha,” and finally “Sivарtha”; he also sometimes used the name “Alshah,” rather than “Alesha.”

⁹⁹ Sidарtha, “The Growth of Man,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 12 January 1884; “The Growth of Man,” 19 January 1884; “The Collective Man,” 9 February 1884; “The Coming City,” 15 March 1884; “A Serpent in Man,” 3 May 1884; Sivарtha, “A Universal Language as a Basis for Human Unity,” 31 December 1887.

¹⁰⁰ Liberal League: “Liberal League,” *Inter Ocean*, 23 July 1882 and “Notes,” *Radical Review* 10.16 (28 July 1882); Social Science Association: “Social Science,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 October 1882; Chicago Greenback Convention: “Dispatch from Indianapolis,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 26 May 1884; National Bible and Prophetic Convention: “An Evangelical Council,” *Inter Ocean*, 17 November 1886 (where he registered as “M. Sivарtha”).

They relied on the then-popular occult, “mind science,” and New Thought movement, based on the “mind over matter” philosophy. Merton’s “mental science” found followers in Chicago, but even there his ideas were generally recognized as uniquely eccentric. The descriptive phrase, “religious crank,” was not absent from secular newspaper reporting on him.¹⁰¹ An article in in 1886 in the *New York Tribune*, for example, described him as what we would call a “cult leader.” Its headline was “Latest Freak in Chicago”:

About fifty persons, mostly intelligent women, believe that a man who lives in Holman[sic]-ave., in the west division of the city, is a Messiah come to save the world again and introduce a new order of living. His name is Arthur Merton. ... Of Merton’s previous history little is known, except that for at least ten years he had believers in his Messiahship. Many well-known Chicagoans were once his disciples, but they gradually withdrew from the fold and left his worship entirely to the women, who have stuck to him through thick and thin. ... [His theories] appear to be as harmless as they are wild and fanciful. They put forward the idea that there is a plan of government in Heaven and that Merton has discovered this and copied the system for application on the earth, when the new Jerusalem is built there.¹⁰²

Merton and his associates practiced communicating with exalted spirits. Indeed, Kate Grinnell (“Adasha”) served as a medium for asking questions of the creator of the universe. “In ancient times,” wrote Sivatha, “Yehovah communicated to man through the use of spiritual laws and forces. And the same thing can and does take place now. With his faithful servant Adasha He has often conversed face to face, and revealed His personal form. He has answered thousands of her questions, with a wisdom and a spiritual knowledge surpassing that of man.”¹⁰³

In 1884, Sivatha and his followers, then operating as the “School of Culture” with an office in the Tribune building, published a new synopsis of Sivatha’s teachings—perhaps a

¹⁰¹ See, for example, “A religious crank ...” *Iola Register*, 24 September 1886.

¹⁰² “The Latest Freak in Chicago; a Man Who Has Discovered the System of Government in Heaven,” *New York Tribune*, 17 November 1886.

¹⁰³ Sivatha, *Book of Life, Vonisa* (Chicago: 1884), 345.

summary to hand out to interested parties or to those attending one of his thirteen-session lecture series—as well as a revised edition of *The Book of Life*.¹⁰⁴ The summary edition gives a brief synopsis of when and what he had discovered. It begins by noting that Joseph Gall, Joseph Rodes Buchanan, and James Wakeman Redfield had preceded him in locating regions of the brain and body and claims that his own investigations in this had been recently verified by the electrical stimulation of animal brains by David Ferrier. Then Sivārtha turns to what he believed he had discovered:

In the years 1859, 1860, and 1861, the Author of this Synopsis made a series of discoveries which complete the outlines of the Science of Man. These included the classification of the mental organs in three classes and twelve groups; the Geometric laws of the Mind; the Polarity of the Faculties; the Law of Spiritual Exchanges and Colors; the perfect Structure of Society; the Tree of Life and the System of Integral Education for all the faculties. These discoveries thus reduce the Science of Man to a practical form. They cover the most vital and the most extensive interests of the individual and of society. They solve the greatest problems of human life. They give a complete standard of social and religious conduct. The Author occupied twelve years of close and careful labor in working out the details and demonstrations of these laws, and in comparing the immense array of facts upon which they rest.

In April 1878, the Author discovered that each of the twelve tribes of Israel was marked by one dominant group of mental faculties, and that each tribe in the New Jerusalem was placed on its ruling group of faculties, when we draw a plan of the city on the human head. This discovery completed the Author's scientific explanation of the great Scheme of the Bible and demonstrated the essential truth of inspiration. It completely placed in our hands the means and the method for establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on the Earth.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ M. A. Sivārtha, *A Synopsis of the Book of Life; Sepherva* (Chicago: 1884), and Sidārtha, *The Book of Life; Vonisa* (Chicago: The School of Culture, 1884). The latter was subtitled “Discoveries and Writing by Sidārtha, 6215 to 6240 A. M.” and “The Science of Man has opened the gates of Paradise, for it reveals the laws of universal happiness in the human constitution.”

¹⁰⁵ Sivārtha, *Synopsis*, 34.

The new edition of *The Book of Life* amplified what Merton had written in the earlier edition, although it provided recent published sources as references for what he wrote. His citation of those sources, however, rarely, if ever, matched what he claimed as proof for his own schemes. Far from proving his detailed “discoveries” of the locations of the higher faculties of the brain, for example, Ferrier’s experiments only gave preliminary results of his attempt to locate locomotor and sensory functions via electrical stimulation of the brains of various animals, including those of macaque monkeys. What Sivartha claims as proof consisted in Ferrier’s tentative statement that “The phrenologists have, I think, good grounds for localizing the reflective faculties in the frontal regions of the brain, and there is nothing inherently improbable in the view that frontal development in special regions may be indicative of the power of concentration of thought and intellectual capacity in special directions.”¹⁰⁶ Sivartha also refers the reader to Alexander Bain’s *Mental Science* (1868) and H. Charlton Bastian’s *The Brain as an Organ of Mind* (1880), but it is unclear, to say the least, how those works provided any evidence for the grand scheme he lays out.

Other works he refers to as sources are treated in the same way. He is particularly fond of the writings of the speculative ethnologists of the time who worked out notions of comparative mythologies driven by a desire to trace back the origins of the people who descended from Adam. Included in his sources, for example, are James Fergusson’s *Tree and Serpent Worship* (1873), George Rawlinson’s *The Origin of Nations* (1883), Staniland Wake’s 1870 essay on phallic worship, and Edward Clodd’s *The Childhood of the World* (1873). Sivartha extends their method: It is his own notion, for example, that the four rivers Genesis says flow out of the Garden of Eden (Hiddekel, Gihon, Pison and Phrath) are homologous with (and therefore equivalent to) the pulmonary artery, the pulmonary vein, the aorta, and the vena cave, which, together form the River of Life.

The publication of his unusual books brought Sivartha some significant notice in Chicago and elsewhere, but adding to the attention, he also began writing letters to and short feature articles for the Chicago *Inter Ocean*, one of the city’s largest mainstream

¹⁰⁶ David Ferrier, *The Functions of the Brain* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1876), 288.

secular newspapers.¹⁰⁷ He carried on a dispute in the paper, for example, over the merits of his new language (he had reworked “Sytal” and renamed it “Visona”) with the local champion of another invented language, Volapük. Sivārtha argued the merits of Visona, and finally published a pamphlet about it, but it was spare, consisting of a few radiating diagrams of “natural” phonemes, a few basic principles for inflection and grammar, and a short vocabulary list.¹⁰⁸

Sivārtha’s articles and letters became the object of praise and scorn—so much so, that the paper, realizing his articles were increasing their circulation, eventually offered new subscribers a copy of *The Book of Life* as a premium. The offer touted the “religio-physiological contributions of Sidārtha” as having given the paper “increased reputation.” His illustrations for the article certainly caught the reading public’s eye.¹⁰⁹

Sivārtha also began marketing sets of pull-down educational charts for classroom use. These included silk-backed chromo reproductions of his various paintings of anatomical sections, health and sanitation guides on room ventilation and the bodily harm done by alcohol, and illustrations of his fanciful version of evolution and geology.¹¹⁰ They sold by the hundreds to high schools and colleges.

By early 1888, Sivārtha believed he had rounded up enough support to initiate his millennial project of gathering the nations at Jerusalem. He had consulted recent surveys of Palestine and his own notes from his previous trip and had whipped up enough enthusiasm among his American followers to envision leading a general colonization effort aimed at

¹⁰⁷ For example: Sidārtha, “The Historic Man,” *Inter Ocean*, 5 January 1885; “Sidārtha to His Critics,” 14 January 1885; “The Mystic Number,” 23 October 1887; Sivārtha, “Shall It Be Spoken?” 27 November 1887; “Visona vs. Volapuk,” 11 December 1887; “Which of the Two?” 8 January 1888. Years later, an elderly San Francisco lady deposited a thousand dollars in her bank, intending for her mail carrier to inherit it upon her death, which he was to use to promulgate Visona, but the probate judge decided the money should go to the lady’s daughter instead; “World Cannot Gain Universal Language,” *Oakland Tribune*, 1 December 1908.

¹⁰⁸ Sivārtha, *The Visona; a Universal Language Based upon Natural Laws* (Chicago: School of Culture, 1888).

¹⁰⁹ For evidence that the newspaper was willing to print the sheerest puff pieces about or by Sivārtha, see the letter to the editor, “Sivārtha: His Career, His Work, and His Personality,” signed by “X. X. X.,” *Inter Ocean*, 22 April 1888.

¹¹⁰ *Sivārtha Chart of the Earth and Heavens* (1886) and *Sivārtha Charts of Physiology* (Albany: W. A. Choate & Company, 1887).

fulfilling his messianic dream. He departed Chicago on July 5, 1888, but first gave an interview to a reporter from the *Inter Ocean*. Sivatha told the interviewer that he intended to make his way first to England, where he expected to enlist a wide-spread interest in the project and to convince many families to relocate to Palestine, and to join those in America whom he was expecting to follow him in the fall. According to Sivatha, "As soon as a sufficient number of Anglo-Saxon people are there to form a nucleus of a new nation, it is well understood that the European powers will unite to declare Palestine an independent nation."¹¹¹ The reporter then asked, "Has there been in the last few years any systematic organization of men who sympathize with you in this belief, or rather who sympathize with you in an attempt to carry out any such plans?" Sivatha replied, "Well, there has been, but the number of those who have actually signed



agreements is not large, three or four hundred, but a number have written letters from various parts of the country from here and Great Britain expressing their full sympathy and their desire to have a part in the enterprise." He had worked out his plans in detail; not only for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but "for all the public highways, railroads, and the great artificial lakes, and reservoirs and manufacturies in all parts of the country."

Many newspapers across the United States were attracted to the story of Sivatha's setting out to colonize Jerusalem and printed brief articles noting it; however, I have only been able to find evidence for one couple who went with him—his Chicago disciple, Richard Bickerdike (having just become licensed as a homeopathic physician) and his newly wed young wife Alice, who had already proceeded to England in May.¹¹² Sivatha did not seem to find much practical support for his project among his fellow American utopians either. Cyrus R. Teed, for example, the head of the Koreshan Unity, then headquartered in

¹¹¹ "Rebuilding Jerusalem," *Daily Inter Ocean*, 5 July 1888.

¹¹² "Avondale," *Inter Ocean*, 27 May 1888.

Chicago, castigated Sivарtha for his imminent expedition to Jerusalem—most particularly, for what Teed regarded as Sivарtha’s misreading of the prophetic signs in the scriptures.¹¹³

Sivарtha traveled first to England, then returned, perhaps to stiffen up the resolve of his American supporters in the face of the apparently negligible interest he had found for the project in Britain. In April 1889, the *London Star* had this to say:

Sivарtha is well known in America as a clever, energetic, and determined man, who is endeavoring to set up to an impression that he has a great mission to perform in establishing, or in assisting to establish, the foundation of a republic in the Holy Land, which is hereafter destined to extend, and, in time, to become universal. Sivарtha came to England last autumn, but soon found that we had not progressed enough to receive his advanced views in connection with universal republicanism. He tried to move the Anglo-Israelite Society in vain, and after staying for a few weeks left again for America.¹¹⁴

Perhaps before he returned to America he made a short reconnoiter in Palestine. He had left Katherine Grinnell back in Chicago during his trip, with the task of beginning and editing *The Logos*, a monthly journal meant to recruit members for the “Messians,” as Sivарtha’s band of followers were now calling themselves. It began the first issue of its brief life in September 1888, and in her announcement of its first issue, Grinnell wrote that Sivарtha was in Jerusalem.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Cyrus R. Teed, “Comments on Arthur Merton’s Re-Building Jerusalem,” *The Guiding Star* 2.6 (June 1888): 171-183. It does seem likely, however, that when Teed chose to move his community south to Estero, Florida, he took care to plan the settlement as a kind of model Jerusalem temple, probably influenced by Sivарtha’s emphasis in his own city plans.

¹¹⁴ Reprinted as “Sivарtha in London,” *Inter Ocean*, 12 April 1889. The spare notices of Sivарtha I have found in the English secular press include a brief note in the *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* (25 August 1888), which observed that “The object of his expedition is partly religious, but it is not quite free from the ‘main chance.’”

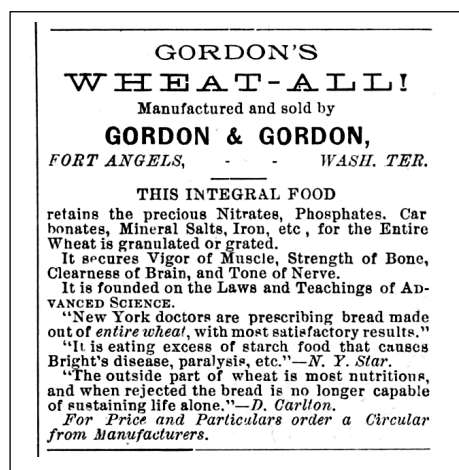
¹¹⁵ “The Logos,” *Mental Science Magazine* 4.12 (September 1888): 268. *The Logos* appears to have folded with the February 1889 issue.



California Palms

By the end of 1889, Sivārtha was back in Chicago and applied for a passport, to be forwarded to General Delivery in New York City, ostensibly for another planned departure to England. I do not think he made the crossing, because the following month he was in Los Angeles, speaking at the Nationalist Club and at a private residence “on the social structure of society on a scientific and scripture basis.”¹¹⁶ He stayed in California, transforming himself as “from Chicago” to “formerly from Chicago” over the space of several months, giving lectures on the “New Jerusalem,” illustrated with his paintings of its future glories. His actual pursuit of the colonization project, however, had ended.

One eccentric and early supporter of Sivārtha’s New Jerusalem project had already settled on the West Coast. He was Henry G. Craigie Gordon, a Scottish immigrant who had



already spent time as part of the community of Thomas Lake Harris’ Brotherhood of the New Life, at Fountaingrove, near Santa Rosa, California. At the time Gordon first wrote to Sivārtha, in May 1886, he had moved north to Puget Sound, where he ran a grain mill, manufacturing a breakfast cereal called “Gordon’s Wheat-All.” He sounded out Sivārtha on his own intentions to start a branch of the Messians. When Sivārtha wrote him back, Gordon had it printed in the

local paper, along with his own comment at the end. It is the only example I have run across of Sivārtha’s writing in a chatty informal way:

“Your letter of May 30th gave me great pleasure with its hopeful words and indications. It seems important to me that there should be at least three great points established for our work on this continent, one near the Atlantic coast, one here [Chicago], or near here, and one on the Pacific coast. I prefer the North-West to either

¹¹⁶ “New Lines of Thought,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 1890.

California or Mexico, both on account of its climate and on account of its social or moral influences.

“I have described the successive steps to be taken to form a Band in the eighth chapter of the Book of Life. Love and honesty alone are not sufficient to insure success.

Knowledge, wisdom and law, these are elements in a perfect life and cannot be left out.

“For a band located on a farm, I would lay out an acre and a half or say sixteen rods square in the general form of the New Jerusalem, this would be the yard and garden with the Temple in the center. For the farm I lay it out according to the kind of crops to be cultivated, constructing certain permanent roads through it for convenience of access.

“The clay, the cedar and the fir would furnish the basis for manufacturing in addition to agriculture and thus render the Band more self contained and independent.

“We had two very pleasant visits from Mrs. Packard.¹¹⁷ She told us that you had made and hoisted the Messian Banner and this, of course, made our hearts glad. The first banner was made in 1860.

“Since last January I have worked every day from 1 in the morning till 12 or 1 o’clock at night in getting out my new Physiological charts, and now I must rest a few days before commencing my winter’s work for the Kingdom. Last winter, 20,000 children studied these charts. Among other figures they contain a plan of the brain, the tree and the river of life. I am laying a broad and deep foundation for my work in the public mind. I shall capture them without their knowing what is being done. ‘As a thief in the night.’ Ten or twelve days more work will complete the new universal language, Visona. It can be learned in a twentieth part of the time that it takes to learn English, French, or German. We will also have a new system of Arithmetic. We were all delighted to get from you the first letter written in Visona. Some of the members in our band here would like to correspond with you in Visona, for this is certainly a good way to learn the language we shall use in Palestine where the laws of physical geography require that the central nation shall be.¹¹⁸ It is much better to talk and write about the Work and its importance than to talk about me. The manner of a reform is important as well as the matter, and

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth (“Bessie”) Parsons Ware Packard had married Gordon in 1880.

¹¹⁸ Sivartha receives a letter written in Visona, but rather than responding in kind, resorts to English.

reformers have too often neglected this important matter. I have been a painter nearly all my life in portraits and diagram work. I have colored plans for all parts of the temples, costumes, city walls, gates, etc. In Visona each person has a new name of three syllables.

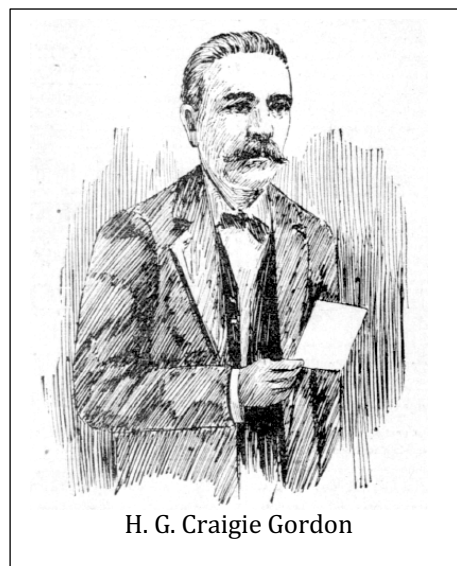
“Your name is Cratiso, and your wife’s [Bessie’s] name is Bessina. ...”

At the end of this missive, as it was printed in the newspaper, Gordon appended:

The question before us now is, who can we find to help to plant a Little Palestine here on this great western Mediterranean sea of Puget Sound? For this great EISODUS of ISRAEL we came here where we can easily establish a branch of that which is about to center again in the Cradle ground of our race on the shores of the Mediterranean of the east, in Palestine and the Great Euphrates Valley.¹¹⁹

In 1889, Gordon wrote a letter to *The Logos* pledging that he and his wife were beginning a community on Puget Sound as an outpost of the “Band of Messians and had bought a piece of real estate that he wished to turn into a joint-stock communal home, and so offered to sell interested would-be Messians twelve acres of land apiece for twenty-five dollars.¹²⁰

I do not know if Craigie Gordon’s plans for a Messianic settlement ever met with any degree of success; but a venture he plunged into a few years later definitely did not. Gordon envisioned a national (and then international) system of registering,



H. G. Craigie Gordon

¹¹⁹ “Rebuilding Jerusalem,” *Puget Sound Weekly Argus*, 27 September 1886. Gordon’s project at Port Angeles was unconnected to George Venable Smith’s Port Angeles Cooperative Colony founded there in 1887.

¹²⁰ “Port Angeles Band,” *Logos* 3 (February 1889): 31. See also the letter to the editor from “Cratiso” and “Bessina” in *Logos* 2 (November 1888): 19-20.

tracking, and returning all kinds of lost articles, which he referred to as “waifs.” The system would be run alongside of (or as an adjunct to) the Postal System. Its lost and found correspondence would be carried by the mail, but it would use a special “waif stamp”

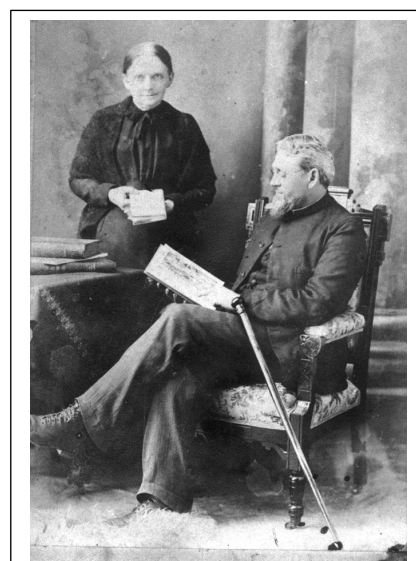


Craigie Gordon's waif stamps

instead of a Post Office stamp. Gordon himself would serve as “Waifmaster General.” Calculating in June 1896 that he would start the ball rolling, he designated “waif offices” around California, appointed local “waif masters,” and had printed up

a batch of waif stamps (with his own portrait handsomely engraved on them), with the words “U. S. Mail” in tiny letters at the top of the stamps, whereupon he was arrested by the postal authorities.¹²¹

The activities of another supporter may also have been a factor in Sivartha's decision to move to Southern California. While Sivartha was pushing his colonization project, he and “Adasha” (Grinnell) published letters and articles in an Anglo-Israelite newspaper, *Israel at Work*, edited by the Rev. Matthew Mays Eshelman in McPherson, Kansas, where Eshelman was on the board of trustees of McPherson College, associated with the Church of the Brethren.¹²² A couple of years previously, the Brethren's Publishing Company had published Eshelman's book, *Two Sticks; or, The Lost Tribes of Israel Discovered; The Jew and the Israelite Not the Same*, in which, as he told his readers, “the usual orthodox rules of Scripture exegesis on



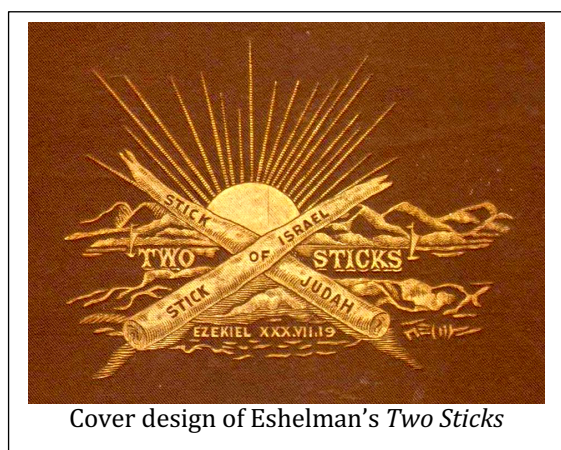
Matthew Eshelman and wife Elizabeth

¹²¹ “Wanted to be a Waifmaster,” *San Francisco Call*, 16 June 1896. As an act of nuptial compassion, Gordon had kept his first wife in a cage in their home rather than send her to a sanitarium. For a leisurely description of Craigie Gordon's eccentric career, see M. J. Nolan, “Clinical Notes and Cases: Paraphrenia,” *Journal of Mental Science* 68.281 (April 1922): 159-161, where Gordon is diagnosed post-mortem as a model case of “Paraphrenia expansiva.”

¹²² The August 1, 1889 issue of *Israel at Work* contains Sivartha's article, “The New Jerusalem” as well as Adasha's article, “United Israel.” Eshelman recommended Sivartha's work to his readers.

prophetical utterances have not been followed, for the reason that the painted words and the great variety of bits and broken fragments of the regulars could not be made to fit together so as to make harmony; and as confusion was not the thing sought, the orthodox rules were brushed aside to give place to common sense.”¹²³ His “common sense” yielded him the detailed conclusions that the Anglo-Saxon race was one of the lost tribes of Israel, and would play a leading role in the re-gathering of the scattered “Israelite nations” in Jerusalem amidst an apocalyptic confrontation against “the Coming Gog,” including “the Pope of Rome,” the Anti-Christ, etc.

In 1899, Eshelman left Kansas and moved to Los Angeles County, to Lordsburg (present-day La Verne) in the San Gabriel Valley. There, working as an immigration agent



Cover design of Eshelman's *Two Sticks*

for the Southern Pacific Railroad, he sold plots of farmland to his fellow Church of the Brethren members who intended to establish a community there. He also began a newspaper, *The Southern Californian*, to promote immigration and in 1891, helped establish Lordsburg College (now the University of La Verne), where he found a place for himself on the faculty.¹²⁴ I do not have any evidence of

contact between Sivartha and Eshelman once they each moved to Los Angeles County at the same time, but it is likely that Sivartha knew that his fellow Anglo-Israelite and prophet of the literal regathering of the tribes in Jerusalem had gone to Southern California to set up a religious colony there. It may have helped draw Sivartha to Los Angeles to promote his own dream and to set up a community affiliated with the core group of Messians still dedicated to him in Chicago.

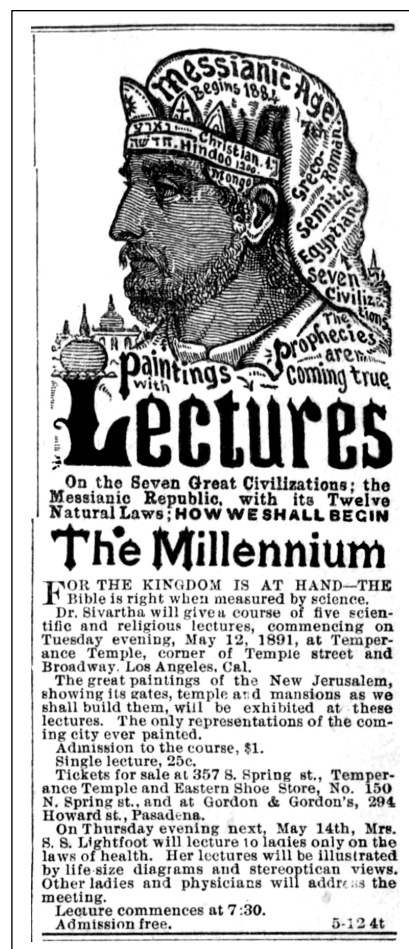
That Chicago group had dwindled, but it would continue to number among its believers the Bickerdikes and the Grinnells. Katherine Grinnell, in particular, would

¹²³ Eshelman, *Two Sticks*, 11-12.

¹²⁴ “The Dunkard colony ...” *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, 25 February 1890; “Notes,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 31 July 1892; “Scissors and Pen,” *Grass Valley Morning Union*, 22 September 1892

continue to promote Sivartha's ideas for social organization, although in language stripped of its explicit connection to him. She delivered an address on "Woman in an Ideal Government" at the Congress of Women held in conjunction with the Worlds' Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893; authored *Renaissance of Israel; or, The Coming Order of Society*, published by her daughter Grace's newspaper *The Jeffersonian* in 1907; and wrote *Woman's Place in Government: From the Scientific and Biblical Viewpoint*, which would be published in 1914 by Sivartha's son, Holmes Whittier Merton. Although Sivartha left Chicago in 1890 for California, Grinnell never stopped regarding him as her teacher.

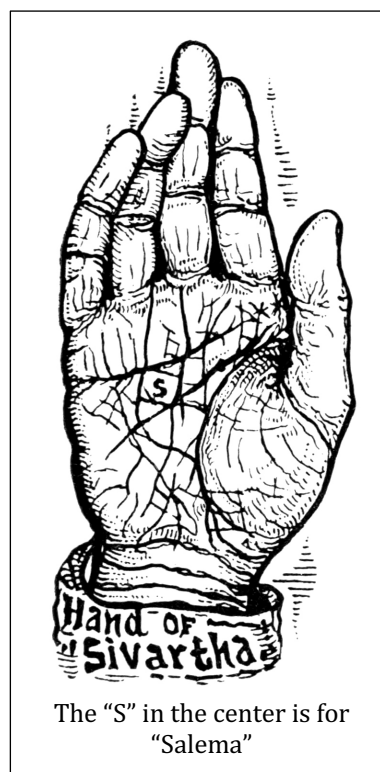
Sivartha's lectures in Los Angeles were didactic expositions of his millennial and physiological notions, supplemented with his paintings of the New Jerusalem, delivered in an effort to build support among his audiences by having them visualize his own revelations.¹²⁵ He began a series of private classes on the more occult aspects of his ideas. From almost the beginning of this period, he appeared at his public lecture venues with Silena S. Lightfoot, a woman who had emigrated from England to California with her husband, George, where they had built a hotel in Pasadena. Mrs. Lightfoot managed their hotel, turned a portion of it into a sanitarium (she had been trained as a nurse), and attached herself to Dr. Sivartha as his student and patron. When Sivartha gave his lectures on his usual subjects, Mrs. Lightfoot would often then take the podium and speak about health and the proper care of the sick. Her husband George would die suddenly in January 1893, but as early as April 1891, she had paired with Sivartha in trying to propagate affiliate Messianic Bands or "Schools of Culture" wherever they could. At that time, she told a newspaper



¹²⁵ See, for example, "Mental Work Shop; Explanation of the Brain and Its Faculties," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 10 May 1891; "The New Jerusalem; Ignorance Regarding the Biblical Idea of the City," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 20 May 1891; and "The Kingdom at Hand," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 21 May 1891.

reporter that there were twenty-three in existence, including ones based in London, Manchester, one each in France, Germany, Italy and India, and, in the United States, in Chicago, New York, Boston, Detroit, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles.¹²⁶ I have no idea whether any of these “bands” had even a handful of members.

I also have almost no information on Sivārtha’s activities during the last half of 1892 and the entire following year. His public lectures appear to have ceased during that period. At the end of March 1893, “Professor Alesha Sivārtha” was on the passenger manifest of the ship *Chester* when it reached port in New York City, having crossed the Atlantic from Southampton. His onward destination was listed as California. At the very end of that year, he resumed lecturing in Los Angeles, again with Silena Lightfoot. The pair were a close team for they published a pamphlet entitled “The Doctrines of Dr. Sivārtha and Mrs. Lightfoot.” His ideal society had not changed in its conception, but he now began calling it, the “Unista,” and his joint appearances with Mrs. Lightfoot sometimes included her speaking on sexual hygiene (to exclusively female audiences), while he focused on palmistry, an understandable development of his comprehensive notion of the way in which a person’s character and destiny manifested itself in signs and marks on the body. In 1894, “S. S. Lightfoot & Company” of Los Angeles published *The Sivārtha Book of Palmistry; or, The Hand of Isis*, which was illustrated with Sivārtha’s characteristic attention to pictorial detail. A fill-in form on the last page suggests that Sivārtha was taking private and mail-in clients whose palms he read, presumably for a fee.



For the next several years, he appears in the newspaper record as a visiting lecturer at spiritualist societies and congregations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, at places like the “New Era Church,” and even as “Primate” of the “Harmonist Church” in Los

¹²⁶ “A Central Nation,” *San Diego Union*, 13 April 1891.

Angeles, which met at the Grand Army Hall on Spring Street, which congregation seems to have briefly taken the name of the “Temple ben Sivartha.”

A new version of *The Book of Life* was issued in 1898. It was printed in Stockton, but Sivartha inscribed a preface to it that was dated 1896, and the title page lists its publisher as “the Culture Band” and its place of publication as London, New York and Jerusalem—probably where his former students were still residing, and perhaps still sending him money. A form at the back of the book invited interested groups to “unite in the Covenant of Harmonism” and register their group as accepting “the Model and Basic Truths” as their guide. For Sivartha, however, this edition of *The Book of Life* developed no new ideas. It was essentially an abridged version of the earlier editions.

The first indication that Sivartha moved around this time from Los Angeles to the San Francisco Bay area is an announcement of his participation in the California State Spiritualists’ Association’s “Semi-Centennial Spiritual Jubilee” in April and the publication of his article, “Has Palmistry a Scientific Basis?” in the San Francisco spiritualist journal, *The Coming Light*, in April 1898.¹²⁷ About that time, he entered into a common-law marriage with a twenty-eight-year-old English-born woman, Elizabeth Ann Smalley. He was sixty-four years old. The 1900 federal census for Oakland listed Alesha Sivartha, “teacher of science” (the city directory for that year listed him as a physician), living with Elizabeth Sivartha, a “proprietor of electric and vapor baths,” with their six-month-old daughter, Alesta Sivartha.¹²⁸ Another physician, a forty-five-year-old English-born widow, Lavinia Knowles, was also residing in the household. The Sivarthas would have another child, a son, born in November 1905, whom they would name Orsena.

While living in Oakland with his new family, Sivartha continued to tour and lecture. In Oakland in January 1902, “Professor Swartha, formerly of Harvard University,” was reported by the *Oakland Tribune* to have spoken at a public meeting concerning the inter-oceanic canal project across the isthmus of Panama then before Congress.¹²⁹ That same

¹²⁷ Announcement of the spiritualists’ celebration in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 April 1898. Katherine Grinnell, who was still living in Chicago and a widow since 1893, published a two-part essay, “A Scientific Form of Government,” explaining Sivartha’s ideas, in the January and February 1899 issues of *The Coming Light*.

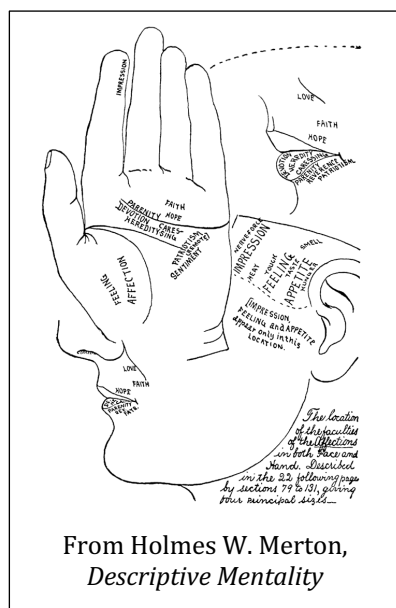
¹²⁸ She had run a similar establishment in Stockton for a few months in 1898.

¹²⁹ “Will Talk of Canal,” *Oakland Tribune*, 22 January 1902.

year, he traveled to Washington, D. C. as a delegate to the International Conference on Phrenology and then to New York City, where he discussed the conference at the American Institute of Phrenology.

In 1903, the “Philosophic Company” of New York published an updated revision of *The Book of Life* under the title *The Historic Growth of Man into the Coming Civilization*. The Philosophic Company was set up by “mental science” teacher and editor of *The Metaphysical Magazine*, Leander Edmund Whipple to publish miscellaneous odds and ends—mostly occult novels. This version dwelt far less than earlier ones on promoting himself as the Messiah via scriptural proof texts. It took a plainer and less explicitly personal view of the evolution of races and societies, as if he were presenting a general plan for society whose assumptions had already been proved and could serve as the unstated foundation for a social reform. It reproduced many of his previously wrought “head” shots of the division of society, but relatively few of the detailed physiological dissections. It included only a handful of new illustrations.

In early 1907, still living in Oakland, he became one of the founders of the California



Eugenics Association and was elected its “state committeeman” at a meeting that discussed “The Intellectual Adaptability of Men and Women in the Married State.”¹³⁰ He contributed a selection to a collected volume published by the Association, whose other selections were authored by such well-known progressive reformers as Moses Harmon, Robert G. Ingersoll, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Edgar Lucien Larkin, and Luther Burbank.¹³¹ Sivārtha continued to reside in Oakland as late as early 1908.

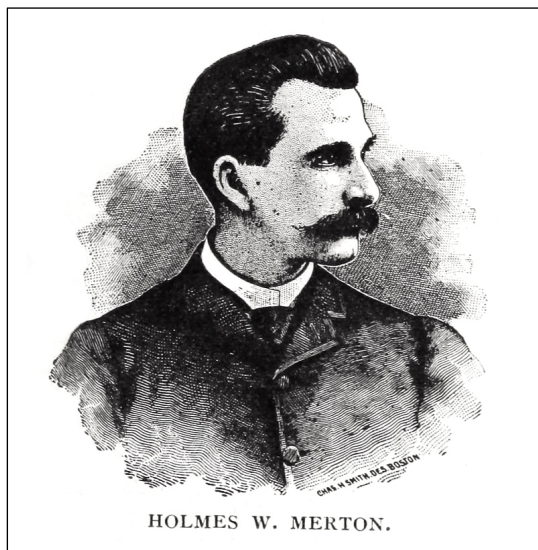
Sivārtha’s son, Holmes Whittier Merton, born in 1860 to Arthur Merton and his wife Josephine, played a part in his father’s later life. Holmes was born in Lebanon, Warren County, Ohio on April 5, 1860,

¹³⁰ “Eugenics Society to Meet,” *San Francisco Call*, 10 March 1907.

¹³¹ Dr. Alesha Sivārtha [“A Noted Greek and Hebrew Scholar”], “Waves of Nerve Force,” in *Eugenics: The Science of Being Wellborn or Highborn* (Eugenics Association of California: 1907), 24.

according to *The Encyclopedia of American Biography*.¹³² According to Holmes' marriage record, however, he was born in Lebanon, Ohio in 1859.¹³³

The circumstances of Holmes' birth are unclear: The federal census of 1860, recorded in the area on August 31, shows Josephine Evans, living with her parents and



siblings on the Evans farm. Neither Arthur Merton nor any little Holmes Merton are anywhere in sight, either there or elsewhere in the 1860 census. This would have been four months after his birthdate as reported elsewhere.¹³⁴ In addition, Arthur Merton and Josephine Evans married only on March 21, 1861, having taken out a license in Warren County a few weeks before, but then traveling to Dayton in the neighboring county to be married by a Justice of the Peace.¹³⁵

At the 1870 census, Holmes was indeed listed as ten years old and living with his mother in Waynesville. Again, his father Arthur is not listed with the family at that time. There are several ways one might reconcile all this data. Arthur Merton fathered two more children by his wife Josephine. Both were born in Lebanon in Warren County: Clara Eva Merton, in 1862, and Louis Evans Merton, in 1864.

Holmes was raised by his mother, but she died in 1880. By that time, I believe, he was working with his father as an enthusiastic apprentice and a devoted believer in his theories. In 1881, he published and marketed his father's "Physiological Charts of Life." By 1884, he had moved to Providence, Rhode Island and had begun describing his occupation as "mentologist." In 1886, he found a Philadelphia publisher for his *Descriptive Mentality from the Head, Face and Hand*, a work of phrenology, palmistry, and astrology, which was largely derived from his father's works. The next ten years, as a "mentologist," he spent "in

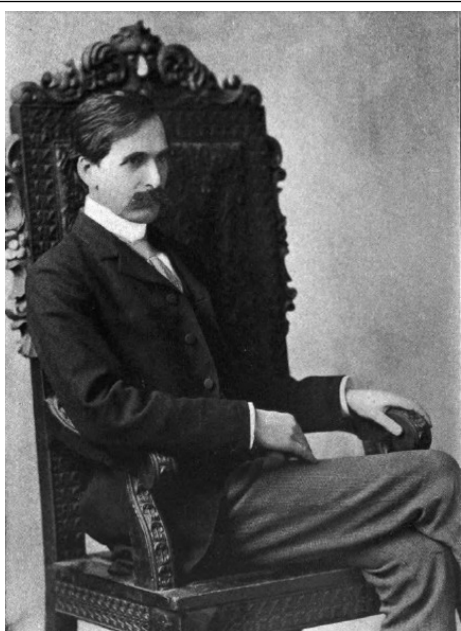
¹³² *Encyclopedia of American Biography, 1800-1902*, 564.

¹³³ *Massachusetts, Marriage Records, 1840-1915*. Holmes W. Merton and Caroline E. Dodge, married October 17, 1894 in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

¹³⁴ I have not located any actual birth record for Holmes from the time.

¹³⁵ *Ohio, County Marriage Records, 1774-1993*; "Marriages," *Weekly Western Star* (Lebanon, Ohio), 7 March 1861.

the New England mills, where he did nothing else but examine and advise on promotion” and gave (as he claimed) 2500 lectures on the History of Ideas and the Bases of Industrial



Holmes Whittier Merton

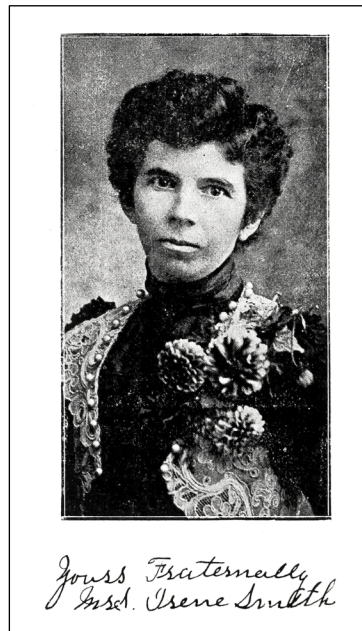
Progress.¹³⁶ This was all intertwined with his father’s ideas of character delineation and fitting workers to their jobs according to their physiology. He was also a delegate to the Industrial Labor Conference in Cincinnati in 1887, and that year he became the publisher of *The People*, a labor newspaper issued from Providence.

In 1894, Holmes was still closely following in his father’s footsteps, and published *Life and Healing; a Segment of Spiritonometry*, and in 1899, he followed that with *Heliocentric Astrology; or, Essentials of Astronomy and Solar Mentality* under the pen name “Yarmo Vedra.” That work, which was periodically reissued with revised ephemeris listings, was entirely dependent on his father’s notion of revising astrology around the “fact” that horoscopical calculations ought to be made by placing the Sun at the central reference point, not the Earth. At the time that “Professor [Holmes] Merton” published this work, he had moved to Staten Island and was lecturing on “mentology,” as well as giving written delineations of character by mail from photographs sent to him. All in all, he was a small chip off the old block of his father, although he did not equal his father’s talent for drawing and illustration. Nor did he come up with anything near as wildly original as his father’s resplendently bizarre ideas. He must be given credit, however, for extrapolating Sivartha’s “solar astrology” into a complex system in his own *Heliocentric Astrology* (though perhaps with his father’s help).

That work became popular with psychics and occult seekers, among whom was Irene (“Rena”) Mary Smith. She and her husband Julian were prominent speakers at the California Union of Spiritualists camp meeting in Oakland in June 1897. By 1900, she had opened the “Soul Culture Institute” in Oakland, where, as a pupil of Sivartha, she offered

¹³⁶ “Let Me Look at Your Face,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 26 April 1925.

lessons in Practical Palmistry (including Astrology), New Thought, and the Science of Life.¹³⁷ In 1901, the Smiths moved the Soul Culture Institute to San Jose, where they offered a course of instruction in hypnotism. They moved again to Tacoma, where, in 1901, she



published *The Science of Palmistry and Its Relation to Astrology and Phrenology*, a work, she wrote, that was based largely on Holmes Merton's *Heliocentric Astrology*. In fact, her book's plate of the Zodiac had at its center a drawing of Sivartha's restored Temple of Jerusalem, with his twin suns in the sky behind it. "The Temple in [the] center of Zodiac," she wrote, "is a Symbol of the New Institutions of the Future based on the Twelve Laws of Man's Nature," referring directly to Sivartha's scheme of social evolution. "Dr. Swartha" did ally himself with the Socialist Labor Party. In June 1898, for example, he gave a talk to the San Francisco section of the Party on the "Natural Structure of Society."¹³⁸

In May 1904, Smith was the sole delegate from Oregon to the national convention of the Socialist Party.¹³⁹ Back in Tacoma the following year, "Rev. Irene M. Smith" lectured the People's Progressive Lyceum on the topic, "What is Spiritualism?" A few months later, she was elected one of two representatives from Washington State to the national committee of the Socialist Party. When her involvement in spiritualism, phrenology, and palmistry was made an issue by an opponent at a meeting of the Socialist Local in Bellingham in August 1905, Comrade Smith responded with a show of self-criticism by saying she had come to understand that socialism was primary.¹⁴⁰ She and her husband Julian led the Tacoma local of the Socialist Labor Party International Workers of the World in celebrating "Red Sunday" and collected money for their Russian comrades.¹⁴¹ In March 1907, Rena Smith addressed the local socialists in Olympia, Washington on "The Triumphs of Socialism":

¹³⁷ "Soul Culture Institute," *Now* (San Francisco) 1.2 (April 1900).

¹³⁸ "Socialist Labor Party Happenings," *San Francisco Examiner*, 13 June 1898.

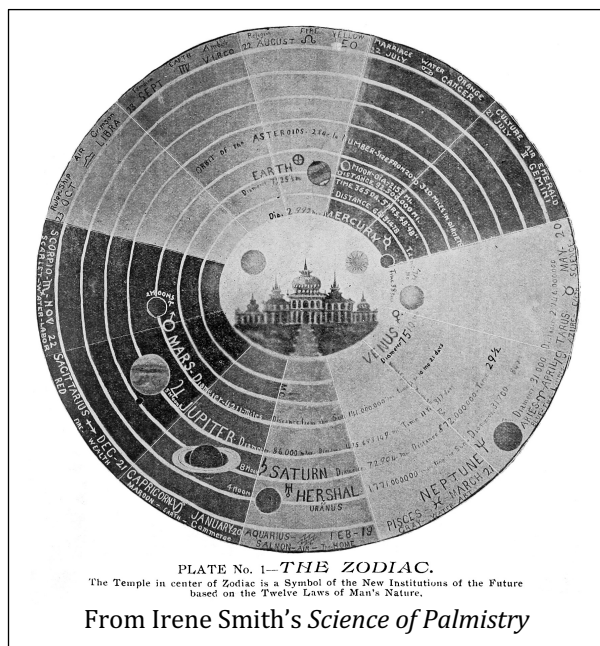
¹³⁹ *The Worker*, 8 May 1904.

¹⁴⁰ "Bellingham Local Resolutions," *Montana News*, 16 August 1905.

¹⁴¹ Letter from A. Kleminig, Tacoma, to the editor, *The Liberator* (Chicago), 3 February 1906.

Socialism as a great world movement is rapidly coming to the front and absorbing the attention of the thinkers of the age. It is the next step in human progress as the direct result of economic evolution and as such nothing can stem the tide of the rising revolution. The workers in all lands are rapidly becoming conscious of their exploited

condition, and are organizing themselves for mutual protection against the common enemy, capitalism.¹⁴²



Nevertheless, she would continue to mix her socialism, already closely formed by Sivartha's theories of social evolution, with spiritualism. She attended a meeting in Seattle in February 1909 of the Mediums' Protective Association that included mediums' offerings of spirit messages. Smith gave a lecture to the group on "Kindergarten,

the Battleground of Life."

Smith would continue to mix socialism and spiritualism over the following years. Back in California, she ran on the Socialist ticket for California State Senator from Los Angeles in 1916 (she came in third) and was defeated in the primary when she ran for Mayor of Los Angeles in 1919. That year she was one of six California delegates to the founding convention of the Communist Labor Party of America, yet she would continue to give lectures in Los Angeles and San Diego to spiritualist societies on subjects such as "The Awakening of the Higher Self," "Descriptive Psychology," and "Scientific Astrology," and occasionally "answer questions" from the platform as a medium herself. She published *Twelve Lessons in Psychic Unfoldment* in 1925. Throughout her career, Sivartha's visions of social evolution aiming at the founding of a perfect society remained a part of her philosophy.

¹⁴² "Socialistic Address," *Morning Olympian*, 28 March 1907.

"Let Me Look at Your Face and I'll Tell You What Work You Ought to Be Doing"

"There Is No Guesswork in the Matter of Facial Analysis," Declares Dr. Holmes W. Merton, Who During the Past Forty-five Years Has Read More Than Forty Thousand Faces

By Enid Griffiths

FOND parents who feel confident that little Johnnie Junior will one day become a famous artist because of his propensity for covering bits of waste paper with weird figures in reds, yellows and blues had better wait a while before spending any large sums of money on the development of Johnnie's remarkable talent. For if, when Johnnie gets to be a big boy, his nose doesn't sit just right on his face, or if his lips don't have just the right curve, he will never be an artist, despite his passion for dabbling in the color box.

Every face is a map, it seems, revealing beyond the shadow of a doubt the capabilities of the individual, and showing clearly to those who know how to read the line of work which the individual should endeavor to follow during his lifetime.

This is the conclusion reached by Dr. Holmes W. Merton, who during the past forty-five years has made an exhaustive study of the subject of facial analysis. During this period of time he has read more than forty thousand faces and has assisted an equal number of men and women to choose the line of activity for which they were best fitted and in which they might hope to achieve the fullest measure of success. He believes that to those who understand the art of reading the human face there will be revealed with startling decisiveness and truthfulness the qualities and mental abilities of the individual, and that when this understanding is linked up with a corresponding knowledge of the qualities required in the various vocations then it is a comparatively simple matter to say definitely what any one person should or should not try to become. In short, "Let me look at your face and I'll tell you what you ought to be doing."

Close follow-up work in connection with great numbers of the individual cases which have come to Dr. Merton's attention has convinced him that his theory is correct, and that where the intelligent application of a proper facial analysis method is brought into play there is no occasion for any men or women finding themselves in the position of square pegs in round holes. The study of the human face, its features and contours, has always held a fascination for Dr. Merton, and at a very early age he commenced clipping and filing pictures of national and international figures, living and dead. In each case he noted their qualities and mental abilities as shown by their achievements. The next step in the development of his method was the making of careful small section proportion maps and percentage graphs of the local regions of thousands of these faces.

He soon found definite evidence that the most powerful mental aptitudes of each individual developed their own parts of the face beyond the other parts. Thus, by grouping thousands of men by vocations and comparing their degree of success and the mental abilities known to be needed in their work with the high and low parts of their facial graphs he established the laws which form the basis of his judgments.

"There is no guesswork in the matter of facial analysis," Dr. Merton said. "Nature does not put a certain sign in the face to mean one thing one time and a different thing another time. The graph is always there, revealing in absolute truth what is behind the features."

"What about whiskers?" asked the interviewer. "Don't they throw you out in your calculations?"

But Dr. Merton only smiled, and assured her that he could "see through them."

He admits, however, that in these days of facial surgery the man or woman who comes for a facial analysis to assist them in choosing their work should explain what changes have been made in the physiognomy by the beauty doctor, otherwise art is likely to become confused with nature and the analysis and prediction suffer in consequence.

One instance was cited in which a young man came for a facial reading and was advised that he would never be a success at higher mathematics. He protested that this was the very field in which he shone, and there ensued a period of considerable puzzlement on the part of the analyst.

"Were you ever in an accident?" he finally inquired. "Ever have any little part of a feature torn or cut away?"



Dr. Holmes W. Merton

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The young man pondered a moment. "Why, yes, I had," he admitted. "A few years ago I was hurt in a hockey match and lost a bit of my nose—here."

He indicated the septum, and the puzzle was solved. For where the analyst had observed the small septum, which accompanies a notable lack of analytical method, nature had originally placed a low-hanging septum, which is invariably found in the analytical chemist, the mathematical engineer, physicist, astronomer and analyzing accountant.

In addition to other varied experience in his chosen field of study, Dr. Merton spent ten years—1886 to 1896—in the New England mills, where he did nothing else but examine and advise on promotion. His study on the industries as a whole led him to estimate that approximately eighty percent of the people in any particular industry are not expressing sixty percent of themselves.

"Such people can be called only part successes," he remarked, "for a man is a success in the industries or anywhere else just in proportion as he is able to bring the best of himself to bear on his task."

"Of the people who come to you for advice, do you find very many who are 'square pegs in round holes'?" he was asked.

He nodded his head and his expression told as well as words that such cases were not rare by any means. One of the most interesting cases referred to was that of a young man who had achieved considerable success as a musician and had developed into a very capable organist and choir leader. His father was anxious to have the son continue his musical studies. Dr. Merton, however, saw in the boy the born chemical engineer, and persuaded the parent to allow his son six months' study in this field. That six months was sufficient to convince both father and son that the atmosphere of the chemical laboratory, and not of the studio, was his natural element.

"Do you think the time will ever come when the schools will endeavor to make a serious study of individuals pupils with a view to being able to point out to them the direction in which they should apply themselves?" was the next query put to Dr. Merton.

"Most assuredly," he replied. "There has been altogether too much of people plunging up blind alleys and taking the wrong fork in the vocational road. If the educational world does not do it of its own accord, the commercial and industrial world will in time force it to give attention to this problem in order to do away with the tremendous wastage in human effort, time and human capabilities occasioned by people getting on the wrong path."

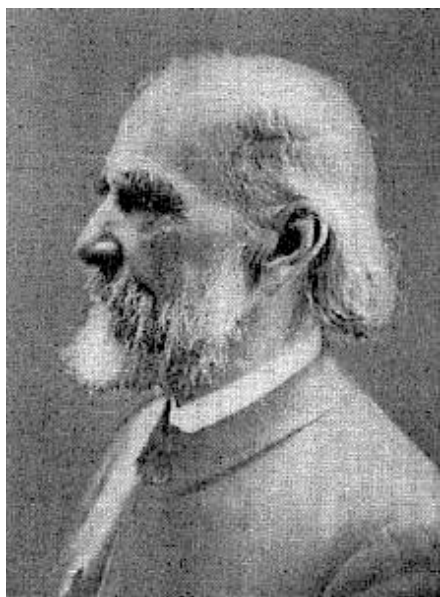
"The problem begins between grammar and high school? Personally I believe there should be a segregation of studies in the entrance to the high school so that the general training of the child's future could be outlined there, enabling him to move in the right direction at the beginning of the high school."

Dr. Merton, who is head of a large vocational advisory institution, is sixty-five years of age. He looks at least fifteen years younger, however, owing to his uprightness of figure, keenness of eye and alertness of expression. He is an inveterate reader and is extremely energetic, generally putting in as many as twelve hours of exacting work in a day.

He is a lover of music, as is his wife, Caroline D. Merton. Mrs. Merton, in spite of the great handicap of blindness, has to her credit a number of charming compositions for the piano. Included in her works are "Phantoms," "Three Twilight Songs," "Zephyr and Sunshine," and several others of equal merit.

Last Years

Toward the end of 1907, in Oakland, Sivartha's living arrangement with his wife Elizabeth ended.¹⁴³ He left California, and, in the summer of 1908, he sailed from New York



Alesha Sivartha, frontispiece of the 1912 edition of *The Book of Life*

City on the SS *Majestic* for Southampton, returning the following month on the SS *Teutonic*. This time the passenger manifest, recording his age as 50 (he was 74), listed his final destination as Brooklyn, probably where his son Holmes was living. That year, perhaps arranged by Holmes, Sivartha published *Solar Atlas of Man; Illustrating the Book of Life*, an octavo-sized set of fifteen charts, and an illustrated fifteen-page pamphlet, "Making the Farm a Paradise; a plan for the farm-domains and villages," a brief adaptation of his plotted community idea to how a farm should be set up—a Jerusalem writ small, as it were.

By 1910, Sivartha had moved to Kissimmee, Florida, where the federal census listed him ("widower" and "college professor") living as a boarder in a house owned by Richard Bickerdike's sister Elizabeth. Also in the household was Katherine Grinnell ("widow" and "authoress").¹⁴⁴ Back in New York, Holmes arranged the publication of his father's *The March of Nations* (a cobbled together version and synopsis of *The Book of Life*, on the title page of which, Sivartha hand-lettered himself as a

¹⁴³ Elizabeth remarried in May 1909, to Edward J. Elliott, who adopted her son Oresta. The boy's first and last names were changed to Richard Elliott.

¹⁴⁴ Katherine Van Allen Grinnell died September 20, 1917 at the home of her son, Rev. William E. Grinnell, in Garrett, Indiana, and was buried in the Union Ridge Cemetery in Chicago.

Ph. D.) and, in 1912, Holmes published a final and comprehensive edition of Sivartha's *The Book of Life; The Spiritual and Physical Constitution of Man*.¹⁴⁵

By October 1913, Sivartha and Grinnell were back in New York and living together in Richmond Hill in Queens. He spoke at a Prohibitionist meeting in Brooklyn:

"I'm 80 years old and a prohibitionist," said Dr. Sivartha, who comes from England and is living in Richmond Hill. "I don't use eyeglasses and I can touch my little finger with the index finger of the same hand."

He performed the little feat. He was dressed in a black robe and wore a circular black cap with a star n front. With him was Mrs. Katherine Grinnell of Illinois.¹⁴⁶

He died of pneumonia on April 8, 1915 in Bayard, Kansas, having spent the last two weeks of his life there at the house of his daughter Leona. She buried him in a plot next to that of her mother Lunetta (she had died in 1911) in the Osage Valley Cemetery in the nearby town of Mildred. The cemetery recorded his name at the time of burial as "Arthur Elisha Henry Merton." His son Arthur Llewellyn Merton wrote the newspaper obituary for

¹⁴⁵ Holmes Merton continued to flog his father's social theories, although toned down and modernized, in his book, *Social Harmonism: Human Rights Under Functional Government* (New York: Holmes W. Merton, 1914). In 1917, Funk & Wagnell's published his *How to Choose the Right Vocation; vocational self-measurement based upon natural abilities; the mental ability requirements of the fourteen hundred vocations, including: 362 professions, arts and sciences, 344 commercial enterprises and businesses, 700 trades and skilled vocations, with 720 self-testing questions*, which went through several editions and solidified his reputation as a "scientific" vocational consultant. In 1917, he set up the Merton Institute on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, and, in 1920, published *Vocational Counseling and Employee Selection: The Art of Judging People*, a book that brought him corporate clients who hired him to train their Personnel Department staff. In this, we may say that he was a pioneer "management consultant." For a sympathetic feature article on his method of "facial analysis," see Enid Griffis, "Let Me Look at Your Face and I'll Tell You What You Ought to Be Doing," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 26 April 1925. He kept the Merton Institute going into the 1940s, although, by then, the press was not being shy about regarding him as a quack; see, for example, "Physiognomist," *Time* (7 April 1941): 61, which called him "the last great practitioner of the pseudo-science of 'physiognomy,' which some 50 years ago was almost as popular in the U. S. as phrenology." Holmes Merton died January 18, 1948 in New York City.

¹⁴⁶ "WCTU Meeting," *Brooklyn Daily Standard*, 27 October 1913.

him, which appeared in the Bronson, Kansas *Pilot*.¹⁴⁷ It incorporated second-hand bits and pieces of lore about him. It claimed, for example, that for several years he had been Professor of Botany and Zoology at Harvard, that he was “better known in Great Britain than in the United States,” and that he “enjoyed the friendship and esteem” of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe, Luther Burbank, Asa Gray, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.¹⁴⁸ “He looked forward to the resurrection [meaning, probably, his reincarnation], and longed to share in the rich blessings that are coming to Natural Israel,” said the obituary. “And so he died, at peace with God and man, leaving the world richer for his labor.”

The family eventually erected a headstone for his grave. It read:

“Alesha Sivartha”
 Dr. Arthur E. Merton
 Son of Ram Mohan Roy
 May 16, 1834 – April 8, 1915
 Born in England

It was correct in its use of quotation marks around “Alesha Sivartha” and in its reporting of his date of death. Everything else was the dream of Elisha Holmes Dodge.

¹⁴⁷ “Obituary,” *Bronson Pilot*, 7 May 1915.

¹⁴⁸ He may indeed have met some or all of them.

[Part 2: Album of Sivarta's Drawings]

Acknowledgments

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