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THE LIFE OF JOHN MURRAY SPEAR: SPIRITUALISM
AND REFORM IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1973

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CHAPTER I

SPIRITUALISM AND MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN REFORM

American historians in the 1960s became increasingly sensitive to the tendency of their predecessors to compartmentalize aspects of the nation's development. In considering the history of reform in the United States, they emphasized that the reform impulse which characterized the intellectual and social mood of the nation in the 1830s, 40s and 50s did not expire with the firing upon Fort Sumter, nor was it spontaneously resurrected when an assassin's bullet thrust Theodore Roosevelt into the White House. Rather, it was argued, the history of reform—to use Emerson's phrase, "the comparison of the idea with the fact," ¹—has formed an unbroken pattern in the stream of American history, and any attempt to assess its importance in the historical process must acknowledge the fact. ²

¹ Works, Riverside ed. (Boston, 1888), I, p. 258 ("Lecture on the Times").

² Gerald Grob, comments presented at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, April 6, 1972 in a session on the subject "Humanitarianism in Nineteenth-Century America."
The evidence which has been amassed illustrating the existence of a wide variety of reform endeavors in the late nineteenth century is great enough that historians should never again allow themselves to simplify the history of that century by portraying it as an "Era of Romantic Reform" juxtaposed against an ensuing "Gilded Age." And yet, while acknowledging the continuity of the reform impulse in American history, there remain certain unique characteristics which can be observed in the reforms and reformers of the period from 1820 to 1860. This uniqueness appears both in the breadth of the reform impulse and also in the buoyant sense of optimism which accompanied it.

3In The Era of Reconstruction (New York, 1965) Kenneth Stampp has stressed the continuity between abolitionism and post-Civil War Radical Republicanism (pp. 11-105), and in The Populist Response to Industrial America (Cambridge, Mass., 1962) Norman Pollack argues persuasively that Populism in the late nineteenth century was not a conservative reaction but a well-defined reform effort rising out of the injustice which accompanied rapid industrialization. The urban reform movement of the period is described in detail in Harold U. Faulkner's Politics, Reform, and Expansion: 1890-1900 (New York, 1959) pp. 23-47. There was a very active temperance reform movement between 1865 and 1900 (see Herbert Asbury The Great Illusion [New York, 1950]), and largely neglected but active reform effort on behalf of the American Indian (see William T. Hagan, American Indians [Chicago, 1961]). The movement on behalf of women's rights continued throughout the period (see Gerda Lerner, The Woman in American History [Menlo Park, Calif., 1971], 106-164, passim), and recent scholarship is bringing to light evidence of a number of experiments in communitarian living, for example, John O. Fish, "Communism in Georgia: The Christian Commonwealth Colony, 1896-1900." unpublished manuscript delivered at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, April 8, 1972.
The circumstances which encouraged the growth of this general optimism are numerous. English colonists brought with them to North America a tradition of natural rights and human equality. Such beliefs were nurtured by nearly a century of "salutary neglect" on the part of the British, and were ultimately embodied in the "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" clause of the Declaration of Independence.

Two important developments which gave significance to the rhetoric of enlightened liberalism were the purchase of the Louisiana Territory and the establishment of absolute control over the Old Northwest as a consequence of the War of 1812. The frontier had from the beginnings of American history encouraged a sense of equality of opportunity (which was often confused with equality of ability), and the guarantee of a seemingly inexhaustible body of inexpensive land convinced Americans that in such an environment the most equitable and democratic of all possible governments might be realized. Furthermore, in such an environment social institutions and humanity itself could anticipate the achievement of perfection.  

The effect of the frontier upon the American mind was closely entwined with American religious patterns. It was on the frontier that evangelical religion was most successful. During the 1820's Charles G. Finney began a long and illustrious career as an evangelist, preaching a gospel which was in complete harmony with the optimistic political temper of the times. Finney's gospel placed a close relationship between salvation and good works. The achievement of individual perfection would be evidenced by the dedication of the believer to the improvement of the human condition. Finney's efforts spawned a large number of reformers (among them the famous midwestern abolitionist, Theodore Weld), whose goal was the perfection of American institutions through the salvation and perfection of the American people.

In New England, orthodox Calvinism was threatened not so much by emotional evangelism as by the rapid spread of Unitarianism, which originated in the late eighteenth century. The Unitarian doctrine, emphasizing as it did the living compassion of God and the innate goodness of man, offered a theology which differed greatly from Finney's, but which was no less important in encouraging the reform impulse of the nineteenth century. Unitarianism was in close accord with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, in that it made reason the cornerstone of religious belief. It stressed the perfectibility of institutions through orderly, democratic, rational processes. If man appeared to be depraved, the logical course was to remove the impediments which prevented him from discovering his capacity for good.6

Such, stated very briefly, were the roots of the reform movement which occurred in American history between 1820 and 1860. The end product, however, involved more than the evolution of purely American political and religious beliefs. In Europe, and later in the United States, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a transition away from the

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cold rationalism of the Enlightenment. The Romantic Era, as the period from approximately 1815 to 1860 has been characterized, adhered to the Enlightenment view of man as a rational creature—capable of perceiving and solving his problems—but it rejected the Lockeian insistence that all human understanding can only originate from empirical sources. To the Romantic mind, man, being created in the image of God, possessed within himself an element of divinity which opened to him intuitive sources of knowledge. Man was capable of transcending the limitation of purely sensory phenomena; he could intuitively experience the essence of God. The philosophy of the Romantic Era received expression in the United States primarily through the work of the New England Transcendentalists, most notably of Ralph Waldo Emerson.7

Between 1830 and 1860 a wide range of reformers from all levels and classes of American society devoted themselves to the noble task of improving the nation's people, 

7In addition to the general works already cited, see Richard D. Mosier, The American Temper: Patterns of Our Intellectual Heritage (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952), Book III, "The Romantic Mind." The works of Emerson have been reprinted by numerous publishers. A good beginning point, for material relating to the reform impulse, is the first volume of the Riverside Edition (see footnote 1, supra) which contains several of his most important essays. One of the most incisive treatments of the transcendentalist philosophy is still that of O.B. Frothingham (Transcendentalism in New England, [New York, 1876]), who was both participant in and historian of the movement.
Its social institutions, and its government. Lewis and Arthur Tappan, highly successful New York businessmen, heard the call and played prominent roles in the Eastern wing of the abolitionist movement. Ministers and educators played major roles in a variety of reform endeavors. The Washingtonian movement, an attempt to eliminate the suffering which resulted from abuse of alcohol, was begun by a group of reformed drunkards. A sizable effort on behalf of woman's rights emerged during the period, and opposition to all forms of war was particularly pronounced in the Northeast. A wide-ranging communitarian movement, of which Owenism and Fourierism were representative, reflected the desire of a variety of groups to begin the process of perfection on a microcosmic scale. Prisons and asylums came under heavy fire from reformers, and even such seemingly mundane concerns as dress and diet came under the reform influence.  

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Even under normal circumstances the perfectionist element in the reform movement might have disappeared as the panorama of reform efforts failed to achieve the anticipated perfection of institutions. But within much of American reform the Civil War brought with it—as does nearly every war—the stark realization that man is not on the threshold of achieving perfection. Reform efforts continued after the Civil War, but the sense of buoyant optimism which characterized ante-bellum reform was almost totally absent. The broad public support which characterized ante-bellum reform was also for the most part missing.

At the height of the ante-bellum reform movement, Americans were for a time excited by apparent evidence that human beings could communicate with spirits of individuals whose mortal bodies had died. The belief that such communication was possible and the practice of such communication

was identified as "spiritualism," a term employed by both supporters and critics. This study will attempt to illustrate, through a description of the life and philosophy of John Murray Spear, that the spiritualist movement was a legitimate outgrowth of the nineteenth century reform impulse and that certain persons within the movement were involved in a concerted attempt to employ spiritualism and the philosophy that accompanied it to construct a radical alternative to the existing social order. Such individuals, generally coming from the ranks of the universal reformers, seized upon spiritualism as a means of achieving a state of social perfection which the rhetoric of romantic reform had implied was possible, but which has not been accomplished by related programs of universal reform.

Throughout the past forty years American historians have generally ignored or discredited the importance of spiritualism as an intellectual force in nineteenth century reform. Several factors appear to have contributed to this tendency. It is clear that most historians of mid-nineteenth century reform have taken for granted that spiritualism was in the same league with the sideshow spectaculars produced by P. T. Barnum. A superficial study of spiritualism might very well tend to support such an assumption. The most spectacular news story pertaining to the subject developed in 1847 when Margaret and Kate Fox, ages thirteen and twelve, of Hyde Park, New York, claimed an ability to commu-
nicate with a spirit who purportedly had been murdered years earlier in the house where the Fox family now lived. An older sister, Leah, quickly realized the potential of her sisters' gift, and encouraged them to expand their communicative powers. Through her astute management the Fox sisters became immediate celebrities, and soon moved to New York, where for a brief time, they worked for P. T. Barnum, who charged an admission fee of two dollars for their performances. In private or small group seances the sisters displayed their talents by contacting almost any spirit from whom their clients might wish to hear. The vehicle of communication was through raps on the underside of a table, around which the participants were seated. Thirty years later both Kate and Margaret admitted that the rappings were nothing more than the resonance they could create by slightly dislocating their unnatural toe joints against wooden objects—a trick they learned while playing in their bed on cold winter nights.9

While from a scientific point of view this disclosure neither disproved the work of other mediums nor explained the clairvoyant aspect of their practice, it nonetheless cast an aura of deception over the entire movement which still remains.10


10The confession of the sisters was used as a basis for a triumphantly critical account of the entire movement (see Reuben B. Davenport, The Death-Blow to Spiritualism [New York, 1888]).
looked for the most dramatic incidents pertaining to spiritualism in its coverage of the subject. Invariably the issue at stake was the authenticity of the manifestations. Having determined through the exposure of numerous clever and conscious frauds that spiritualism was in its totality a humbug, most of the public press came out in opposition to everything which was connected with spiritualism in any way whatever. As a consequence, the readily available primary sources for any study of spiritualism—the New York Times is a good example—are almost uniformly hostile sources.11

Philosophical advocates of spiritualism published a number of journals, particularly in the 1850s, but most were of short duration and small circulation, and the volumes of such journals are scarce and collections often incomplete.12 Until the student of ante-bellum reform becomes aware that the implications of spiritualism extend beyond an indictment of masses of Americans for their naivete, he will be inclined to use the most readily available sources. Most of these

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11 In a wholly irrational piece of journalism the Times described spiritualism as "...the new Mohammed, or the social Antichrist, overrunning the world." It blamed the competitor of the Times, Horace Greeley, for what it called a free love system operating in the guise of Christianity. Greeley's guilt was traced to his support for Fourierism, and his association with the Fox sisters (New York Times, October 16, 1855).

12 For the period 1847-1865 the most important of these were Univercoelum (New York), The Spirit Messenger (Springfield, Mass.), The Shekinah (New York), The New Era (Boston), The New England Spiritualist (Boston), The Banner of Light (Boston) and Herald of Progress (New York).
lead to the conclusion that spiritualism was pure and simple quackery of only slight significance.

It is probably on the basis of such a conclusion that numerous reputable historians of the American mind have paid scant attention to spiritualism. In studies by Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., Vernon L. Parrington, Arthur Edirch, and Herbert Schneider, spiritualism as a phase of American reform is simply disregarded. Arthur Bestor's highly praised Backwoods Utopias includes only one comment pertaining to Robert Owen's endorsement of spiritualism late in his life. Such ideas, Bestor contended, were "incongruously fused with the rationalistic views on religion he had always preached." Bestor's conception of the spiritualist movement prevented him from seeing the relationship between Owen's world view and the spiritualist philosophy. The oversight has been corrected in the most recent biography of Owen, J.F.C. Harrison's Quest For the New Moral World.

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14 Backwoods Utopias, p. 90.

15 Harrison notes that "spiritualists were seceders from the orthodox churches, seekers for a rational, noncredal religion which did not offend their scientific interests," and that numerous Owenites incorporated spiritualism into their search for the new moral world (J.F.C. Harrison, Quests For the New Moral World [New York, 1969], pp. 251-52.).
An even more revealing example of the predisposition to play down or disregard the importance of spiritualism is seen in a private letter by the noted bibliographer of socialism in America, T.D. Seymour Bassett. Responding to an inquiry concerning the fact that a spiritualist pamphlet by John M. Spear was printed by the Hopedale Press of Universalist minister Adin Ballou, Bassett wrote: "I am surprised to see that Spear's...Twelve Discourses on Government bears the imprint of the Hopedale Community Press. Adin Ballou was a non-resistant (opposed to revolution) and not much interested in spiritualism. Probably his society printed it because nobody else would, as a job."\textsuperscript{16} Bassett did not know, or perhaps had forgotten because it seemed unimportant, that Ballou was not only a non-resistant and communitarian, but also was deeply interested in spiritualism, so much so that he conducted numerous spiritualist gatherings at his Hopedale Community, wrote an introduction to the above mentioned Twelve Discourses on Government, and in 1852, wrote an entire book on the subject of spirit manifestations.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Bassett to Ernest C. Miller, Dec. 19, 1947, in the Sheldon Papers, Darlington Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Two detailed studies of American thought which appeared in the early 1970s show no improvement. Charles A. Barker, in *American Convictions: Cycles of Public Thought, 1600-1850*, refers to spiritualism only once, in connection with Shakerism. In Rowland Berthoff's *An Unsettled People: Social Order and Disorder in American History*, the author views spiritualism as simply one more of the irrational phenomena which appeared in the burned-over district of western New York: "In spite of the objections of physicians and scientists, the North went through a prolonged fad of 'Rochester rappings,' seances, and table-tipping." Berthoff implies that spiritualism died out by about 1860, "the last spiritual novelty" of "the old yankee backcountry."  

Merle Curti, in *The Growth of American Thought*, wrote that only after the Civil War did spiritualism attract the interest of serious intellectuals and scientists "as well as untutored plain people." The ante-bellum period he described as one of "credulousness, superstition, and faith in super-naturalism." The conclusion which emerged from Curti's work was that the spiritualist movement prior to the Civil War consisted entirely of purposefully fraudulent rappers easily exposed by any rational person, and that no literate

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American gave the movement a second thought.¹⁹

During the 1920s and 30s two attractively written popular accounts of ante-bellum social history appeared. The excesses of spiritualism was a subject invariably included in such works. In The Stammering Century, Gilbert Seldes devoted to spiritualism an entire chapter, which he titled "The Good News From Rochester." In the mind of Seldes, spiritualism represented the most dramatic evidence of the emotional instability and irrationality of the period. The fact that prominent Americans such as Horace Greeley, George Bancroft, James Fenimore Cooper, Theodore Parker, and Harriet Beecher Stowe endorsed the claims of spiritualism did not, in Seldes' opinion, lend credibility to the movement; rather, it indicated them.²⁰ Douglas Branch, in The Sentimental Years, did not follow Seldes in viewing spiritualism, or the larger reform movement, as indicative of serious national illness, but regarded it as a pleasant and harmless joke. Branch acknowledged a relationship between spiritualism and transcendentalism, but he did not pursue it, presumably because he did not consider transcendentalism worthy of serious consideration.²¹

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Most recent historians do not accept the thesis that ante-bellum reform is worthy of consideration only as a spectacle of individual or group emotional instability. In most cases, the work of Seldes is cited only as an example of the kind of historical writing which unfairly portrays abolitionists as individuals whose reform activities were primarily a means of giving vent to their own psychological needs.²² Louis Filler, in the bibliography which accompanies The Crusade Against Slavery, refers to Seldes' study as "top heavy with Freudian interpretations." And yet, in that same bibliography, he refers the reader only to Seldes for material on the subject of spiritualism. Filler did acknowledge the existence of worthwhile works on the subject, and cited the need for a definitive study of spiritualism, but it remains most ironic that as his single reference on spiritualism he would cite a study the objectivity of which he questioned in regard to other aspects of the reform movement.²³ Filler's treatment of spiritualism in the main body of his study illustrates the influence of Seldes upon his thinking. "Spiritualism," Filler states, "was conceived in fraud; a phenomenon of religious unrest and exploration."


²³Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, pp. 296-297.
He described the conception as occurring "in a little town near the everstirring Rochester, New York." There, of course, the Fox sisters made their alleged discovery. His belief that spiritualism consisted primarily of fraud explains Filler's displeasure with La Roy Sunderland, who, "had seemed on his way to becoming one of the most distinguished antislavery ministers," but shifted instead to mesmerism, spiritualism, and phrenology, and his own synthesis of the three, pathetism.

Certainly it would be misleading to suggest that no detailed research has been conducted on the subject of American spiritualism. One of the leading midnineteenth century lecturers on the subject was Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, a British actress who followed the growth of the movement on both sides of the Atlantic. Mrs. Hardinge (she preferred her maiden name) drew upon her own experience and extensive research to produce a comprehensive study of the

\[24\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 115.\ In\ a\ disturbingly\ careless\ bit\ of\ historical\ writing,\ Filler\ cites\ as\ the\ source\ for\ his\ statement\ regarding\ the\ fraud\ of\ the\ Fox\ sisters\ an\ early\ account\ of\ the\ events\ by\ Eliab\ W.\ Capron\ and\ Henry\ D.\ Barron (Singular\ Revelations,\ Explanation\ and\ History\ of\ the\ Mysterious\ Communion\ with\ Spirits,\ Comprehending\ the\ Rise\ and\ Progress\ of\ the\ Mysterious\ Noises\ in\ Western\ New\ York,\ Generally\ Received\ as\ Spiritual\ Communication\ [Auburn,\ N.Y.,\ 1850\ ed.]).\ No\ page\ numbers\ are\ cited.\ In\ fact,\ Capron\ and\ Barron's\ account\ accepted\ the\ rappings\ of\ the\ Fox\ sisters\ as\ completely\ valid,\ and\ the\ book\ is\ an\ attempt\ to\ authenticate\ the\ existence\ of\ spirit\ communication\ in\ general.\]

\[25\text{Ibid.}\]
early years of spiritualism. Being concerned about what she considered a sizable number of imposters circulating under the guise of the movement, Mrs. Hardinge was especially careful to document her evidence of spiritual phenomena. Knowing that her account would be carefully scrutinized by critics, she tended to minimize the role of dissident elements within the movement. Radical spiritualist schemes were portrayed as unimportant and unrelated to the mainstream of spiritualism. Where there was evidence that certain groups of spiritualists held the institution of marriage as traditionally defined in low regard, Mrs. Hardinge insisted that the fault lay with individuals, not with spiritualism. Viewed in its entirety, her account tended to support the more innocuous elements of the movement, and dwelt at too great length with the matter of valid and invalid manifestations. By approaching the subject as she did, Hardinge ignored most of the relationships between radical spiritualism and radical reform in general.

The most scholarly and comprehensive study of spiritualism to date is that of Frank Podmore, a British scholar who was, at the turn of the century, one of the leading members of the British society for Psychical Research. Podmore had been for several years in the late nineteenth century an active supporter of the claims of spiritualism,

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primarily because he was unable to offer any other explanation for some of the mediumistic activity he had observed. By 1890, however, he became convinced that all of the physical elements of spiritualism, such as the movement of objects from one place to another, could be explained as the work of brilliant magicians and illusionists. Spirit communication he attributed to the clairvoyant powers of mediums in reading not the minds of spirits but rather those of the persons seeking the communication. Trance writing suggested to him the result of self-induced hypnosis in which the writer was able to call forth information buried in his subconscious mind. 27

Podmore wrote as a skeptic, but also as a student of psychical research, and perhaps most important, as a professional historian. He carefully traced the origins of modern spiritualism to eighteenth century Europe, noting the link between French mesmerism, the German somnambulists, and the following generation of animal magnetists in England and the United States. Podmore was also aware that the spiritualist movement in the United States evolved simultaneously with the introduction of English translations of the works of the Swedish philosopher and seer of the mid-eighteenth century, Emanuel Swedenborg. Far from finding

American spiritualism the private domain of little minds, Podmore discovered that many of spiritualism's most articulate supporters were, or had been, associated with either radical reform movements or with the more liberal churches, most notably Universalism. But Podmore did not allow himself the luxury of pursuing the backgrounds of such individuals in the depth which was, and still is, needed. The main purpose of his work was to scrutinize the extrasensory phenomena connected with the movement, and in this manner to offer a basis for judging the validity of the claims of spiritualism.  

In 1937 George Lawton published a massive work titled The Drama of Life After Death: A Study of the Spiritualist Religion. Lawton's work, as the subtitle indicates, was concerned primarily with spiritualism after it organized itself nationally, a development which came about in the late nineteenth century. Ante-bellum spiritualism was treated mainly as a forerunner to twentieth century spiritualism, and as such, its link to Romantic reform was not afforded extensive consideration. Robert Judah offered some important insights in his section on spiritualism in The History and Philosophy of Metaphysical Movements in America. Judah approached the subject in terms of its evolution as a

28 Ibid.
religious philosophy, but as in Lawton's work, his treatment focuses on spiritualism after the mid-nineteenth century. 29

One of the first general works on reform which sought to define the relationship of spiritualism to other branches of reform was Alice Felt Tyler's Freedom's Ferment. Tyler found considerably more than the gimmickey of rappings in the spiritualist movement, noting that the philosophy of spiritualism boldly forecast the dawn of an age in which human perfection would be realized. Its optimism she found to be truly American and its vision of a glorious future little different from that alluded to by Lyman Beecher and many other American writers of the period. 30 Tyler was aware, too, that spiritualists were often directly linked with various aspects of reform including the formation of communal societies. She found considerable interest in spiritualism among the Shakers, who were Christian communists. Warren Chase, the founder of the Wisconsin Fourierist Phalanx, was one of the leading proponents of spiritualism, and there was active interest in the subject at Brook Farm. And yet, though she was conscious of the breadth of interest in the movement, Tyler left largely


30 Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, p. 79.
unanswered and unexplored questions pertaining to the social and intellectual basis upon which the movement rested.\textsuperscript{31}

In \textit{The Burned-Over District}, the ground-breaking study of religious patterns in western New York, Whitney Cross, like Tyler, took the spiritualist movement seriously, noting the close ties between spiritualism, mesmerism, phrenology, Universalism, Swedenborgianism, and transcendentalism. But he found that transcendentalism was outside the purview of his study, and that the Swedenborgian influence in the burned-over district was primarily that of a catalyst in the growth of spiritualism, rather than a main ingredient, as was the case in New England. Hence Cross could not, within the confines of his subject, give the Swedenborgian revival the attention he felt it merited.\textsuperscript{32}

Martin Duberman argued some years back that historians should cease the practice of attempting to generalize regarding the abolitionist movement or the abolitionist mind until further research has been done on a number of noteworthy but largely neglected individuals within the movement.\textsuperscript{33} The same may be said of nineteenth century American

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., pp. 80-85.


spiritualism. The Fox sisters have obviously received a
great deal of attention, and the movement as a whole has
been judged within the context of their behavior. But
most of those who took the evidence of spirit communication
and molded from it an elaborate philosophy of human per-
f ectibility have been ignored. A number of Universalist
ministers and editors who were closely affiliated with the
movement have never been given serious consideration. These
include not only John Spear, but also Woodbury M. Fernald,
Charles Partridge, S. Crosby Hewitt, Samuel B. Brittan,
Charles Hammond, Uriah Clark, and R.P. Ambler. The lives
of Warren Chase and La Roy Sunderland deserve more concen-
trated attention than they have received, and it would be
useful to see in detail the role of spiritualism in the
lives of free thinking anarchists such as Josiah Warren and
Stephen Pearl Andrews.  

34 In the most recent full length account of this phase
of the movement (Pornell, The Unhappy Medium), Margaret Fox
is treated with considerable sympathy while the movement as
a whole is ridiculed.

35 A correspondent of the spiritualist journal Univer-
coelum expressed concern that the movement, supposedly
anti-sectarian in nature, might simply become a division of
Universalism (cited in Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, I, p,
218).

36 Chase wrote a useful autobiography which tells much
about his own reasons for becoming a spiritualist. See Life-
Line of the Lone One, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1865 [1857]). Some
material on his spiritual odyssey is contained in La Roy
Sunderland's The Trance, and Correlative Phenomena (Chicago,
1868). Warren and Andrews formed a spiritualist-anarchist
community in the 1850s, which is described in Madeline B.
Stern's The Pantarch: A Biography of Stephen Pearl Andrew
(Austin, 1968), pp. 73-86.
Only two of the individuals most closely affiliated with mid-nineteenth century spiritualism have received full-scale biographical consideration. Thomas Lake Harris, the Universalist minister who became a major proponent of spiritualist thought in the 1850s, is treated in Herbert W. Schneider and George Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim: Being the Incredible History of Thomas Lake Harris and Lawrence Oliphant*. Harris formed a short-lived spiritualist community at Mountain Cove (Virginia) in the 1850s, but his biographers gave scant consideration to that phase of his life in order to concentrate upon the record of the Brocton Home Community, or Brotherhood of New Life, which Harris and Oliphant organized in 1867 on the shore of Lake Erie in western New York. By that time Harris had disassociated himself from the main body of spiritualists, contending that the source of his knowledge was not ordinary spirits, but God himself.  

The life and philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis have been studied in a thoroughly researched doctoral dissertation by Robert Delp. Davis was a formally uneducated western New Yorker who discovered in the early 1840s his ability to enter the trance state almost at will. It was a series of messages purportedly given to Davis through the

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37 Herbert W. Schneider and George Lawton, *A Prophet and a Pilgrim: Being the Incredible History of Thomas Lake Harris and Lawrence Oliphant* (New York, 1942).
spirit of Swedenborg which represented the high point of the Swedenborgian renaissance in the United States and which, in large measure, marked the beginning of modern American spiritualism. The focus of Delp's treatment is upon the "harmonial philosophy" which Davis propounded, and its relationship to the reforms which Davis espoused as a spiritualist. As such it represents the type of research which is essential if the history of spiritualism in the United States is to be understood.38

Another important recent study, which is not biographical in structure but includes valuable biographical material on a number of prominent spiritualists, is a doctoral dissertation by Scott Swank. "The Unfettered Conscience: A Study of Sectarianism, Spiritualism, and Social Reform in The New Jerusalem Church, [Swedenborgian] 1840-1870."39 Interest in investigating the relationship between the defenders of spirit communication and the practitioners of secular science is seen in Benjamin Moore's


Unfortunately, these serious pieces of research have appeared almost simultaneously with several works which indicate the desire of both publishers and writers to capitalize upon the renewed interest in the occult which appeared in the 1960s. Herbert Jackson's *The Spirit Rappers*, for example, is simply an inaccurate and superficial repetition of some of the most sensational aspects of the movement. It is not footnoted and the meager bibliography includes not a single spiritualist journal. Likewise, *The Heyday of Spiritualism*, by Slater Brown, aims primarily at being readable, and for that reason concentrates on providing the fullest detail in regard to the more dramatic evidence of mediumistic activity. A somewhat more scholarly work is Geoffrey K. Nelson's *Spiritualism and Society*. Nelson offers little new information, however, and his general interpretation, which characterizes spiritualism as an irrational product of a society in the midst of social upheaval, is reminiscent of the thinking of Gilbert Seldes.

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The roots of American spiritualism as it appeared in the nineteenth century were tightly entwined in the reform temper of the period, and beyond that, in the perfectionist emphasis which evolved from the reform impulse. Spiritualism addressed itself to, and was concurrently affected by, a wide range of national behavioral patterns which reflected the influence of evangelical religion and Jacksonian democracy. Nowhere is this relationship clearer than in regard to the development of scientific thought.

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, an America which championed the Enlightenment political philosophy of John Locke quickly became equally attached to Locke's scientific counterpart, Sir Frances Bacon. The Baconian approach to science was broad enough, however, and so vaguely defined, that it endured even as the nineteenth century reaction against the Enlightenment appeared. In one sense Bacon's scientific theory conformed perfectly to Locke's general conception of the basis of understanding. Bacon insisted that the foundation of science must be built upon observation, and that scientific law must be arrived at inductively; that is, by moving from clearly substantiated facts to broader generalization. The corollary to this approach is seen in Bacon's strong emphasis on the avoidance

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of scientific theories or hypotheses. Hypothesizing could be best avoided by strictly limiting scientific thought to the statement of laws which are proven by carefully observed facts. Consequent to this approach, the Baconian method identified all of science with taxonomy, the classification of plant and animal life according to common characteristics. 45

Baconian scientific thought, like a whole range of ideas which originated in Europe and later washed up on American shores, was molded by supporters in the United States, including many spiritualists, to conform to the unique features of American society. The anti-hypothesis element of the Baconian system was particularly attractive to Jacksonian America because it implied the desirability of practical, as opposed to theoretical, science. The Jacksonian faith in democratic institutions and in the ability of the American people to perfect such institutions led easily to the conclusion that science must be the servant of the people in that quest. The efforts of Watt or Fulton were of infinitely more value than a library of dusty volumes full of speculation on the nature and origin of matter. 46

Not only did the common man of the Jacksonian Era consider the major purpose of science to be utilitarian, he also came to view applied science as one of many societal functions which he was personally capable of understanding and shaping. This emphasis on common sense science within the framework of the Baconian system was indicated in several ways. On one plane it evoked a sense of reverence for scientific technology as the means by which human perfection could be achieved and the forces of nature made subservient to the will of man. In 1833, John Etzler published a treatise titled *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labor, By Powers of Nature and Machinery: An Address to All Intelligent Men*. In it he claimed that within the span of a decade man could abolish manual labor by harnessing the infinite power available in nature. The forces of wind, tide, and sun were capable of powering perpetual motion machines. By using this power to provide for his wants and needs, man would, in his superabundance, soon achieve individual and societal perfection. In the national mind Francis Lowell, who memorized the plans of

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49 John A. Etzler, *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labour, By Powers of Nature and Machinery: An Address to All Intelligent Men* (cont'd)
British textile machines and transplanted them to Lowell, Massachusetts, was considered to have made a more important contribution to humanity than Michelangelo. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson managed to synthesize his Romantic appreciation of nature with a profound admiration for those who sought to subjugate it in order to enhance the position of man. "Railroad iron," Emerson writes, "is a magician's rod, in its power to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water."  

The Jacksonian conception of science took another course quite distinctly removed from the materialist quest for a technological utopia. As stated above, science was to be employed in the most practical and direct ways to improve humanity. This anticipation of the immediate and personal benefit of science, coupled with the belief that science should be intelligible to the layman, created a most favorable climate for the introduction of scientific practices relating directly to human welfare. Among these were mesmerism (also referred to as animal magnetism),


Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind in America, p. 298.

phrenology, hydropathy, homeopathy, botanical medicine, and ultimately, spiritualism.

Mesmerism originated with a French physician, Anton Mesmer, who, in 1776, developed the theory that there existed a mutual influence between the celestial bodies, the earth, and animal bodies. The transmitter of the magnetism was a "universal fluid" flowing between the various bodies. Through the use of magnets, Mesmer claimed to be able to draw various types of diseases out of stricken patients.

In response to the general excitement within the French public which Mesmer's theory produced, the French government, in 1782, ordered an investigation to be conducted by the Faculty of Medicine, Royal Society of Medicine, and the Academy of Sciences, whose members included Benjamin Franklin and the noted French chemist Antoine Lavoisier. With the exception of one member, a respected botanist who issued his own minority report, the commission determined that no magnetic force could be detected or measured in Mesmer's technique, and that his method was therefore insufficient to produce any healing effect. Since the investigation was focused narrowly on Mesmer's theory and technique, generally disregarding the effect of the therapy upon his patients, the issue of whether or not persons
actually benefited from his assistance remained unresolved.\textsuperscript{52}

A closer study of the actual effect of Mesmer's treatment of his patients revealed few of the extraordinary behavioral patterns which appeared in later decades under the description of animal magnetism. There were no hallucinations, no muscular feats, and no insensitivity to pain. Rather, it appears, Mesmer's talent lay in the area of simple hypnosis, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious. After the turn of the century, Mesmer's popular influence in France declined rapidly.\textsuperscript{53} His ideas were perpetuated, nonetheless, by followers and students of their originator, and by others who read his theory and applied variants of it to their own practices. Throughout Europe, the first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed serious scientific and medical research involving the subject of animal magnetism. In the process of such research, a number of extrasensory phenomena came to light, including clairvoyance, trance communication with spirits, and most significantly, use of the trance to assure insensitivity to pain during surgery. In general, those medical authorities who

\textsuperscript{52}Donald M. Walmsley, \textit{Anton Mesmer} (London, 1967), pp. 128-139. For the findings of the Commission see Benjamin Franklin et al., \textit{Report of Dr. Benjamin Franklin and Other Commissioners Charged by the King of France with the Examination of Animal Magnetism as Now Practiced at Paris} (London, 1785).

acknowledged the validity of the phenomena continued to search for a scientific explanation, while the majority who did not insisted that the practice was a fraud.\textsuperscript{54}

In the United States, where the practice of animal magnetism was not widespread until the late 1840s, no major body of scientists gave the subject serious consideration, and its first proponents came either from the ranks of those untrained in the scholarly sciences, or from the community of European medical men who had practiced animal magnetism there and now sought to transplant it in the United States. One of those in the latter group was Dr. R. H. Collyer, who had been trained by the famous British mesmerist, Dr. John Elliotson, in London's University Hospital. Collyer traveled extensively in the United States beginning in 1836, demonstrating and explaining, for the most part to public audiences, his own version of animal magnetism.\textsuperscript{55} Another English citizen whose influence upon

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., pp. 67-153 passim. Podmore's research on the subject of animal magnetism in Europe is an invaluable source, rich in detail and thoroughly documented. For the account of one of the British physicians who used animal magnetism in surgery see James Esdaile, \textit{Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance} (London, 1852). A professor of chemistry at the University of Edinboro, W. Gregory, published a detailed analysis of mesmeric phenomena in England, and offered his own theory on the scientific basis of the practice in \textit{Letters on Animal Magnetism} (London, 1951).

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., pp. 129-130, 154; John D. Davies, \textit{Phrenology, Fad and Science: A Nineteenth Century American Crusade} (New Haven, Conn., 1955), pp. 132-133.
the American public was substantial was Dr. James Stanley Grimes, a professor of medical jurisprudence who was responsible for introducing Andrew Jackson Davis to the mesmeric trance. The theory by which Grimes explained the phenomenon of animal magnetism stressed the importance of an invisible magnetic fluid, "etherium," the agent by which a variety of sensations passed from one body to another.\[56\]

American practitioners also developed their own theories regarding the enigma of clearly observable mesmeric phenomena. One of the most influential was James Rodes Buchanan, a flamboyant itinerant lecturer on a variety of novel scientific and medical practices. In regard to animal magnetism Buchanan claimed the discovery of "nervaura," an electrical nervous emanation which bore a distinct similarity to "etherium" and other substances defined as the "vital energy." Buchanan was somewhat suspicious of other practitioners who he feared were stealing his ideas, and the individual whom he most resented was La Roy Sunderland. Sunderland was a Methodist evangelist and dedicated abolitionist who from 1835 through 1842 edited the abolitionist journal, *Zion's Watchman*. Having long suspected that some of the most emotional responses to his preaching could be better explained as scientific rather than religious pheno-

mena he was drawn to the theory of animal magnetism as it came to the United States, and soon became a skilled magnetist (hypnotist).57

It is pertinent to note that the practitioners of mesmerism were seldom one-idea men. All of those cited above had also endorsed the claims of phrenology, and their own theories of animal magnetism incorporated enough of the phrenological system that the general term "phrenomagnetism" was applied to them. Like mesmerism, phrenology had come to the United States by a trans-Atlantic route. The theory that human behavior was determined by the structure of the brain, which was divided into thirty-seven distinct "organs," was a product of the mind of a German physician, Franz Joseph Gall. Gall's general assessment of the ordinary brain was a pessimistic one. A late eighteenth century aristocrat, he emphasized those regions of the brain which accounted for evil behavior, intending that

57Ernest S. Bates, "Joseph Rodes Buchanan," Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1935), II, pp. 216-217. Buchanan began publishing and editing a journal of scientific reform, Journal of Man, in 1852, at about the same time he endorsed the claims of spiritualism. His last published work was a collective biography of the early Christian apostles which he claimed to have received directly from the spirits of his subjects. Sunderland's approach to phreno-mesmerism had been developed by 1834 into what he called "pathetism" (see Pathetism with Practical Instruction [New York: P. P. Good, 1843] pp. v, vi), a system in which the magnetic fluid theory was replaced by the theory that a transfer of emotion from mesmerist to subject elicited the response of the subject.
phrenology should be used as a basis for efficient and rational government of the mass of mankind. His most exceptional student was Johann Gasper Spurzheim, who, differing from his teacher, omitted from his list of mental categories those which suggested inherent evil. From Spurzheim's perspective the study of the human brain implied an innate goodness in man, which could be developed by the proper use of phrenological knowledge. Spurzheim tied phrenology to the natural law of the universe as established by God.

Armed with a new science and a metaphysical system to accompany it, he took his message to London and from there to Edinburgh. The most enthusiastic response to his lectures there came from George Combe, who seized upon the optimistic religio-scientific approach of Spurzheim as an escape from a personal struggle with the harsh Calvinist training of his youth. Since Combe was not a trained physician, his contribution to phrenology lay primarily in the areas of philosophy and the application of phrenology to human reform. He did, however, learn from Spurzheim the technique of dissecting a skull and produced extensive writing on the subject of "cranioscopy," the technique of using the skull to provide evidence of mental development in anthropological studies. 58

58 Davies, Phrenology, pp. 5-10.
Both Spurzheim and Combe traveled extensively through the United States in the 1820s and 30s, and while they received a generally favorable response, their appeal was primarily to the intellectual community, and the interest in their work was primarily theoretical. Combe became an intimate friend of William Ellery Channing, and developed close acquaintances with George Bancroft, Samuel Gridley Howe, Nicholas Biddle, and Horrace Mann. The broader appeal of phrenology to the masses of Americans appeared as self-trained practitioners such as Orson Fowler and his younger brother, Lorenzo, began to illustrate the more "practical" usages of phrenology. The elder Fowler was an Amherst College graduate, intent upon pursuing his studies at Lane Theological Seminary, but he found lecturing and practicing phrenology of more immediate interest; and so began, midway through the 1830s, to carve out a career based in large part upon the delineation of personality by the process of cranium reading. The Fowlers and other practical phrenologists did not appeal merely to country yokels. The phrenological examinations of James A. Garfield, John Brown, and Walt Whitman are still preserved. Joseph Smith's was published, and Gideon Welles left his in a collection of his papers. Robert Dale Owen included his in his autobio-

59Ibid., pp. 16-19, 21-22, 28-29.
graphy. Clara Barton entered upon her career as the result of a reading. 60

Like practical phrenology and like the American practice of animal magnetism, other innovative sciences held considerable popular appeal in the ante-bellum decades. The Thompsonian Botanical System of medicine, with its emphasis on the use of natural remedies, the various water cure techniques, even the Sylvester Graham system of dietary science, all developed a significant following. The common trait shared by all of these, and later by spiritualism, lay in their implication that science and medicine could be practiced by ordinary laymen and that the best use of such professions involved practical applications for the betterment of the whole of the society. In this sense they represented Jacksonian democracy at work.

Occasionally the insistence of their practitioners upon the Baconian method and the utilitarian approach brought these professions into conflict with the established medical and scientific communities. A confrontation between practitioners of the new medical sciences and the more conservative faction of the medical profession occurred during the 1830s in the battle for control of the Medical College of Ohio in Cincinnati. Daniel Drake, the noted frontier physician and writer found his control of the college challenged

60Ibid., p. 38.
primarily due to issues relating to professional jealousy and his own outspoken nature. In an attempt to discredit opposition faculty members, Drake linked them with Daniel Gano, a member of the college's board of trustees who also was a licensed practitioner of the Thompsonian System of Botanical Medicine. Drake failed to purge the opposition doctors, but an investigation of the college by a committee of the Ohio State legislature in 1835 resulted in the removal of Gano from the board on the ground that an advocate of the Thompsonian System should not preside over a college of regular scientific instruction.

Gano responded by pointing out that he had on several occasions been consulted by members of the faculty of the Ohio Medical College and that the remedies he prescribed were successful. He maintained that he had always favored the accumulation of as much knowledge as possible in regard to all phases of the practice of medicine, and he inquired of the investigative commission, "Should not all 'regular scientific institutions' teach a knowledge of facts?" Or do regular medical colleges merely hold to arbitrary and standard sets of "theories, opinions, notions, and speculations?" Gano was never reinstated to the board of trustees, but in the ensuing years he enlarged his own medical practice to include the use of mesmerism. As before, he used his ability to assist the regular doctors, frequently magnetizing patients who were to undergo surgery. Gano
never claimed to understand in full the scientific theory upon which botanic medicine and mesmerism were based; but for twenty-five years he and his wife ran an infirmary in their home where they had considerable success in the use of both. For them it was a case of making practical use of cleverly observable scientific facts.61

The fact that Gano, and many like him, became proponents of spiritualism is not mere coincidence. The national temper of the 1830s and 1840s was well suited to the development of spiritualism for two reasons. In an age in which science was looked upon as a utilitarian discipline, spiritualism could clothe itself in the garb of

61 Diary of Daniel Gano, MS, pp. 20-35, Gano Papers (Cincinnati Historical Society); Joseph Kett, The Formation of the American Medical Profession: The Role of Institutions, 1780-1860 (New Haven and London, 1968), pp. 87-89. The best single source on Thompsonian medicine and its relation to the Jacksonian mind is Kett, chapter four, "Samuel Thompson and the Rise of Sectarian Medicine." For Sylvester Graham see Richard H. Shryock, Medicine in America: Historical Essays (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press), "Sylvester Graham and the Popular Health Movement, 1830-1870," pp. 111-125. The practice of hydrotherapy (water cure), which involved prescribed internal dosages as well as a variety of external applications, appeared in the United States in the 1840s, Orson Fowler built up the circulation of the Water Cure Journal to ten thousand a month, and the universal reformers Thomas Low Nichols and Mary Gove Nichols operated the American Hydropathic Institute. Hydropathy was particularly influential in the East, where it was considered fashionable by the upper classes. At Brook Farm a water cure institute was set up and a German doctor was employed to give instruction twice a week (Davies, Phrenology, pp. 112-113; Georgina Bruce Kirby, Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative [New York and London, 1887], pp. 162-164).
practical science. Spirit communication was invariably described by its advocates as an extension of other of the newer sciences, and a large number of spiritualist lecturers and mediums were to insist boldly that spiritualism was in complete accord with Baconian empiricism and the inductive method of scientific research. 62

But the advent of American Spiritualism was also a product of changes in American religion in the Romantic Era. Divisions in American religious thought had traditionally appeared in the responses to three broad questions. The first "What is the relationship between mortal man and immortal God?", and the second, "Is there to be a judgment of sinners after death, and if so, what form will it take?", were major issues from the beginnings of colonial America. The third, "At what point and under what circumstances will the millennium appear?", came into focus in the nineteenth century.

With regard to the first question, Calvinist theology had divided the world between the predestined elect and, by implication, the predestined nonelect. Individuals not of the elect could in no way expect to experience God. The souls of the elect, while experiencing doubt and uncertainty,

could also anticipate intimate communion with Christ even while still in the mortal life. As a nineteenth century transcendentalist noted, "...whenever orthodoxy spreads its wings and rose into the region of faith, it lost itself in a sphere where the human soul and the divine were in full concurrence." Methodist and Baptist theology confronted Calvinism by insisting that although man was inherently sinful and apart from God, God's infinite grace allowed man, by his own free will, to accept or reject the divine offer of the redemption of sin. As with orthodox Calvinism, the saved could know and experience God in ways which transcended ordinary sense perception. Both orthodox Calvinism and evangelical free-will beliefs stressed an afterlife of unending bliss for the elect or saved, and interminable damnation for the unredeemed.

A revolt against the harshness of full-strength Calvinism appeared late in the eighteenth century in the form of Unitarianism. But as noted above, Unitarianism used the empiricism of Locke to destroy the dogma of Jonathan Edwards and in the process destroyed its mysticism as well. The New

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64 William McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism, p. 25; Bernard Weisberger, They Gathered At the River, pp. 43, 89.
England transcendentalists retained the liberal theology of the Unitarian faith while reasserting the capability of the human soul to perceive God directly and intimately. Transcendentalism insisted that "to the human mind...belongs the firm assurance of God's existence, as a half-latent fact of consciousness, and with it a dim sense of its moral attributes." Within transcendentalism, communication with the ideal world was again opened through conscience; and communion with God, close and tender as anywhere described by devotees and mystics, was promised to the religious affections." Transcendentalism, unlike Calvinism or the free will evangelical denominations, saw a spark of God in every human soul, and thus claimed for all men that which orthodoxy reserved for the elect. 65

The most prominent theme of the transcendentalist movement was its belief that God acted as a unifying force in the universe, not in the deistic, mechanistic manner, but in an immanent sense in which the soul is identified with God, and, correspondingly, with every other soul. Applying their belief in the immanence of God in the universe, transcendentalists were particularly attuned to the potential for the perfection of humanity in the United States, and

Most of them viewed science as a major avenue leading toward that end. Science in itself, however, tended to be rather coldly mechanistic, and it was undoubtedly their search for a philosophy which would provide a synthesis of science and religion which stimulated the transcendentalists' interest in the work of Emanuel Swedenborg.66

Swedenborg was both a scientist and a mystic. Born in Stockholm in 1688, he had by 1740 reached varying degrees of accomplishment in the fields of astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology, and mineralogy. In all his scientific study, Swedenborg sought the answers to fundamental questions such as the relation between matter and spirit. He intended that everything he knew and experienced should be based upon a consistent physical and spiritual law.67

Viewed from the perspective of contemporary psychological understanding, Swedenborg would be characterized as highly psychic with a special talent for clairvoyance. In a thoroughly substantiated case he reported the specific details of a disastrous fire in Stockholm, as it was

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occurring, from three hundred miles away in Gothenburg. He also announced correctly the death in prison of the Russian Emperor Peter III before that news had been made public, and on still another occasion conveyed to the Swedish Queen Louisa Ulrica a secret which she swore was known only to herself and her deceased brother. 68

During the year 1743 Swedenborg began to experience long hallucinatory dreams, in some of which he claimed to have been personally transported into a life beyond physical death. These followed closely upon his completion of a work on the subject of the relationship between body and spirit, The Economy of the Animal Kingdom, an indication that his mind was actively searching for answers to the question of the spirit-matter relationship. 69

The world-view which emerged from Swedenborg's trance writings over the next thirty years replaced the spirit-matter dichotomy by placing both spirit and matter within an inseparable universal whole. The scientific order which characterized the universal whole was an expression of the Divine Being, God, whose image was reflected in

68 Sigstedt, The Swedenborg Epic, pp. 269-270; Toksvig, Swedenborg, pp. 188-190.

69 Sigstedt, The Swedenborg Epic, pp. 182-193; Toksvig, Emanuel Swedenborg, pp. 96, 124; Brown, The Heyday of Spiritualism, pp. 45, 46. Toksvig points out (96) that The Economy of the Animal Kingdom would be better translated The Organization of the Soul's Kingdom.
the human soul. The human body, in turn was a reflection of the human soul, which was its life force.\footnote{Swank, "The Unfettered Conscience," p. 2.}

Swedenborg would have objected to the use of the term "mystical" to describe his writings, for he maintained that as a scientist he was simply recording what he was permitted to observe. In interpreting the meaning of his trips into the world beyond death, he asserted that his writing represented the inauguration of the second advent. Rather than appearing in person to initiate the millennium God had chosen him, as one who could perceive and publish spiritual truth, as his representative to establish "a new church, which is the New Jerusalem."\footnote{Emanuel Swedenborg, The True Christian Religion Containing the Universal Theology of the New Church (Philadelphia, 1923), p. 927; Robert Delp, "The Harmonial Philosopher," p. 9.}

Following Swedenborg's death in 1776, the Church of the New Jerusalem was established first in England, and by 1800 in the United States. It was not a proselytizing body and its membership in the United States never exceeded five thousand. Yet it did spread into the Midwest, and its members, acting out their belief that the second advent had occurred, lent their support to a variety of schemes for social reform.\footnote{Brown, Heyday of Spiritualism, p. 43; On the Church of the New Jerusalem on the frontier see Ophia D. Smith, "Adam Hurdus and the Swedenborgians in Early Cincinnati," Ohio State Archeological and Historical Quarterly, V (1944), pp. 106-134.} Daniel Roe, the minister of a Sweden-
borgian congregation in Cincinnati, was a staunch supporter of Robert Owen and one of the founders of the Owenite Community at Yellow Springs, Ohio.73

It was not until the 1840s, when Swedenborg's works were first translated into English, that his religious theories captured the attention of a sizable number of intellectuals. Particularly within the transcendentalist movement did the Swedenborgian system take root.74 The transcendental interest in mysticism was whetted by Swedenborg's portrayal of invisible worlds and his emphasis on intuitive sources of knowledge. In its approach to theology Swedenborgianism paralleled a number of the more liberal religious doctrines. While identifying Christ with God, Swedenborg nonetheless discounted the concepts of the trinity and the sonship, suggesting only that Christ was somehow an illusive representation of the Father.75


74The most dedicated Swedenborgian among the transcendentalists was Sampson Reed, who contributed substantial sums to the Swedenborgian Church and to the New Jerusalem Magazine. Perry Miller found that the influence of Swedenborg upon the transcendentalists as a whole was equal to that of Coleridge and Carlyle (Miller, The Transcendentalists, p. 48).

liberal interpretation of the Scripture (Swedenborg discarded about half the Bible as uninspired) appealed to Unitarians, but at the same time, Swedenborg placed strong emphasis on revealed religion and the close relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds, and in so doing captured the mystical religious imagination of the transcendental mind. 76

The influence of Swedenborg was strong at Brook Farm, the socialistic community which existed at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, between 1841 and 1847. Brook Farm was not, strictly speaking, a transcendentalist community, but numerous of its members were in close touch with leading transcendentalists and the influence of transcendentalist thought upon the community was strong. The perfectionist reform sentiment was active at Brook Farm and its members were sympathetic to the claims of mesmerism, phrenology, hydropathy, and homeopathy, a system of medicine to which Swedenborg's analysis of bodily function later became closely tied. 77

76 Noyes, History of American Socialisms, p. 539; Judah, History and Philosophy of Metaphysical Movements in America, pp. 33-34.

In its last years, Brook Farm became a Fourierist Phalanx identified closely with the larger Fourierist movement. Yet not all the residents of the community were enthusiastic Fourierites. In the last issue of the Dial Elizabeth Peabody suggested that the Fourierist philosophy alone was no guarantee of success because it was too coldly materialistic. "It is our belief," she wrote, "that unless the Fourierist bodies are made alive by Christ, 'their constitution will not march;' and the galvanic force of reaction, by which they move for a season, will not preserve them from corruption." Charles Lane, an English citizen who came to Brook Farm at the conclusion of Bronson Alcott's abortive communal experiment at Fruitlands, was also concerned over the irreligious nature of Fourierism, and warned that one could either serve God or man, but not both.

Partially in response to such expressions of concern, proponents of Fourierism stressed the compatibility of

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78 The transformation of Brook Farm from community to association and finally to phalanx is best documented in the pages of the two journals which identified with Brook Farm, Phalanx (1843-1845) and The Harbinger (1845-1847). See also Lindsay Swift, Brook Farm (New York, 1961 [1900]), pp. 263-281, and Zoltan Harazsti, The Idyll of Brook Farm (Boston, [1937]), passim.

79 Quoted in Noyes, History of American Socialisms, p. 518.

80 Ibid., p. 520.
Swedenborgian religious thought with Fourierist socialism. Parke Godwin, a major mid-nineteenth century American Fourierist, believed that a perfect parallel existed between Swedenborg's philosophy of correspondence and Fourier's system of universal analogy. For Brook Farmers, for whom the ideas of Fourier were too materialistic to suit the intuitive spiritual impulse of transcendentalism, the intellectual fusion of Swedenborg and Fourier served admirably as the basis of the blueprint for achievement of the perfect society.

In 1847 American interest in Swedenborg was further heightened by the announcement that Andrew Jackson Davis had been visited by the spirit of Emanuel Swedenborg and had received lengthy discourses from the Swedish savant. The Poughkeepsie, New York, youth was a likely subject to receive such communications, having been an apt subject for practitioners of mesmerism. He had been given very little formal schooling and was apprenticed to a shoemaker when, at age seventeen, his abnormally magnetic tendencies were discovered. His special gift initially seemed to be a

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81 Ibid., p. 547. For a more detailed analysis of the fusion of Fourierism and Swedenborgianism at Brook Farm see Noyes' entire chapter on the subject, pp. 537-550. Parke Godwin was not a member of the Brook Farm Phalanx, but he wrote a great deal of material on Fourierism for both the Phalanx and The Harbinger. His A Popular View of the Doctrines of Charles Fourier (New York, 1844) contains the most detailed synthesis of the Swedenborgian and Fourierist systems.
clairvoyant ability to see the whole of the human anatomy and by doing so to diagnose the afflictions of the Poughkeepsie townspeople. 82

The attitude of the local clergy toward Davis was generally unsympathetic, with the exception of the Universalist minister, Gibson Smith, who became the seer's first amanuensis, carefully recording the activities of Davis whenever he entered the trance state. Davis soon began to produce series of papers on the subject of mesmerism (while magnetized), 83 and with Smith and his personal magnetist, William Levingston, toured New England on a healing and speaking tour. By 1845, he had established residence in New York City, and there employed a new magnetist, Dr. S. S. Lyon, whom he had met earlier in Connecticut. 84 Lyon arranged to have Smith replaced by a personal friend, Universalist minister William Fishbough. The volume purporting


83 Davis, Magic Staff, p. 278. One of those most critical of Davis's early writing on mesmerism was La Roy Sunderland, who had worked out his own theory on the subject. Sunderland, who shortly thereafter became a prominent leader in the spiritualist movement, referred to the writings as "false philosophy unsustained by matter of fact." He did not accuse Davis of deliberate deception, but maintained that he had simply recounted his visions, which were not authoritative (New York Tribune, Sept. 30, 1845, p. 1, cited by Delp, "The Harmonial Philosopher," p. 29).

84 Ibid., p. 286.
to have come from Swedenborg was produced over the course of the next two years. One of the early enthusiastic observers of the transmissive process was George Bush, a Calvinist Presbyterian who had converted to Swedenborgianism several years earlier and was a professor of Hebrew at New York University. Bush was profoundly interested in the subject of clairvoyant mesmerism because he was certain that visions of the spiritual world received in that manner would prove the Swedenborgian description of the spirit realm. 85

But Bush was soon placed in an awkward position, because the completed volume, Nature's Divine Revelations, while reflecting much of Swedenborg's thinking, also included material which stressed Fourierist principles and made numerous disparaging references to the Christian religion and the Scriptures. He responded by taking the position that although the work was not entirely true to Swedenborg, it nevertheless verified the existence of Swedenborg's spirit world in that Davis had obtained information from a variety of spirit sources. 86


The best conclusion seems to be that Davis had a brilliantly retentive mind and could pour forth ideas from his subconscious mind while in a hypnotic state. Whatever the source, his first work was imbued with the millenial regenerative enthusiasm which typified American reform. This characteristic, plus its novelty, helps to explain how the work could have run through thirty-four editions in thirty years and opened the door to modern American spiritualism. By the year 1848 Davis was already hailed by the newer supporters of Swedenborg as the medium and representative of the "illustrative Swede," and the Brook Farm periodical, the Harbinger, "rejoiced over them both."

The enthusiastic reception of Nature's Divine Revelations was followed by the appearance of the Univercoelum in December, 1847. This journal was established by Davis's supporters, Fishbough and Lyon, who were joined by Samuel B. Brittan, Thomas Lake Harris, and W. M. Fernald, all of whom were or had been Universalist ministers. The first issue of the Univercoelum set the tone for what was to be a journalistic life span of eighteen months. The ultimate objects which the editors hoped to achieve, by stressing the spiritual origin of the laws of nature, were "the

establishment of a universal System of Truth, [and] the Reform and Reorganization of Society."

The journal would rely heavily upon the revelations of A. J. Davis, but, Brittan insisted, the authority of Davis would be judged in the light of reason.\textsuperscript{89}

The fact that a high percentage of the early editors and lecturers on Swedenborgianism and spiritualism were Universalists is of considerable significance, for it suggests that the religious background shared by Harris, Fishbough, Brittan, and Fernald, as well as Universalist spiritualists and reformers of the next decade such as R. P. Ambler, Charles Partridge, S. Crosby Hewitt, and, of course, John Spear, may have directed them toward spiritualism.\textsuperscript{90}

The Universalist Church in the United States—generally similar to Unitarianism but less intellectual and appealing primarily to members of the lower, less articulate classes—dates formally from the year 1770, when John Murray, a recent English emigrant, was called to a small congregation in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Murray had preached in England on behalf of both John Wesley and George Whitefield before coming under the influence of

\textsuperscript{89}Univercoelum (New York), (Dec. 4, 1847), pp. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{90}Charles Partridge was the publisher of the Spiritual Telegraph (1851-1858). Ambler edited the Spirit Messenger (1850-1851) and Hewitt the New Era (1852-1855).
James Rally. Rally was the author of a rather mystical theology in which Christ was thought to have assumed a spiritual identity with the human race and to have physically assumed the guilt of humanity in his person. On the basis of such reasoning, Rally interpreted the crucifixion to mean redemption for all, so that universal salvation was assured. But Rally, and Murray, too, maintained that salvation was contingent upon man's acknowledgement of the redemptive act. Though he might fail to acknowledge God's forgiveness in the mortal life, man could not continue his rejection in the next life because there God would confront each soul directly. Thus would universal salvation be accomplished.  

After 1800, to the dismay of Murray, Universalist theology underwent a transformation which left it on roughly the same ground Unitarians would tread twenty years later. It was this transformation, and the repercussions which accompanied it, which ultimately caused sizable numbers of Universalists to turn to spiritualism as a means of buttressing their theological beliefs in regard to the

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nature of life after death. The prime mover in the development of a new Universalist theology was Hosea Ballou, who published *A Treatise on Atonement* in 1803. In his discourse Ballou stripped all the Calvinist vestiges from Universalism, including trinitarianism and the legalistic concept of atonement. More important, Ballou and the "new school men," as they came to be known, asserted man's personal responsibility for sin and maintained that righteousness was to be experienced, not at a future day of judgment, but in the mortal life. It was this position which left Ballou open to William Ellery Channing's later criticism that he imparted to death the power to change and purify the soul, a charge Ballou steadfastly denied. In fact, Ballou did not consider the question of the soul after death in *A Treatise on Atonement*, but merely assumed that a soul might as willfully sin in the future life as in this, in which case it would experience immediate punishment.  

A formal debate in 1817 over the issue of immediate salvation upon death opened a chasm in the Universalist Church which resulted in a temporary split in 1831. Ballou held fast to his position that the next life would hold no punishment for earthly sin, in spite of the criticism of a

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growing number of younger Universalists ministers who argued that belief in immediate salvation removed all responsibility from man and was contrary to Biblical teaching. Calling themselves "restorationists," they insisted that punishment for earthly sin, repentance, and acceptance of salvation could occur after death as well as before. It was this group which later found in spiritualism a conformation of its theology.  

One of the spokesmen for the restorationist faction was Hosea Ballou II, grandnephew of the elder Ballou, and it was he who trained John Spear and his brother Charles for the Universalist ministry. Hosea Ballou II was also responsible for converting Adin Ballou, a distant cousin whose background was Baptist, into Universalism. It was a feat which could be accomplished only by stressing the theology of future retribution. In 1831, when a faction calling itself the Massachusetts Association of Universal Restorationists left the main body of Universalism, Adin Ballou was one of its leaders. The group numbered only

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93 Hosea Ballou, A Voice to Universalists (Boston, 1949), pp. 36-37; Richard Eddy, Universalism in America, 2 vols. (Boston, 1886), II, pp. 312-339; Allen and Eddy, Unitarians and Universalists, pp. 244-260. See also Ballou, An Examination of the Doctrine of the Future Retribution on the Principles of Morals, Analogy and the Scriptures (Boston, 1834).

thirty-one and five hundred Universalist ministers, but there was considerable support for the restorationist position among those who remained. Ten years later, when the separatist movement died, some of its members re-entered the Universalist mainstream, others had switched over to Unitarianism, and still others had abandoned the ministry and thrown themselves into a variety of reform movements, particularly abolitionism.\textsuperscript{95}

Many Universalists—the individuals already cited represent but a sampling—surfaced as Swedenborgians and spiritualists. They were attracted to Swedenborg because he not only confirmed the continuation of life after death, but described in vivid detail three heavens and three hells which spirits entered according to their degree of harmony with, or rejection of, God. The punishment in hell was not of a physical, but a mental type, and souls were free to gravitate upward, never downward, along the scale at the top of which lay the state of perfection. In the early 1850s, Universalist minister W. M. Fernald, by then a spiritualist, would write:

\begin{quote}
I never preached the 'death and glory system;' and if there is any one truth which mankind now [sic] need to be told,...it is that they must not think lightly of life's duties, or wish too speedily to get away from its sorrows, in view of supreme felicity beyond death.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{95}Eddy, \textit{Universalism in America}, pp. 320-339.

\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Spirit Messenger}, March 15, 1851.
S. Crosby Hewitt, also a Universalist minister who became a spiritualist editor, maintained in the latter role that a soul was "saved" when it became "completely enlightened by purity and love." For more individuals this process would not be concluded upon earth, but in the spirit realm. The law of endless progression, he maintained, dictated the ultimate salvation of all souls. Therein lay the "spiritual doctrine of salvation," Hewitt declared. It was a doctrine which was to him "entirely rational, as well as spiritual."97

Restorationists within Universalism concluded, more than a decade before translations of Swedenborg's works appeared in the United States, that salvation of the human soul could be arrived at through a process of gradual improvement in the spirit realm. The descriptive writing of Swedenborg, and the spiritual philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis, confirmed what they had already come to believe by faith.98

The advent of spiritualism occurred, then, because the minds of many Americans, either consciously, or unconsciously, anticipated it. From a perspective outside the ante-bellum period, communion with spirits may seem a

97 New Era, Aug. 28, 1854.

difficult subject to consider seriously. But Jacksonian democracy contained a nationalistic faith in the American potential for the perfection of institutions, and a wide-ranging reform movement provided visionary zeal. A common conviction that the mysteries of science were being opened to man was welded to the belief that science and religion constituted a single discipline—the study of a divinely inspired, natural, wholly systematic and rational universal order. The practice of clairvoyant mesmerism, involving the transmission of thought from mind to mind, established the existence of spirit as a force capable of acting independent of the human form. The Swedenborgian conception of a universe in which progression from a lower to a higher state of being prevailed both in the earthly and spiritual realms offered a sense of liberation from the orthodox, pessimistic dogma of depraved man and eternal punishment.99

Although the publication of Davis's *Nature's Divine Revelations* caused a great deal of excitement within the community of perfectionist reformers, liberal religionists, and advocates of the new sciences, widespread public interest in spiritualism did not develop until after the Fox sisters introduced the phenomenon of spirit-rapping. The reason for this is quite apparent. The concern of the

comman man was primarily self-centered and his interest in science and medicine was not theoretical, but practical. Utilitarian science was a hallmark of the Jacksonian Age. The trance writing of Davis, while of vital importance to those atune to its theoretical and philosophical implications, offered little to the American public in the way of tangibly improving the quality of life. Furthermore, although Davis claimed to have encountered the spirit of Emanuel Swedenborg, the only proof that he had actually done so lay in comparing his work to Swedenborg's. The public was not in a position to make that type of judgment. It should be noted, too, that Davis's work did not lead to the immediate conclusion that anyone so wishing could communicate with a deceased friend or relative.

On one level it is reasonable to say that the Fox sisters and the legion of mediums who followed their lead reduced spiritualism to a crude sort of popular science with which the common man could easily identify. The experience of watching a skillful medium at work eliciting the spirits to produce noises, move objects about, or play various musical instruments, was much like watching the phrenologist read bumps. It was a means by which the common man could participate in the "scientific" advancement of the times. Some of the philosophical spiritualists had complete contempt for this aspect of the movement. Warren Chase insisted that being a medium did not make one a
spiritualist, nor did the simple reception of spirit com-
munication. By the same token a spiritualist could be one
who had never experienced any communion with spirits what-
ever. "It is," he maintained, "a condition of intellectual
and spiritual development, attained by some through the
aid of mediumship, or messages, and by some in natural and
religious growth."\textsuperscript{100}

But even in his criticism, Chase accepted the indirect
value of popular spiritualism to the philosophical wing of
the movement. Many of those who became supporters of the
spiritual philosophy of human regeneration did so because
they had witnessed what they considered irrefutable physi-
cal evidence of the existence of spirits of the bodily
deceased. The two individuals most commonly named in
connection with spiritualism, retired University of Penn-
sylvania chemist, Robert Hare, and New York state supreme
court judge, John Edmonds, both came to the movement by
this route. R. P. Ambler claimed in the \textit{Spirit Messenger}
that he was personally familiar with numerous atheists and
agnostics who found in the proof of the spiritual realm the
further proof of a Divine Being.\textsuperscript{101}

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\textsuperscript{100}Warren Chase, \textit{The Gist of Spiritualism: Viewed
Scientifically, Religiously, Politically, and Socially}
(Boston, 1865), p. 71.

\textsuperscript{101}R. P. Ambler, "What Good Has Been Accomplished?"
The \textit{Spirit Messenger}, Jan. 7, 1851; Podmore, \textit{Modern
Spiritualism, I}, pp. 223-236. For their own (cont'd)
While it is easy to ridicule the magician-medium with his bag of tricks, it is somehow difficult to make light of the thousands of persons who found, through well-intentioned mediums, immense gratification in the belief that a lost loved one was alive in spirit and communicating a message of hope and assurance. The term "well-intentioned" mediums refers to those who believed that information they conveyed came from deceased spirits, even though it may have derived from a telepathic reading of the mind of the person seeking the contact. At a time when nearly every family still experienced the premature loss of one or more of its members, the psychological value of spirit communication, whether imagined or real, should not be overlooked.\textsuperscript{102}

It is not the popular wing of the spiritualist movement, however, which is of major concern in this study, but rather its thrust in the area of American reform.\textsuperscript{103} It is

\textit{(cont'd) writings on spiritualism see Hare, \textit{Spiritualism Scientifically Demonstrated} (New York, 1855) and Edmonds and George T. Dexter, \textit{Spiritualism}, 2 vols. (New York, 1853).}

\textsuperscript{102}Spiritualist journals frequently cited this type of evidence, which was generally considered an example of the potential of spiritualism for improving the human condition. See the \textit{Spiritual Telegraph}, May 8 and 22, 1852, for an account of Adin Ballou's communication (through a medium) with this son, Adin Augustus, who died at age nineteen of typhoid fever.

\textsuperscript{103}The popular phase of the movement has been given thorough treatment in Fornell, \textit{The Unhappy Medium}. 
intended that by approaching spiritualism through the life of John Murray Spear, a contribution to a more thorough understanding of the subject may result.
CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF A REFORMER

John Murray, the founder of the Universalist denomination in America, pastored a church in Boston from 1793 until 1809.\(^1\) Among the members of his congregation were two generations of the John Spear family, residents of Boston's south side. John Spear labored as a fisherman and his son John, Junior as a blacksmith.\(^2\) On September 16, 1804, the wife of John Spear, Junior produced a son, and as a gesture of respect for their personal friend and minister, the parents named the child John Murray Spear.\(^3\)


\(^2\)Boston Directory, 1803 (Boston, 1803), p. 120.

\(^3\)Hannah F. M. Brown, "Biographical Sketch of John M. Spear," in John M. Spear, The Educator, edited by Alonzo E. Newton (Boston, 1857), p. 9. Brown's brief sketch of Spear contains the only known account of his life prior to his entry into the Universalist ministry. Because Brown was a close friend and admirer of Spear and obviously wrote the account from a skeleton of facts supplied by Spear, her comments regarding his personal character cannot be regarded as totally objective. The basic facts are probably as accurate as was Spear's memory in 1856. Of necessity, however, the account of Spear's early life is based upon the record of Mrs. Brown.
While John Murray Spear was still a small child, his father died, and young John and his older brother, Charles, were subsequently cared for by the widowed mother and the paternal grandparents. As a young boy, John was said to have exhibited those traits which remained dominant throughout his life. His willingness to tend to the needs of his grandparents, his concern for the welfare of abandoned animals, and his desire to assist families less fortunate than his own seemed to indicate that a basic gentleness of spirit and love of humanity permeated his character.

The lack of an earning father in the Spear family required that John and Charles contribute to the family income, and so, probably at about ages ten and twelve, the boys were sent to work in a cotton factory in Dorchester. The lengthy hours and exhausting work left little time for schooling, but a clerk in the factory opened a Sunday school for the children employed in the mill, and it was here that the Spear brothers gained the rudiments of an education, learning to read, write, and perform basic mathematical skills.

When John reached the age of seventeen, his family sought to guide him into a profession, and apprenticed him to a shoemaker in Abington, Massachusetts. Here he became associated with a congregation of orthodox Calvinists, and began to debate in his mind the same thorny theological issues that had earlier tormented his namesake. The
doctrine of the elect was based squarely upon scripture, and yet the goodness of God seemed to preclude the possibility of eternal punishment. Even while associated with a Calvinist church Spear began to read seriously the Universalist Magazine, a small, weekly paper, published by Henry Bowen under the editorship of Hosea Ballou and others. The discourses of leading Universalists, coupled with his own devout reading of the Bible firmly established Spear's personal theology within the Universalist framework.

It was while at Abington that Spear attended a religious meeting conducted by Joshua Flagg, a minister of the Universalist order, who came to that town to preach. As Flagg expounded upon the text "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," Spear felt personally called to devote his life to the ministry. After several months of meditation and prayer, during which he attempted to reconcile his calling with his present condition of poverty and ignorance, Spear determined to set aside whatever money he could in the hope of saving enough to pay for his training as a minister. In time he saved seventy dollars, which he left with his employers for safe keeping. Their business failed, however, and the seventy dollars was used to pay the firm's creditors.

Following this monetary setback, Spear's health failed him. He had for too long worked lengthy hours fol-
lowed by additional hours of study, and for a period of
time he was forced to abandon both work and study in
attempting to recover his strength. Almost at the point of
despair, he found a door opened to him. His brother
Charles had recently completed training for the Universalist ministry in the home of Hosea Ballou II, a prominent
defender of the restorationist theology. It was through
the assistance of Charles plus a very generous offer from
Ballou himself that John was able to pursue this same
course of study.  

The culmination of Spear's years of struggle to gain
the training necessary to become a minister came with the
preaching of his first sermon at Brewster, Massachusetts
(located at the base of the upper arm of Cape Cod), on
December 28, 1828.  

In 1830 he left Brewster to pastor a church in the
town of Barnstable, located about fifteen miles to the
west. The Universalist society of Barnstable had been
formed in November, 1829, with about fifty charter members.
It met originally in a school house, where Spear preached
to the group and assisted in writing the church constitution
and articles of faith. His efforts constituted a type of


\[5\] Brown, p. 11; Richard Eddy, Universalism in America: A History, Two Volumes (Boston, 1884), II, p. 198.
missionary work since he also remained responsible for the Brewster church during this period and received no salary at Barnstable. On April 29, 1830, the church was dedicated and John Murray Spear was formally ordained the pastor. His salary was fixed at four hundred dollars per year.  

A unique characteristic of the Barnstable Universalist Society's constitution was a statement which read that "no member shall be excommunicated from this society on account of his religious opinion." The writer who compiled a history at Barnstable emphasized that this type of liberal thinking clearly bore the mark of Spear, and that his leadership was apparent, too, in the fact that because the town had no hall adequate to house public lectures, the Universalist Church threw open its doors for such events. Soon the church became a forum for "...temperance advocates, moral reform agitators, The Female Samaritan Society, and even the Come-outers," who left the established church of the time in a dispute over the slavery issue.  

In time the congregation voted to restrict the use of the church to religious and society meetings. The policy change was not without casualties, however. Eight members of the society, strong abolitionists all, left the church.

6Donald G. Trayser, Editor, Three Centuries of a Cape Cod Town (Hyannis, Mass., 1939), p. 83.

7Ibid.
in protest, and it is entirely possible that the incident may have prompted Spear to leave as well. It is difficult to trace in any detail the experience of Spear at Barnstable, primarily because the records of the society were destroyed when the church burned down after being struck by lightning in 1871. 8

It was while at Barnstable that Spear, by then twenty-seven years old, married Betsey Briggs of Hanover, Massachusetts. Exactly what circumstances brought the minister of inconsequential means and questionable social status together with the daughter of a family with a rather prominent past is uncertain. In any case, the marriage was for more than twenty-five years a happy and fruitful one, producing five children, four of whom reached adulthood. Throughout these two and one-half decades, Betsey Spear acted as an ideal complement to her impetuous husband, watching over him and caring for his offspring while he devoted himself to the ministry and later to a wide variety of reform activities. 9

8 Ibid., pp. 84-85. The records might have been saved, except that the local fire bell was also the bell in the steeple of the Baptist church, from which the Universalist Society had drawn most of its members. The Baptist sexton, seeing the hand of God in the lightning, steadfastly refused to ring the bell.

9 Brown, "Biographical Sketch," p. 11. One feels not only a profound sense of admiration for Betsey Spear, but also considerable sympathy. Throughout their married life, to an increasing degree, John's primary allegiance (cont'd)
Spring of 1836 brought the Reverend Mr. Spear an opportunity to move to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where another newly formed Universalist society was building a church. After a trial period in which he preached in the local town hall and assisted in the construction of the new edifice, Spear was offered a permanent position. In September, 1836, his family joined him in his new location.¹⁰

The evidence pertaining to Spear's record during his five and one-half years at New Bedford is contradictory. A late nineteenth century history of New Bedford reported that Spear was well received by the New Bedford Universalists, and that when he left the pulpit after five years on August 6, 1841, it was "to the great regret of the society."¹¹ Likewise, a history of New Bedford churches published in 1854 recorded nothing to suggest ill will towards Spear, but suggested rather that Spear left New Bedford "for a sphere of greater benevolence and useful-

(cont'd) was to the ministry and his reform efforts. He was frequently separated from wife and family for long periods of time. Mrs. Spear may have remained loyal to her husband, but her own life was obviously difficult (pp. 11-12).


ness." This account lauded Spear as "...the prisoner's friend, the warmhearted and earnest advocate of mitigation of severe punishments, the active and zealous opponent of the death penalty, the generous and humane philanthropist [sic], whose voice and presence shed a halo of sunlight around the path of the poor, the degraded...and whose pen has left an impression of mercy and love on the age he adorns." This description, while highly complimentary to Spear, is misleading to the extent that it implies that Spear left New Bedford in order to devote his full energy to prison reform and the needs of the poor. In fact, he served another church for approximately five years after leaving New Bedford before deciding to abandon the formal ministry.

In spite of the record of such laudatory expressions, there is clear evidence that Spear's term of service in New Bedford ended in disharmony between the pastor and his flock. It was at this point in his life that Spear was attracted to the radical abolitionism of William Lloyd Garrison. The dynamic crusader appeared at New Bedford in 1838 and was apparently subjected to some sort of attack

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12 History of the New Bedford Churches (1854), p. 54.
13 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
by irate citizens of the town. According to his biographer, Mrs. H.M.F. Brown, Spear conducted his own investigation into the cause of the attack, and finding himself in complete sympathy with Garrison's ideas, subsequently became a local champion of "Peace, Temperance, and Freedom." From that point his role in New Bedford became that of the righteous crusader, keeping the faith in spite of open opposition from friends and associates, who found him "immovable as a rock."

Spear could not await "the moving of the custom-bound, popularity-seeking, fold enchained souls," because he

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14 Brown, "Biographical Sketch" in Newton, ed., The Educator, p. 12. A problem arises in attempting to trace the nature of the incident to which Brown alludes. In the biography of Garrison by his children (William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1809: The Story of His Life, Four Volumes [New York, 1889], reference is made to an appearance by Garrison at New Bedford on April 15, 1838, (III, p. 120). No mention is made, however, of any violence, and the appearance went unnoticed in both the New Bedford Mercury and Garrison's own Liberator. Certainly if he had been the subject of physical violence, Garrison would have reported the incident in the Liberator. The only reasonable conclusion must be that the appearance was not linked with a "stoning" of Garrison, as Brown wrote. In the recollection of his years at New Bedford, Spear may have unconsciously remembered a verbal attack by local citizens as a physical attack, and recounted the story in that manner to Mrs. Brown. Another possibility is that Spear might have confused the appearance at New Bedford with one or more other instances in which he might actually have seen Garrison physically attacked.


16 Ibid.
found truth to be worth more than all the "masked hypocrisy, religious dogmatism, and milk-and-water-philanthropy" in the world.\textsuperscript{17} His working to establish a legitimate claim to freedom for the Negro woman earned him the complete scorn of his church and the community at large, and he was frequently described as a "nigger stealer," a "thief," and an "enemy to his country."\textsuperscript{18}

Spear's abolitionist activity at this time was not confined to New Bedford. In November, 1840, he addressed the first session of the newly organized Universalist Anti-slavery Convention, which was held at Lynn, Massachusetts. His speech was important for what it revealed about Spear. He began by tracing the course of Universalism in the United States. The Universalist Church, he observed, had taken a stand against the evil of temperance more than twelve years earlier. Its representatives had "preached, written, passed resolutions and legislated" against capital punishment. But Universalism had remained practically silent on the issue of American slavery. The first time Universalists were confronted as a body with the issue was at their Massachusetts State Convention in 1837. At that time an antislavery resolution was considered briefly, then post-

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
poned indefinitely. A year later similar resolutions were referred to a committee which determined that no further action should be taken. A district meeting of the Old Colony Conference at Fall River, Massachusetts, in February, 1840, also postponed consideration of the issue. The same body convened in August and in response to resolutions put forth by Spear and T. K. Taylor, voted to condemn slavery as "a moral wrong" and to seek its abolition by "moral suasion."

The Old Colony Conference directed that the resolution be considered by local Universalist societies and that their delegates to the Annual Session be prepared to respond to it at that time. These directions were to be printed in the Universalist and Trumpet, the major publication of the Universalist Church, but for some reason this was not done. Consequently, Spear and several other Universalist ministers called a conference of Universalists for the specific purpose of considering the issue of slavery. Spear's address to that body moved from a discussion of the general course of Universalism in regard to reform to a strong criticism of certain elements of the denomination for their lethargy in the matter of antislavery. He stated his personal conviction that the editor of the Universalist and Trumpet had consciously sought to undermine the efforts of antislavery

men within the denomination. His charge that the journal practiced "open hostility toward the discussion of anti-slavery" is clearly documented and appears accurate.

Spear, however, was lacking in the sense of diplomacy which might have served to reconcile differences within Universalism and to broaden abolitionist influence within it. Rather, he chose to chide "many of our dear brethren" who were "unwilling...to have us say a word on behalf of the poor American slave in our religious bodies," insisting that "Universalists, above all others, should be the un­tiring enemies of all crime, of all oppression, of all war, of all slavery." 20

Most significant is the manner in which Spear cloaked himself with the mantle of "Truth," a technique which Garrison was also inclined to employ as he battled with opponents in the cause of righteousness. Speaking of the antislavery position as an expression of truth, Spear told his audience:

This truth must live, yea, outlive every oppo­sition. Truth is power. Crush her to the earth and she rises again with renewed vigor. Throw her into the most furious billows of popular commotion, and she mounts aloft like the ark upon the summit of its waves. Cast her into the seven-fold heated furnace of persecution, and she walks unharmed in the midst of the flame. She is the brightest of earth's minis­tering spirits, sent to shed upon our faith the light of life and glory; sent to animate and

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illumine and inspire our souls while in this childhood of being; sent to guide us safely to the world of light and blessedness. When the grave shall have blighted all the pride of wealth, and talent, and knowledge, and authority; when earth and heaven shall have passed away,—truth shall rise like the Phoenix, like the angel of Manoah's sacrifice upon the flames of nature's funeral pyre, and ascend to her source, her heaven, her home, the bosom of the holy and everlasting God!\(^{21}\)

According to Mrs. Brown, it was opposition to Spear's antislavery efforts which ultimately compelled him to leave New Bedford. That was probably the case. Universalism in New Bedford most certainly did not flourish under his leadership. The church which was built there by the Universalist society was not adequately financed. It cost six thousand five hundred dollars, and the members of the society, unable to pay upon its completion, mortgaged it. This is understandable, of course, but the debt was not paid off while Spear was in New Bedford, probably because his antislavery activity tended to disrupt the congregation and lessen financial support. Even after Spear's departure the society was unable to recover, and in 1849 was forced to sell the church and the property in order to pay off the debt. The congregation was subsequently dissolved.\(^{22}\)

Also noteworthy is a variation in the treatment of Biographical Sketch, p. 12.

\(^{21}\)Ibid.

\(^{22}\)Ellis, History of New Bedford, p. 590; Brown, Biographical Sketch, p. 12.
Spear's ministry at New Bedford in the two editions of the *History of the New Bedford Churches*. This history was first published in 1854, at which time Spear's reputation as a prison reformer was widely known and his recently adopted views regarding spiritualism were not. It was this account which praised Spear's work as minister and reformer. A second edition, *The History of the Churches of New Bedford*, was published in 1869, after Spear had for fifteen years been a dedicated spiritualist, had attempted to form a communal society based upon spiritualist-socialist principles, and had committed numerous social indiscretions, among them leaving his wife. In the 1869 account, reference to Spear was confined to one brief sentence merely acknowledging his service as minister of the New Bedford church; this despite the fact that the second volume was designed to elaborate upon the earlier history and in large part quoted directly from it. It can be fairly assumed that there was, in 1869, a conscious attempt to expunge Spear's name from the record insofar as it was possible to do so.

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Not wishing a repetition of his difficulties at New Bedford, Spear entered his next pastorate, at Weymouth, Massachusetts, only after gaining a commitment from members of the society there that he could preach the gospel as he understood it. For their part, they could pay him what they felt he was worth. The bargain, while not designed to give the Spear family any degree of security financially, nevertheless seems to have worked out well. It allowed Spear to pursue various of his reform activities without waiting for the endorsement of the congregation, while the congregation, on the other hand, did not need to feel responsible for the behavior of its minister.25

Certainly Spear's experience at Weymouth was less tempestuous than that at New Bedford. Arriving there in April, 1841, he remained until April, 1845.26 Among other interests he lent his full support to the Weymouth "cold water campaign," a temperance effort. This movement had widespread endorsement in Weymouth, so much so that parades were staged, bands played, and massive "cold water" picnics were a frequent summer occurrence. At such events Spear was always in attendance, and was generally called upon to make some appropriate remarks.27

26 History of Weymouth, Massachusetts, Four Volumes, (Weymouth, Mass., 1923), I, p. 268.
The temperance crusade was at this time, however, only a peripheral concern of Spear's. The most important evil to be overcome was slavery, and Spear used his church as a platform for all the major abolitionists of the day. William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Parker Pillsbury, and Theodore Parker were all in their prime, and all were welcomed by the people of Weymouth, who, perhaps in part because of Spear's efforts, were more interested in reform than the citizens of some neighboring towns. Among the traveling lecturers, Garrison, in particular, developed an enthusiastic and devoted following in Weymouth.28

Spear himself was an active participant in the New England Anti-Slavery Society during this period,29 and while still associated with the church at Weymouth, traveled extensively on the abolitionist lecture circuit. In the fall of 1844 he, along with Stephen S. Foster, Parker Pillsbury, and Abby Kelley attempted "...to upturn some of the hard soil of New Hampshire."30 Later in the same year, Spear and Stephen S. Foster (and perhaps others) journeyed

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28Ibid.

29Liberator, June 14, 1844. Spear's endorsement of Garrisonian abolitionism is indicated by an account in the same issue of the Liberator listing Spear's name among those who supported a resolution stating that "no abolitionist can consistently swear to support the constitution."

to Portland, Maine, again to sow the seed of abolitionism. It was during the stay in Portland that Spear and Foster were severely beaten by an angry mob.

Surprisingly, the attack was not related directly to Spear's stand on the slavery issue. On the night of the attack, December 24, he and Foster attended a meeting of the Native American and Protestant Christians in Portland's City Hall. It was one of the largest groups ever assembled at that place, and the speaker was a Reverend C. Sparry. His address, as described by the Portland Daily American, was "...a Native American, anti-democratic, anti-Polk caucus speech of the worst class."\(^{31}\)

At the conclusion of the speech a local citizen rose to ask if a reply would be permitted. The response of the audience was boisterously negative. At that juncture Spear "mildly inquired" whether the audience was "afraid of free discussion." He, too, was shouted down by the audience. Then, as Spear and Foster (who had said nothing during the course of the meeting), were descending the steps of the building following the meeting, a crowd, apparently organized for that purpose, attacked both men beating them severely as they attempted to make their way back to their lodging.\(^{32}\)


\(^{32}\)Ibid; (Portland) Eastern Argus, December 27, 1844, p. 2.
The seriousness of the injuries Spear and Foster sustained is uncertain. The *Daily American* reported that Foster was "severely injured" and his face considerably swollen. Spear was injured even more seriously, in that "He had repeated spasms during the course of the evening, and was yesterday very feeble." Following the attack Spear had managed to reach the home of Peter Morril, "a generous-hearted Quaker," who tended to his wounds. Although Spear was probably never at the point of death, as later accounts were inclined to suggest, his condition was serious enough that even after returning to Boston in mid-January he spent several weeks recuperating in the home of his friend and fellow abolitionist, Oliver Dennett.

The nature of the incident aroused the ire of Spear's friends and supporters in the Boston and Weymouth areas. The *Liberator* printed a statement released by the Weymouth Universalist society. Describing Spear as a "meek and humble follower of Jesus Christ, a faithful and ardent friend of the whole human family...," its writers commented,

33(*Portland*) *Daily American*, December 26, 1844.


35*Hangman* (Boston), January 22, 1845; Brown, *"Biographical Sketch,*" p. 13. In her typically melodramatic style Mrs. Brown wrote, "On one occasion,...his life-lamp seemed nearly extinguished. His friends stood anxiously about, watching his feeble pulse, and praying that, if the thing were possible, death would spare to them the husband and father."
"our minds were filled with the greatest horror and dismay, and the most anxious foreboding for the security of life and the perpetuity of our free institutions by which it is guaranteed." The statement went on to assert that freedom of speech and debate were "essential properties of a free government, and the only secure foundation upon which it rests..."36

The Daily American printed the statement from the Weymouth congregation and added its own ringing denunciation of the Portland law enforcement agencies for their failure to attempt to apprehend the criminals. "Not the first step has yet been taken," asserted the Daily American; "MOBOCRACY reigns triumphant.—The government cowers to the spirit of misrule."37

During his period of convalescence, Spear weighed the value of his formal ministry as opposed to the value of his reform efforts, and concluded that the established church acted as a hindrance, rather than a stimulus to his impulse toward reform. Believing that he must devote himself full time to the improvement of the human condition, he resigned his pastorate at Weymouth and moved his family to Boston.38

36Liberator, January 24, 1845, reprinted from the (Portland) Daily American; Hangman, January 22, 1845.
37Liberator, January 2, 1845.
Spear did not leave the ministry without making specific plans for his future. He continued to labor on behalf of the slave, acting as one of several vice-presidents of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. But there was also a different avenue of reform which captured his attention. In the latter months of 1844 John Spear became convinced, as was his brother Charles, that capital punishment was both immoral and ineffective in deterring crime, and that it should be immediately abolished. Both began to make frequent public appearances on behalf of the abolition of capital punishment, and together they planned to begin publication of a weekly paper to be devoted primarily to that end. Beyond the abolition of capital punishment, they intended that their paper should "improve the condition of prisoners, and arouse a general sympathy for the victims of a criminal social order."

With Charles acting as general editor, and John (although incapacitated in Maine at the time) as contributing editor, the first issue of the Hangman was published on January 1, 1845. Its initial task was the formation of an anti-capital punishment organization, and at an open meeting of interested persons, Charles Spear, the Rev. John

39Liberator, January 31, 1845.
40Ibid., November 22, 1844.
Pierpont, and Wendell Phillips were selected to lay the groundwork.  

The members of the committee then scheduled a discussion of capital punishment which included as speakers Ellis Gray Loring and Samuel J. May, Unitarian ministers who were active in a number of New England reform endeavors. Out of the exchange of ideas produced by the discussion emerged the Massachusetts Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment.

Originally intending the Hangman to run on a trial basis for a period of thirteen weeks, the editors were so pleased with the response to the newspaper that they enthusiastically announced its continuation on what they hoped would be a permanent basis. Hoping to stimulate interest in their paper and its reform thrust, the Massachusetts Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment brought to Boston a wide variety of reformers to participate in the

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41Hangman, January 1, 1845.

42Ibid., January 22, 1845. The movement to abolish capital punishment has received little attention as a phase of ante-bellum reform, perhaps because there was so little disagreement among major reformers on the subject, hence a paucity of source material. The Hangman (later the Prisoner's Friend) was the only reform journal which devoted extensive coverage to the subject, though most gave the movement their editorial support. The Hangman is the most valuable single source on the subject, containing minutes and speeches from meetings as well as articles by major reform figures. The most elaborate critique of capital punishment was Charles Spear's Essays on the Punishment by Death, 8th ed. (Boston, 1844).
May, 1845 meetings of the fledgling organization. Included on the list of speakers were such leading lights of universal reform as William Henry Channing, Horace Greeley, Albert Brisbane, Robert Owen, Wendell Phillips, and William Lloyd Garrison. 43

Unlike the antislavery reform movement, the movement to abolish capital punishment was characterized by virtually complete unanimity of thought among the participants. It was an issue which was nondivisible, and the major speakers were in total agreement in calling for the immediate and complete abolition of capital punishment. Some addressed the problem from a religious perspective, some from a perspective of philosophical humanitarianism, and still others from a purely pragmatic position. 44

After recovering from the effects of the attack in Portland, John Spear entered the mainstream of the anti-capital punishment movement. He traveled extensively through eastern Massachusetts, championing the cause wherever an audience would listen. He also met regularly with the leadership of the newly formed organization, planning meetings and launching petition drives for clemency on behalf of condemned murderers. On August 4, 1845, he addressed the monthly meeting of the society in Boston,

43 hangsman, June 11, 1845.
44 Ibid.
appearing on the program with William Lloyd Garrison, Robert Rantoul, Jr., Wendell Phillips, Ellis Gray Loring, and Henry Channing. 45

Like many of the humanitarian reformers, Spear could maintain an interest in several reforms at the same time. At one point, while attending a meeting of the Worcester, Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, he discovered that a number of friends of the abolition of capital punishment movement were in attendance and so organized an impromptu anti-capital punishment caucus which again included Garrison, as well as Samuel J. May, Jonathan N. Buffum, Henry Chapin, and Adin Ballou. 46

As the Hangman concluded its first year of publication, its editors decided to broaden its scope and change its name. Many of the supporters of the paper had criticized the use of the word "hangman" to describe a paper which was opposed to hanging. Charles Spear had chosen to call the paper the Hangman because he wished to call specific attention to the despicable nature of capital punishment. By the end of a year of publication, however, it was decided

45Ibid., August 8, 1845.

46Ibid., July 2, 1845. Buffum later became a spiritualist and supported a number of Spear's spiritualist reform endeavors. Likewise Adin Ballou, upon becoming a spiritualist, supported Spear's spiritualist healing practice, but later refused to support Spear because he believed Spear was preaching free love.
that the title should convey more than the desire of the editors to abolish capital punishment, and so the name was changed to The Prisoner's Friend.

John Spear's role with regard to the paper became that of a reporter-at-large. He visited prisons and sometimes prison wardens and reported his findings to The Prisoner's Friend. He kept a running tabulation of prisoners condemned to die, and reported on their cases and on the progress of attempts to have sentences commuted to life imprisonment. In his personal attempt to eliminate the gallows, he was always appalled at the number of ministers who defended capital punishment. It was in light of that sentiment that he circulated a petition to the Massachusetts State Legislature to require that clergymen who supported hanging act as the hangman.47

Like the more famous Dorothea Dix, Spear always felt compelled to witness the suffering he hoped to eradicate, or at least to identify with it as closely as possible. Whenever a convict was hanged, he attempted to observe the hanging, and would invariably report the incident in all of its nauseating detail. In the same manner he wrote in detail on the brutalization of prisoners. At one point he reported reading of a thirteen-year-old Negro slave boy who was placed in the Charleston, South Carolina, work house

47 Prisoner's Friend, February 11, 1846.
and "...whipped very hard, the skin flying at every blow." Spear commented that as he attempted to write his story from the account, "It was with much difficulty that I could refrain from weeping." At another time he lamented the fact that members of the male sex had been willing to carry out the hanging of a woman convicted of murder. "She is of the weaker sex," he commented, "and by her very weakness claims assistance from the stronger." Upon visiting a prison of Portland, Maine, he asked to be locked up in the "dungeon," in order to sense the agony of the prisoner in such a condition.

Not being content merely to catalog the abuses of prisoners, Spear became increasingly caught up in specific attempts to reform the Boston, Massachusetts, prison system. In June, 1846, he played a leading role in the formation of two local reform groups, the Prisoner's Friend Society, and the Boston Society in Aid of Discharged Convicts. The latter brought Spear into direct contact with Louis Dwight, the secretary and driving force within the Boston Prison Discipline Society. Dwight was chosen the vice-president

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48 Ibid., April 7, 1847.

49 Ibid., February 11, 1846.

50 Ibid., July 14, 1847. In their attempt to convey a sense of prison life, John and Charles Spear published a volume of poetry written by prisoners while in a state of confinement. See Voices From Prison... (Boston, 1847).
of the Boston Society in Aid of Discharged Convicts. Since there is no record of Dwight's active participation within the organization, however, it must be assumed either that he was merely a figurehead included to lend prestige to the operation, or that he rapidly became disenchanted with Spear's style of reform.51

There is considerable evidence that John and Charles Spear did not always see eye to eye with Dwight. In an early issue of the Hangman, in June of 1845, they lauded Dwight and the Boston Prison Discipline Society while at the same time complaining of the failure of the organization to protest the exclusion of Universalist and Unitarian ministers from Boston prisons.52 By the middle of 1847, the editors were openly chagrined by Dwight's failure to mention The Prisoner's Friend in the annual report of the Prison Discipline Society. They attributed the omission to Sectarianism.53

51Prisoner's Friend, June 10, 1846.

52Ibid., June 1, 1845.

53An examination of the Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society, Vols. 21-27 (Boston, 1846-1852) indicates that neither the Prisoner's Friend nor the general efforts of John and Charles Spear were deemed worthy of mention by Louis Dwight. The fact that Dwight was a devout Congregationalist and that the Society consisted primarily of Congregational and Baptist ministers (see McKelvey, American Prisons, pp. 9-10.) lends support to their contention that the Society practiced sectarianism.
The final parting of the ways came, however, when the Boston Prison Discipline Society split in 1847 over competing philosophies of prison discipline. Dwight was a strong advocate of the congregate system, which allowed prisoners a limited amount of contact with fellow inmates. Certain members of the Prison Discipline Society, among them Samuel Gridley Howe and Charles Sumner, were inclined to support the type of system in which convicts were placed in virtually perpetual solitary confinement. Such a system had earlier been introduced in Pennsylvania's Eastern State Penitentiary, just outside of Philadelphia. Unable to change the position of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, Howe and Sumner took their case to the editors of The Prisoner's Friend, who allowed them to use the paper's columns in their own defense. 54

The argument which Howe presented was drawn from his own experience in prison in Europe. He had been held in solitary confinement, and although he suffered periods of terrible loneliness, he had no doubt that the experience would have been much more horrible had he been compelled to live with the typical inmates of the prison. Thus, he argued that although a prison which provides each prisoner a separate cell and secludes him from other inmates if unquestionably a costly system to operate, it offered the

54 Prisoner's Friend, July 14, 1847.
best hope of reforming the prisoner. To charges that the insanity rate at Eastern State Penitentiary was abnormally high, compared to the Auburn, New York, Penitentiary, where contact between inmates was allowed. Howe answered that Pennsylvania made no provision for the insane, whereas New York did, and that the insanity rate at Eastern was high because many inmates were insane at the time of their incarceration.55

The position taken by Howe and Sumner could not fail to meet the approval of John Spear. In October, 1846, he had written that one of the most striking and objectionable characteristics of the Boston prisons was the manner in which hardened criminals were housed with the very young, with petty offenders, and with those merely arrested and waiting for trial.56 Such conditions, he argued, completely negated the possibility of reform, and in fact, often served as a training ground where minor offenders were introduced to more serious and sophisticated types of crime.


56Prisoner's Friend, October 7, 1846. Spear often pointed out that a great many of the inhabitants of Boston's prisons were young men from the country who had come to the city, committed a minor offense, and having no money to pay the small fine, were jailed.
Entering its third year of publication, in 1848, The Prisoner's Friend faced a financial crisis. In order to increase revenue and thus be better able to bear the costs of production, the Spear brothers decided to enlarge the circulation of the paper by broadening its appeal. Subsequent issues of The Prisoner's Friend presented columns devoted to the peace movement, humane treatment of animals, and the care and treatment of children.

Being a universal reformer, John M. Spear felt completely comfortable championing each of these causes as well as those with which he was more immediately concerned. Even before the paper had added its column on the treatment of animals, he had written an article describing a friend who beat his horse mercilessly in order to make him move, but to no avail. Spear, himself, came onto the scene, and was able to convince the horse to pull by gently speaking directly into its ear. His article condemned the common practice of horse-beating, concluding with a poem by William Cowper which reflected Spear's own sensitive nature:

I would not number among my list of friends
Though graced with polished manners and fine sense
(Yet wanting sensibility,) the man
who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

When a report of a major victory in the Mexican War reached Spear's desk, he could not glory in the military success, but felt compelled to write, "Opposed to all war,

57Ibid., March 11, 1846.
belonging to no political party, looking on as a calm, unprejudiced observer, when I thought of the hundreds who had been wounded, and slain, and of the thousands who had been made widows and orphans, my heart was made sad."

Spear's interest in improving the care of children was indicated not only in words, but in deeds as well. In spite of his already overly demanding schedule, he found time in the summer of 1847 to operate an excursion program for the children of Boston. With funds solicited at speaking engagements and through The Prisoner's Friend, he arranged transportation to take city children into the country on a daily basis, in the belief that the country air and the change of environment would be helpful to these children.

Late in the spring of 1848, the format of The Prisoner's Friend was changed again. The weekly newspaper was abandoned and replaced by a compact monthly journal. It was not to focus not only on criminal reform, but on philosophy, literature, science, and art. The transition of The Prisoner's Friend also marked the end of John Spear's

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58 Ibid., April 21, 1847, Spear was an opponent of war but not a total non-resistant. At a non-resistance gathering in 1841 he stated, "I am ready to engage in human butchery when God requires it by my hand, but not otherwise" ("Remarks Offered in a Non-Resistance Convention...1841," cited in Peter Brock, Pacifism in the United States, p. 590).

59 Prisoner's Friend, August 18, 1847.
association with it. Why he left the paper is not absolutely certain, but several possible reasons can be suggested.

The income from the paper simply was not enough to support both of the editors. Throughout 1847, the Spear brothers had been forced to appeal directly to readers for financial assistance. It was only logical that in the effort to cut costs one should give up his position. Furthermore, it is clear that John's responsibility for the paper had decreased throughout 1847 as he became increasingly more involved with speaking engagements and with his own independent reform activity.

Finally, the new format of the paper seemed to appeal neither to his interests not his talents. His assignment with The Prisoner's Friend had been largely reportorial. The new approach placed more emphasis on articles on the history of prisons, on poetry and fiction dealing with the subject, and on comparative studies between prison systems in the new and old worlds. John Spear's approach to reform had always had a very practical bent to it, and since he was not particularly adept at writing in a scholarly or literary vein anyway, it was a good time for him to launch forth on his own.

Between 1848 and 1851 Spear worked independently and incessantly on behalf of the imprisoned of Boston, and to a lesser extent, of the entire Northeast. His work now
consisted of a continuation of an effort begun while he was still with The Prisoner's Friend. A strong emphasis on temperance had always permeated his efforts on behalf of the prisoner. Even while still in the Universalist ministry, he had organized a Washingtonian movement at New Bedford, and his later temperance efforts have already been noted.

In conjunction with his prison reform work, Spear had commented in a lecture at Newburysport, "We are deeply sensible that intemperance is one of the principle causes of crime. Should intemperance cease, there would be but very few prisoners to need our assistance." He had long lamented the close relationship between "rum and murder," and he made a personal attempt to obtain from prisoners he assisted promises to abstain from any future consumption of alcoholic beverages. On one occasion, while in New York for a prison reform meeting, Spear was accompanied by Theodore Parker to the city prison, the Tombs. There he presented separate addresses to the men in the morning and to the women in the afternoon, and also conducted a temperance meeting at which a sizable number of prisoners signed "the pledge."

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60 Ibid., April 1, 1846.
61 Ibid., Nov. 25, 1846.
62 Hangman, April 2, 1845.
63 Prisoner's Friend, October 13, 1847.
Although Spear believed that an individual could improve himself by abstaining from intoxicants, he nevertheless held society partly responsible for the behavior of those who succumbed to drink. At one point he encountered a man who had been arrested for a petty crime and sentenced to a short prison term. Following his release the man had made a serious attempt to secure employment, but was repeatedly turned away because of his prison record. At the height of his despondency and desperation he had become intoxicated and robbed a store. The cycle was completed when he was arrested and returned to jail. In a case such as this, Spear argued, one could not reasonably criticize the failure of the man to abstain from drink without at the same time condemning the larger society for its callous attitude toward released convicts. 64

In many cases Spear personally used his influence to secure employment for released convicts. A note in The Prisoner's Friend describes a man with a wife and four children who had been imprisoned for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. He had taken "the pledge," and anyone who could provide a job for him would be asked to contact Spear. Another issue called to the attention of readers a man who had sworn off alcohol and was seeking work as an

64 Ibid., January 28, 1846.
The most distinctive features of Spear's reform efforts between 1846 and 1852 were his non-affiliated status and his emphasis upon direct contact with each of the recipients of his assistance. This is not to suggest that he became adamantly opposed to reform organizations. He remained an active member of the Massachusetts Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, serving with Samuel May, Wendell Phillips, Ellis Gray Loring, and others on that organization's standing committee. In May, 1849, acting on behalf of the committee, Spear and Wendell Phillipa signed a circular in defense of a convicted murderer, Washington Goode. But with regard to his direct efforts on behalf of prisoners, Spear became a totally independent agent. No organization financed or directed his labors. Rather, he financed his endeavors by speaking before church and civic groups and by directly contacting philanthropists in the Boston area.

For four years, Spear compiled an annual report of his activities under the title Labor For the Prisoner. In each report he described the type of intensely personal work in which he was engaged. By making almost daily visits to the

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65Prisoner's Friend, February 18, 1846, March 11, 1846.
jails and municipal courts of Boston, he encountered a wide variety of people who were in need of assistance. One such person might be a young newspaper boy arrested for selling papers without a permit. Finding that the boy had no mother and an alcoholic father, Spear would pay the fine, give the boy some decent clothes, and find a family in the country willing to care for him in return for the performance of farm chores.  

Often Spear would be approached by the destitute families of prisoners. Securing the release of the husband of the family was often simply a matter of putting up the required bond or paying a small debt. Sometimes the service Spear provided was simply that of being a man who knew the city, knew the courts, or knew how to go about locating missing persons. His own account of his efforts for the period from March 1850, until March, 1851, revealed the scope of his undertaking. He reported delivering eighty-nine discourses on prison, crime, and punishment; traveling [about seven thousand miles] to assist prisoners and to lecture; providing bail to the amount of two thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars, all of which was returned; making seventy-three visits to prisons; writing ninety-four letters for prisoners to their families; assisting three

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67 A large number of detailed case histories of the type alluded to are found in John Murray Spear, Labors for the Prisoner (Boston, 1848-1852), Nos. 1-5, 1848-1852.
hundred fifteen persons with food, clothing, lodging, counsel, employment, or by returning them to their friends. 68

Spear became totally involved in this effort, he said, because he considered it his Christian duty "to visit the prisoner." 69 Many of those arrested for crimes were either very poor or were strangers to the city, and being such, were virtually helpless. They had need of someone who could provide them access to inexpensive legal assistance, or help them gather simple evidence to have cases dismissed. Often, simply by testifying as a character witness, Spear could secure the release of first offenders. Working as he did, he soon came to be known personally to court officials and law enforcement officers, so that his good word on behalf of a person under arrest often had a vital effect upon the disposition of the case.

Even though the constant calls for his service became physically taxing, Spear adamantly refused to heed the advice of friends and admirers who urged him to organize a society for the better promotion of his work. He was convinced, he said, that "in this difficult and peculiar work, I can accomplish the greatest good in a quiet, individual

68 Labors for the Prisoner, No. 4, 1851, pp. 15-16.
69 Ibid., No. 3, 1850, p. 2.
Between 1851 and 1852 he had provided more than ten thousand dollars bail for prisoners, and all the money had been repaid. He believed that the perfect record was due to his personal relationship to the borrowers, and that they would have been more likely to neglect to repay the loan if it had come from a faceless, impersonal organization. Furthermore, Spear noted that many clergymen held little faith in charitable organizations, but nonetheless "express their interest in my labors, open their churches to me, and give substantial evidence that they wish me to continue my individual work." 71

During this period of his life, between 1848 and 1852, John Murray Spear worked at a pace which must have been both mentally and physically exhausting. But he had the satisfaction of knowing that his work was important, and he could see the results of his efforts in the many letters of appreciation from people whom he had helped. Although his efforts remained totally neglected by the Boston Prison Discipline Society, he became widely known throughout New England as a "sincere, disinterested and worthy laborer for the benefit of his fellow men." 72 Wherever he lectured on behalf of the prisoner, he received a favorable response.

70 Ibid., No. 5, 1852, p. 1.
71 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
72 Ibid., p. 9, citing (Augusta, Maine) Kennebec Journal.
and he was particularly gratified by support received from prominent citizens and fellow reformers.73

One who took particular interest in Spear's work was the Reverend F. D. Huntington, editor of the Unitarian Journal, Christian Register. Huntington praised Spear's meekness and simplicity as well as his dedication to his work. He commented, too, that far from interfering with the execution of the law, as some seemed to believe was the case, Spear worked in close conjunction with "judged, advocated, and officers of the courts," and that all of these considered his work meritorious.74

Another account of his work described Spear as "an out and out reformer,...not afraid to assail any form of evil, however large its bulk or hideous its horns...A sensible speaker but not an attractive one; a calm reasoner, but not an eloquent one,...a plain, practical, every-day sort of man, whose look and manner convinces one of his sincerity."75

Commenting in particular upon Spear's "tall, lean, boney

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73 Among those from whom—Spear received letters of commendation were O. B. Frothingham, Edward Everett, Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, Horace Mann, and Frederick Robinson (warden of the Massachusetts State Prison). See Labors for the Prisoner, No. 3, 1850, p. 12-14.

74 P. D. Huntington, "In Prison and Ye Visited Me," Christian Register, April, 1850.

75 George W. Bungay, Crayon Sketches and Off-hand Takings of Distinguished American Statesmen (Boston, 1852) p. 110.
frame," and his "black wig...sallow skin, and...mouthful of large teeth," this same account noted that "He wears a 'can-I-help-you' sort of look and speaks so gently and moderately [that] the listener, if ever so excited before, becomes calm and feels at home, as in the presence of a friend and brother."  

While working directly with persons in need of his services, Spear placed the greatest emphasis upon self-reform. He could find employment for released prisoners, but it was their responsibility to remain on the job. He was willing to post bail for individuals arrested for drunkenness and disorderly conduct, but he strongly encouraged them to pledge never to use intoxicants again.

But even while he was attempting to impress upon the recipients of his help the need for personal reform, he became increasingly aware that these masses of poor and unfortunate people were also the victims of a hostile environment. As the streams of illiterate, neglected, almost hopeless individuals passed through the door of his office in the heart of Boston, Spear came increasingly to believe that effective personal reform must be accompanied by a transformation of the environment which shaped the individual. He had once said, "Properly educate the people and there will be no crime, consequently no prisons, no

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76 Ibid.
courts, no scaffolds. After 1852, he devoted his life not merely to the transformation of education, but to a restructuring of the whole of society.

— Prisoner's Friend, April 21, 1847.
CHAPTER III
CONVERSION TO SPIRITUALISM

Until 1851, the course of John Murray Spear's life offered little to distinguish him from a great many other humanitarian reformers of the day. During that year, however, he became closely associated with the spiritualist movement. Life a great many reform-minded New Englanders, he had observed with interest the work of Andrew Jackson Davis. Soon after the publication of Davis's Nature's Divine Revelations, in September, 1847, Spear commented in The Prisoner's Friend that "the 'Revelations'...have increased my faith in man." In November of the same year the editors told their readers, "We have read this wonderful book with deepest interest, and are persuaded that it contains much that is important for man to know..."

A more direct influence upon Spear came from the Spirit Messenger. This journal began publication in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1850 and was edited by R. P. Ambler and Apollos Munn, Universalist ministers whom Spear knew. It was a sober, scholarly publication which expounded the philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis as interpreted by its

1Prisoner's Friend, Sept. 1 and Nov. 17, 1847.

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editors. Also included were occasional contributions from S. B. Brittan and W. M. Fernald, who had earlier edited the *Univercoelum.* Though its main concern was spiritualism, the *Spirit Messenger* was broad in its scope. Its editors printed the transcendentalist Sampson Reed's brilliant essay, "Genius: Its Origin and Its Objects," as well as an essay by Theodore Parker, "Philosophy of Inspiration." Extracts from a speech by the phrenomagnetist J. R. Buchanan appeared in its pages, as did an article by Adin Ballou on the nature, philosophy, and goals of the Hopedale Community.

In July, 1851, Spear wrote a letter to Ambler which later appeared in the *Spirit Messenger.* "I am a constant reader of the *Spirit Messenger,"* he stated, "and derive much instruction and comfort from its perusal." The communication went on to describe what appears to have been Spear's first direct encounter with spiritualist phenomena. He had recently visited Merideth Bridge, New Hampshire, in conjunction with his prison reform work, and had met "a most excellent medium." The medium, he reported, had received for him a message from his infant son, Henry C.

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3 *Ibid.,* I, 36, April 12, 1851, and II, Nos. 6, 8, 9, and 16, Sept. 13 and 27, Oct. 4, and Dec. 6, 1851.
Wright Spear, who died in 1844 when just two months old. The message stated, "Beautiful is the heavenly sphere in which I move....Dear Father, I am with you, to comfort you and soothe your weary mind." A second communication was also relayed, this from Spear's deceased friend and former editor of the abolitionist Herald of Freedom, Nathaniel P. Rogers, who told him, "Friend, continue on in the work of reform. I am with you." These messages, Spear wrote to Ambler, "are to my soul a source of inexpressible comfort. As I go from town to town,...laboring for the destitute prisoner, they comfort, soothe, and strengthen me."

Spear was inclined to give serious consideration to spiritualist claims for another reason; he had felt for some time that a supernatural power of some sort had acted

4The fact that Spear named the child as he did is not without significance. Wright was apparently closely acquainted with Spear and was obviously admired by Spear. An uncompromising abolitionist, total non-resistant, and outspoken champion of women's rights, Wright accepted the claims of spiritualism in the 1850's and participated with Spear in several spiritualist conferences. See Filler, Crusade Against Slavery, 120-121; Merle Curti, "Non-Resistance in New England," New England Quarterly, II, no. 1 (Jan. 1929), pp. 43-57. It is quite possible that Spear sought out the medium with the specific purpose of receiving some solace with regard to his infant son. During 1844, when the child was born and died, Spear was spending long periods of time on the lecture circuit. One can speculate that he probably saw very little of the baby and may have blamed himself for the child's death.


6Ibid.
upon him personally. "I know," he declared, "a Hand unseen has guided me;—may it not guide others? I have often communed with higher intelligences;—why may not others do the same?" In part, what he was describing from his own experience was a sensation he had felt on numerous occasions which had directed him to go to a specific part of a city, or to meet with certain groups of people. Inevitably, he found that if he followed such inclinations there was need of his assistance.\(^7\)

The actual mediumship of Spear—a medium being defined as one who is able to receive spirit communications or perform normally impossible acts through their aid—is generally dated from March 31, 1852.\(^8\) Although he reported that on numerous prior occasions his hand had been involuntarily moved to record certain unintelligible drawings, and his mind had been "deeply impressed by some unseen power, entirely foreign to his own consciousness,"\(^9\) never before had he received a precise directive from a spirit source. On that day, however, he was moved to record a message purported to have come from Oliver Dennett, the deceased friend

\(^7\)Brown, "Biographical Sketch," p. 24; Allan Putnam, Introduction to John Murray Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing (Boston, 1873), p. viii.

\(^8\)S. Crosby Hewitt, Messages from the Superior State (Boston, 1853), p. 27.

\(^9\)Ibid.
who had nursed him back to health after his misfortune in Portland, Maine. 10

The message ordered Spear to go to Abington, twenty miles south of Boston, on the next evening. There he was to meet a man named David Vining, who would be expecting him. Spear's initial reluctance to go was followed by a second and third communication assuring him that he need not fear, that the spirit of Oliver Dannett would advise him along the way. Accordingly, he set out for Abington, only to find that David Vining did not live there, but in nearby Weymouth. Inquiring of his communicant regarding this miscalculation, Spear received a reply which stated that "We do not in the spirit world regard town and other boundaries."

The next day he journeyed on to Weymouth, and there found David Vining, who was extremely ill with neuralgia, reportedly having been unable to sleep for ten days. As soon as he was introduced to Vining, Spear felt compelled to lay his hands upon the sick man's head, whereupon the pain began to disappear. Vining subsequently declared himself healed, and went about his normal activity. About fifty days later, however, following exposure which brought

10 Ibid., pp. 28-31; Brown, "Biographical Sketch," pp. 24-26; Adin Ballou, An Exposition of Views Respecting the Principles, Facts, Causes, and Peculiarities Involved in Spirit Manifestations: Together with Interesting Phenomenal Statements and Communications (Boston, 1852), pp. 203-208. While these accounts vary in some of the minor details, the key facts of the case are the same.
on a severe cold, he again contracted neuralgia. For the second time Spear was ordered by spirit direction to Vining's side, but "finding him [Vining] surrounded by unrelenting doubters of this new healing power, was not suffered to approach him." To those most closely linked with the modern spirit­ualist movement, the account of Spear's newly discovered mediumistic power was received with considerable enthusiasm, particularly since the abilities he exhibited—writing, speaking, healing,—were considered to be among the highest order of spirit manifestations. At the bottom of the scale was the transmitting sounds, such as spirit "rappings." Following this came tipping or moving power, which might be exhibited in the lifting of tables. The ability to receive direct spiritual dictates and to practice a beneficent healing power was indicative of a higher plane of mediumistic ability. Thus, within the world of modern American spiritualism, practitioners of Spear's type were more highly respected than were those like the Fox sisters, whose

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11Hewitt, Messages from the Superior State, pp. 35-36. This account seems to suggest that when Spear arrived at Vining's residence for a second time the spirits directed him to leave because of the unfavorable climate created by the presence of nonbelievers. Ballou's Exposition, published a year prior to Hewitt's account, states clearly that Spear was physically prevented from seeing Vining, not by the spirits, but by the nonbelievers in his presence.
efforts were more elementary and in many cases linked with monetary pursuits.12

One of those who expressed an interest in the mediumship of Spear was Adin Ballou, like Spear, a Universalist minister. Ballou had founded the Hopedale Community in 1840 in an attempt to apply the principles of Christ to a socialist communal experiment. It was manifestations of spirit communication at Hopedale that drew Ballou's attention to the subject, and in 1852 he produced a study entitled An Exposition of Views Respecting the Principles, Facts, Causes, and Peculiarities Involved in Spirit Manifestations. In a chapter devoted specifically to the mediumship of Spear, Ballou cited a number of examples which he believed were clearly indicative of Spear's talents as a healing medium.

Recorded in Ballou's account, for example, was a case in which Spear was allegedly informed by his daughter Saphronia, also a medium, that spirits were directing him to the side of a woman well known to the Spear family. Spear expressed surprise, since he had believed the woman to be in good health. Upon reaching her, however, he found her suffering "from a very severe pain in the top of her head." As in the David Vining incident, Spear placed his

12Ibid., pp. 26-27. This gradation of mediumistic talents is further proof that for spiritualists (of New England, at least), spiritualism was a philosophy of beneficent reform and human improvement and not merely a clever way of moving tables.
hand upon her head, at which point the pain proceeded to her neck, then to her feet, and finally disappeared altogether. Ballou noted that while the woman was grateful, she refused to accept the validity of spiritual healing, and refused to have her name published. In much the same way, Ballou reported, Spear had successfully healed a head ailment which afflicted the wife of the Reverend John Pierpont.  

In a rather strange case, a woman in Georgetown, Massachusetts, was struck by lightning, and though partially recovered from the shock, was after a few days still having serious difficulty breathing. Spear reported a strong compulsion to attend the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery convention in Georgetown, and upon arriving there with two friends who were also mediums, one received a message purportedly saying "I want J. M. Spear to call on that poor woman who has been struck by lightning." The message was signed "Franklin."  

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13Ballou, An Exposition of Views, pp. 208-209. Pierpont was a Unitarian minister who, like Spear, was active in abolitionism, the temperance movement, and various other reforms. The two worked together in the Massachusetts Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment (see Hangman, I, 4, [Jan. 22, 1845] and I [n.s.], 11, [June 11, 1845] and Prisoner's Friend, I [n.s.], 8, [May, 1849]).

14Despite the fact that all the accounts of this incident as related by believing spiritualists were absolutely serious and sincere, there nonetheless is something rather humorous about "Franklin" ordering Spear to tend to a lady stricken by lightning. Hewitt (Messages from the Superior State, p. 38) said merely that "Franklin had not forgotten the kite and string and key, by which he brought the subtle fluid down from heaven of yore; and probably knows as much about the agent not, as any ultra mundane spirit."
All three of the mediums claimed no prior knowledge of any victim of lightning, not being residents of Georgetown. Furthermore, all three were fatigued from traveling, and even though acquaintances verified the lightning incident, none was inclined to pursue the matter at that moment. As "Franklin" insisted, however, Spear felt a sense of duty, and so began the one and a half mile walk to the home of the victim. At first he felt completely exhausted. As he walked, however, he regained his energy.

Finding the woman and announcing his belief that he might help her, Spear "...seated himself near her, and instantly both their hands were raised so as to present the palms parallel to each other, two or three inches asunder." The consequence of this act was that the chest pain departed from the woman and entered Spear's body, where it remained for over an hour.  

Although the use of his healing power became almost commonplace—a friend described it as "a somewhat everyday affair,"—a single additional example should be sufficient to convey the seriousness with which Spear pursued this new "calling," and also the attitude of those who were the beneficiaries of his efforts. S.C. Hewitt, a close friend and supporter of Spear's received the following letter:

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Dear Sir:
On the last of May, or first of June, 1852, after having exhausted my system, my vocal organs in particular, by nearly six months' daily public evening lecturing, often in heated rooms, and by consequent exposure to the night air, I took a severe cold, which settled on my lungs. The bronchial tubes became very much inflamed, which caused almost unremitting expectoration, night and day. In this state I remained nearly two weeks, when I found my strength very much reduced, and rapidly failing. My friends began to think that my case was becoming rather critical; and 'the doctor' seemed willing to advise any course, except to try the effect of his own drugs. I concluded, however, to go to Northampton, to a Water Cure Establishment, and accordingly, provided myself with blankets, sheets, napkins, etc., and started. Being obliged to stop in Boston over night, I called on my friend, John M. Spear; and while we were talking together in his study, in the evening, his hand was moved by some invisible power, independent, apparently, of his own will, and taking the pen, wrote that 'the spirits could help me.' This communication came unsolicited, and so far as I was concerned, unthought of. I am sure I felt, at the time a great disinclination to be subjected to the delay necessary to test the power of the 'spirits;' but finally, at the solicitation of brother Spear, consented to stop one day, and see what it might bring forth. I did so, and several times during the day, brother Spear's hands were used in performing various manipulations upon my body. Passes were made in the region of the left lobe of my lungs, the part most affected, and the back of my right hand and fingers most painfully rubbed and twisted. Of course I could not understand the rationale of these strange operations. But, I found myself much relieved at the end of the first day; and, as a prudent man, was content to stay as long as I improved,-Spiritopathy, to say the least, being far less expensive than Hydropathy. These, and similar operations, were repeated for seven days, when I found myself quite rid of my lung difficulty. The eighth day the manipulations were discontinued, and I returned to my home.

A.J. Grover
East Abington, August 4, 1852

During this same period in which his capacity for healing was realized, Spear also engaged in the production of what were termed "spirit drawings." Sometimes the nature of the drawings was clear. One, for example, consisted of a diagram of a human body upon which mottoes were inscribed at appropriate places. On the palm of the hand Spear wrote, "Open thine hand to the poor;" on the shoulder, "bear ye one another's burdens." The explanation given for the diagram was that it was a form of assistance given to Spear from the spirit world with the intent of keeping him from becoming discouraged in his work. On some occasions, the drawings seemed beyond the comprehension of mortals, even Spear himself. In such cases, the only explanation which could be given was that the spirits were attempting to portray the power of a spirit after it leaves the human form.\(^{17}\)

Soon after the beginning of his spiritual experience, Spear developed a sensitivity which allowed him to receive various expressions regarding the human condition from the spirits of deceased individuals. In one early instance he appeared at the regular quarterly conference held at Adin Ballou's Hopedale Community, and unexpectedly took the podium and spoke for twenty-five minutes on the theme, "Love one another." During the discourse Spear's face was reported to have been "of an ashy paleness." For

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 43.
part of the time his eyes remained closed, but when they
were open appeared unusually brilliant and piercing. Those
who knew him personally remarked that the power and eloquence
of the speech surpassed anything characteristic of Spear in
his normal state. Afterward Spear told the group that he
had earlier received the outline of the speech from the
spirit of A. A. Ballou. 

Such were the beginnings of John Murray Spear's en-
counters with the spirit world. A number of questions can
be raised regarding the authenticity of his experiences.
Were they intentionally fraudulent? Was Spear demented?
Were his "healings" of the type which can be explained as
the result of mesmerism or as the use of hypnotic suggestion
to "cure" purely phychosomatic illnesses? Only the first
question can be answered with any degree of certainty.

From all the available evidence, it appears that Spear
was absolutely sincere. For over thirty years of his life
he devoted himself completely to the spread of the philos-
ophy of spiritualism, with all its ramifications. Monetary
ambition certainly did not motivate him. Throughout most
of that thirty-year period, he lived at the brink of
poverty, seldom in possession of funds enough to sustain

18 Ibid., pp. 45-46. The "A. A. Ballou" referred to was
probably Adin Augustus, the 19-year-old son of Adin Ballou
who had died unexpectedly several months earlier. Adin
Ballou had planned for his son, who was a school teacher, to
organize the "Hopedale Educational Home." After his death
the plan was abandoned (Ballou, History of the Hopedale Com-
munity, 237).
himself or his family for more than a few days at a time. Personal fame was not his goal either. If such were the case, he most certainly would not have followed for so long a period of time a course which never gained more than minimal support, but did bring him widespread scorn and derision.

The second question, which pertains to Spear's mental condition is unanswerable for two reasons. First, the study of psychology was largely nonexistent in the mid-nineteenth century, so that there was no adequate examination of Spear's mental condition during his lifetime. Secondly, the whole realm of extrasensory perception is, even today, so mystifying that it is still extremely difficult to ascertain the legitimacy of phenomena which fell into this category. Spear suggested that he himself, on certain occasions, questioned his sanity, and he knew many of his acquaintances were quite sure that he was insane.

Nevertheless, he did not abandon his spiritualist work, in part, perhaps, because he felt that his behavior was beyond his control. Allan Putnam, a close friend of Spear's and like Spear a believer in spiritualism, emphasized the unconscious nature of Spear's mediumistic endeavors. "He

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19 One of the frequent criticisms levied against Spear was that he did not concern himself enough with the task of providing for the financial needs of himself and his family. See Brown, "Biographical Sketch," pp. 33-34.

20 Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, pp. 16-17.
has no knowledge of, and no control over, any work or act of his lips or body when in a trance," Putnam noted, and he speculated that perhaps on some occasions Spear was compelled to behave in ways which brought public scorn because "...the spirits wished to make him more pliable." In this sense Putnam likened Spear to certain characters of the Old Testament. Saul, for example, was compelled to lie naked in public, and Ezekiel was made to perform a series of unorthodox acts, all part of a divine plan.21

With regard to Spear's healing practice, it may be assumed that some of the persons he healed, or, as was often the case, partially healed, suffered from infirmities which were imagined rather than real. At certain points, too, more information from impartial sources seems necessary in order to draw a reasonable conclusion regarding his accomplishments. An item in the Spiritual Telegraph, for example, claimed that Spear, through spirit assistance, had effected the "remarkable cure of a tumor, thought by surgeons to be dangerous and probably incurable." The names of the patient and the surgeons were not reported, nor were the details of the tumor removal, except to say that "the Spirits only gave it one examination and operation,...and, without applying

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21Putnam, Introduction to Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, p. vi. Spear himself said, "I was made to do many things that I did not comprehend and some that to me seemed quite foolish and ridiculous (Twenty Years, p. 17).
any other remedies, [the patient] was entirely rid of the
difficulty within the space of a few hours."\(^{22}\)

Some of the techniques Spear employed in his spiritual
healing practice closely resemble those associated with mes­
merism. Particularly in the case reported by A. J. Grover,
Spear practiced the laying on of hands and made "passes"
over the afflicted areas in the same manner as was the cus­
tom of Anton Mesmer.\(^{23}\) But Mesmer considered his technique
to be purely physical in nature, the act of a human organism
transmitting to another a universal fluid somewhat similar
to electricity. The universal fluid, Mesmer theorized, had
the magnetic qualities of attraction and repulsion, and when
he "magnetized" a patient, he believed that the fluid was
magnetically transferred from his body to that of the
patient. The patient's nervous system responded by employ­
ing the transfusion of magnetic force to overcome the infir­
mity within the organism.\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) _Telegraph Papers_ (a compilation of the most important
material from the _Spiritual Telegraph_ ) I, 1853 (May-Aug.),
p. 54. There is a clear distinction between the type of
healing practice in which the afflicted person approaches
the healer in anticipation of being healed, and the practice
of Spear. It would seem much easier to term the healing
"psychological" when the afflicted person seeks out the
healer than when the situation was reversed as was often the
case with Spear.

\(^{23}\) For a detailed account of Mesmer's practice see
_Walmsley, Anton Mesmer._

\(^{24}\) _Walmsley, Mesmer_, pp. 100, 103-104.
Having no medical training, Spear assumed that his talent for healing stemmed from some type of strength derived from spirit sources. The unique characteristics of his practice could be explained neither in terms of generally accepted scientific law nor as evidence of mesmerism. The involuntary nature of his treatments and the telepathic manner in which he felt compelled to search out afflicted persons unknown to him seemed explicable only as a manifestation of the power and beneficent involvement of spirit sources in lessening human suffering.

S. Crosby Hewitt, the Universalist minister who edited a spiritualist journal, The New Era, from 1852-1855, attempted to clarify the differences between Spear's practice and mesmerism. Hewitt observed that mesmerism attributed the power of the aura, or universal fluid, to the mind of the operator. But the human mind (or soul), as Hewitt understood it, was not an independent force, but part of a superior intelligence. The "primary Author" of all intelligence was God, and from God intelligence descended, first to more highly developed souls in the spirit state, and from there to minds on a lower plane which were still associated with mortal bodies. In ordinary mesmerism the power of one intellect acted upon another, and the aura, or universal fluid, was the catalytic agent. Spear's practice, Hewitt claimed, was not that of the mesmerist actively seeking to accomplish a goal which he himself defines. Rather, Spear's
behavior was characterized by passivity. He may have em-
ployed some of the techniques of mesmerism, but the source
of his power, as the telepathic aspect of his healing
proved, derived from a higher plane of intelligence.25

Spiritualists considered developments such as Spear's
healing practice neither mystical nor miraculous, but rather
evidence that man, in accord with the natural laws of pro-
gress, was achieving a higher "plane of unfolding" from
which he could "manifest powers transcending all those ever
embodied in [the] human external mechanism."26 The process
by which a highly developed human mind was made receptive
to the even higher order of spirit intellect made it natur-
al to employ for the purpose of healing "an eye [spirit
intelligence] that looks through the human organism, see
the difficulty, and...where and how to employ the remedy,"27

Like a great many Americans, spiritualists were caught
up in the euphoria that accompanied scientific and techno-
logical achievement. According to Joel Tiffiny, a Cleveland
attorney and spiritualist editor and lecturer:

It is a truth which cannot be denied, that there
has been more pure intellectual exercise during
the last century, and consequently more mental

27 New England Spiritualists Association: Constitution
... etc. (Boston, 1854), p. 11.
development, than during all preceding time, in the history of our earth; more progress had been made in the arts and sciences, more truths have been revealed to the scientific world, and man, in the power and majesty of mind, has approached the great infinite cause. 28

The scientific revolution had developed the human mind to the point at which man was capable of employing the higher powers which emanated from the "infinite cause" for the betterment of humanity. 29

Assuming that Spear was conscientious in his spiritual beliefs, and acknowledging that the general thrust of his spiritualist activity was toward the betterment of mankind, one cannot help but note a profound difference between his behavior and that of numerous mediums whose activities primarily involved titillating the public thirst for entertainment by employing their powers to tip tables and play musical instruments. As Podmore pointed out, the number of outright imposters associated with the spiritualist movement in the 1840s and 1850s may have been sizable, and a few, most notably the Fox sisters, were repeatedly exposed. Most of the professional table-tippers, however, operated in conditions of semi-darkness so that legitimate investigation of their skills was impossible. 30 In any case, Spear clearly

28 Joel Tiffiny, Lectures on Spiritualism (Cleveland, 1851), pp. 30-31.
29 Ibid.
30 Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, I, pp. 284-285. Strongly biased critics of the movement claimed to (cont'd)
belongs to the category of those practitioners of the faith who saw spiritualism as a means of improving the human condition.

All of the factors which contributed to the growth of spiritualism as an expression of American reform sentiment were reflected in the life of John Spear. Although there is no record of his consciously practicing mesmerism, the type of healing in which he engaged, as suggested above, bore certain similarities to the phenomena generally associated with mesmerism. As a Universalist minister he had been caught up in theological disputes over the nature of man and the conditions of the after-life. But in Spear's case, the most clearly discernable driving force was his unswerving devotion to reform.

In his early background, in his pursuit of a variety of reform movements, and in his adherence to the concept of human progress culminating in perfection, Spear followed a path strikingly similar to that taken by a number of prominent perfectionist reformers. A profile of certain key perfectionist reformers, John L. Thomas has suggested, (cont'd) have no difficulty whatever in exposing the fraud within it. See for example [A Searcher After Truth], The Rappers' Or, The Mysteries, Fallacies, and Absurdities of Spirit-Rapping, Table-Tipping, and Entrancement (New York, 1854).

31 See Chapter II, pp. 2-3
reveals a common background of humanitarian emphasis based on a vaguely defined sense of perfectibility. At some point in the lives of most, this notion of universal improvement was dramatically challenged by a direct confrontation with widespread human deprivation and suffering. In the case of Dorothea Dix, for example, the conflict resulted from her discovery of the horrifying conditions in the penal institutions of Massachusetts. The revelation of the breadth of human suffering struck a heavy blow against the ideal of self-improvement through piece-meal reform.

If man was basically good, rather than sinful, how could one account for the overwhelming evidence of man's inhumanity toward his fellow man? The answer lay in the nature of societal institutions. The product which emerged out of this realization was the reformer who came to consider human perfection attainable only through the perfection of social institutions. Reformatories for the treatment of the insane as they then functioned, not only did not heal the mentally ill, but actually heightened the illness. Obviously, then, if one wished to attack the problem of insanity it would not be sufficient to encourage the masses to preserve their mental equilibrium by adhering to a godly life. The focus of such reform must be the attitude of

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society toward the insane.\textsuperscript{33}

Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott's philosophy of education was based upon the assumption that the existing social order had a negative effect upon human behavior. At his Temple School in Boston, Alcott, along with Elizabeth Peabody, sought to help children discover their own divine nature by cultivating "imagination, judgment,...reflection and reason."\textsuperscript{34} If properly educated, subsequent generations could be expected to create new and desirable institutions, rather than succumbing to the influence of those already in existence.

The desire to escape the corrupting influence of existing social institutions led a number of perfectionists to experiment with socialistic forms of communal living. Alcott's Fruitlands, Adin Ballou's Hopedale, and, of course, Brook Farm, were all established with the dual purpose of offering alternative life styles while at the same time

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33}Ibid., Helen E. Marshall, Dorothea Dix: Forgotten Samaritan (New York, 1967 [1937]), p. 60 ff. The report of Dix's investigation of Massachusetts correctional institutions is contained in Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts (Old South Leaflets, VI, No. 148), (Boston, 1843).
\item \textsuperscript{34}Amos Bronson Alcott, Essays on Education, 1830-62... etc. (facsimile reproduction with an introduction by Walter Harding), (Gainsville, Fla., Scholars' Facsimile and Reprints, 1960), p. 24. See also Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principle of Spiritual Culture (Boston, 1835), and Dorothy McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher (New York, 1940).
\end{itemize}
providing a proving ground where more nearly perfect institutions could be developed.\textsuperscript{35} In time, John Spear began such a community, but his differed from all but a few others in that it used the spiritualist philosophy as the basis for its quest for the perfection of humanity.\textsuperscript{36}

Like other perfectionists, Spear's entire adult life was devoted to various reform activities. His belief that individual reform without social reform is doomed to failure developed while he was involved in his labors on behalf of the poor and indigent of Boston. While posting bail for hundreds of debtors and petty offenders, criminals in the eyes of the law, Spear became increasingly aware that the poverty which afflicted so many in Boston was not an indication of any particular lack of industry on their part, nor did it result from any extraordinary lack of morality.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{36}The only other community known to have been constructed along lines suggested by spirit advisors was the Mountain Cove Community (in the state of Virginia) which was organized by Thomas Lake Harris and James L. Scott in 1851 and survived until 1853 (see Noyes, History of American Socialisms, pp. 568-576).

\textsuperscript{37}See Labors for the Prisoner, Nos. 1-4, passim.
As was the case with Dorothea Dix, Spear preferred to work alone, shunning organizations and agencies, specifically the Boston Prison Discipline Society. Working single-handedly, sensing that the root cause of poverty lay not with individuals but with social and governmental institutions, and being told repeatedly that his healing practice represented a higher order of spirit intelligence working through him, it is hardly surprising that Spear came in time to envision himself the vehicle for the establishment of a new world order.38

For Spear to advance from championing the cause of the poor and indigent to an attempt to construct a society in which there would be no poor and indigent was very much in accord with the pattern of mid-nineteenth century perfectionism. Spear deviated from the usual path, however, in that for him, spiritualism came to represent not only a confirmation of the perfectibility of society, but a direct means of achieving that perfection.

Spiritualism, in its proof of the existence of life after earthly death, was an affirmation of the worth of each individual human being. For Spear, knowing that there

38 Here again Spear's behavior follows the pattern of numerous romantic perfectionists as described by Thomas. He, like they, attempted to construct a perfect social order in a communal experiment, but his vision was greater than that of most, precisely because he believed that benevolent forces in the spirit world would aid in the implementation of a plan for the regeneration of the entire world.
were spirits in another world who had a direct concern for the problems of this world was a source of constant inspiration. In the early 1850s, he and numerous other advocates of the spiritualist philosophy came to view the spiritual world not primarily as a supplier of energy for the tipping of tables, but as a tremendous reservoir through which wisdom emanating from the highly developed minds of antiquity might be employed for the purpose of improving the human condition.

The possibility of receiving counsel concerning contemporary problems from the spiritually unfolded minds of sages of the past will undoubtedly seem incredible from the historical perspective of the twentieth century, but to minds conditioned by transcendentalist mysticism or the perfectionist impulse, it became an extraordinary expression of the human potential for perfection. Whether or not one chooses to believe that great thinkers in some other world stand waiting to offer worldlings their judicious advice is not particularly pertinent to a discussion of mid-nineteenth century spiritualism. The importance of spiritualism lies in the effect it had upon those who chose to believe in it, and the reasons why its supporters chose to endorse its claims.

By 1852, John Murray Spear had become thoroughly

engrossed in the philosophy and practice of spiritualism and had advanced to a writing mediumship; that is, he had begun to be used as a channel through which departed spirits could render to worldly beings advice reflecting their higher plane of intelligence. His two earliest communications of this type were Twelve Discourses on Government, purported to have been given through the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, and Messages from the Superior State, a series of messages from the spiritual pen of John Murray which were incorporated into a book bearing that title by Spear's close associate, S. C. Hewitt.

Spear was not the first of the writing mediums. Andrew Jackson Davis had relied upon the spirit of Swedenborg for much of Nature's Divine Revelations. Charles Hammond, a Rochester, New York, Universalist minister who later worked closely with Spear, published The Pilgrimage of Thomas Paine and Others to the Seventh Circle in 1852. Hammond's book, which described in detail Paine's development as a spirit, though 250 pages long, was written in a little more than one month. Hammond insisted that the work, and another published late in 1853, Light from the Spirit World, were not the result of a self-induced trance nor of his will to

produce such material. His hand, he claimed, moved by an invisible influence and he frequently did not even know what word he was writing until it was completed.\(^4\)

In the same manner, Spear maintained steadfastly that he was unconscious when he received spirit communications, and that frequently he was not even in agreement with the content of the messages. In the case of the *Twelve Discourses*, for example, Spear claimed to know virtually nothing of the thought of Thomas Jefferson, indicating, it would appear, that he could not have plagiarized Jefferson's writings. Whether anyone familiar with Jefferson's writings would see any cause to charge Spear with plagiarism is doubtful, since in their content, the *Twelve Discourses* do not particularly resemble the political ideology of Jefferson, and in style bear no resemblance whatever to the eloquence of Jefferson. They do, however, resemble closely a number of pieces written at various times by Spear.

And yet there can be no doubt that Spear was utterly sincere in his belief that the source of the *Twelve Discourses* was none other than the spirit of Jefferson. Risking the obvious perils involved in psychoanalyzing the

\(^4\)Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, I, 269; *Spiritual Telegraph*, I, 13 (July 31, 1852); *Spiritual Age*, II, 32 (July 7, 1859). Full citations for Hammond's works are The Pilgrimage of Thomas Paine and Others to the Seventh Circle (Rochester, N. Y., 1852) and Light From the Spirit World (Rochester, 1852).
deceased, it nonetheless seems plausible to conclude that Spear's unconscious writing condition consisted of a self-induced trance which allowed him to offer his own critique of society without consciously assuming the responsibility for his radical point of view.

The *Twelve Discourses* is indicative of the metamorphosis which Spear's own thinking was undergoing at the time he wrote it. In keeping with his own traditional reform thought, the paper begins with a ringing denunciation of the South for its attempt to characterize Jefferson as a defender of slavery and describes the country as a whole as a "nation of thieves" who continue to steal the human rights of the Negro.\(^{42}\) "You are endeavoring to extend your territory, that you may extend and perpetuate the curses of bondage...," Spear credited Jefferson's spirit with saying. In considering the economic aspects of slavery, the writer contended, "You seek abroad avenues of trade, and yet there are millions at your doors, who, if they were free, would be purchasers of things useful."\(^{43}\)

But the attack was not confined to slavery alone. The larger issue was the nation's false sense of values, specifically its obsession with materialism. "You value men for what they possess, rather than for what they are...," Spear

\(^{42}\)Spear, *Twelve Discourses*, p. 15.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., pp. 20-21.
recorded; "You tread the poor beneath your feet and then lift up your hands because of poverty."\(^{44}\)

There was a suggestion, too, that the source of the nation's ills lay in large part in the corruption of its institutions. "Your politicians shelter themselves under the wings of the vile Priests; and when they [the politicians] have perpetuated their vilest crime, the Priests come in and justify the base proceedings."\(^{45}\)

Criticism of the established church was generally characteristic of American spiritualism. A. J. Davis considered the church an anachronism, while Warren Chase, the Wisconsin Fourierist, wished to recycle the paper from dusty Bibles into clean sheets for mediums to "write communications from spirits on to the living." Chase happily proclaimed that "the pathway of progressivism is now open to all who seek the kingdom of heaven, and no sectarian bigot can bar it more against the sons and daughters of men."\(^{46}\) In part the opposition was simply to all forms of sectarianism, an indication of the come-outer emphasis within spiritualism. Universalist Uriah Clark wrote: "We recognize the obligations of religion, or our relations to God and man, but we

\(^{44}\)Ibid., p. 20.

\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 23.

ignore all priestly authorities who seek to dictate and lord it over the conscience. 47

For Spear, skepticism in regard to the church-state relationship appears to have been an outgrowth of his own experience with both institutions. A typical Garrisonian, Spear mistrusted a government whose basis was a constitution which condoned slavery. Yet the Universalist church was never willing to condemn the politicians responsible for the continuance of slavery, and was reluctant even to speak out against slavery as an institution. In his prison reform work, Spear found that the most articulate defenders of capital punishment were ministers, who could masterfully employ the Bible in defense of what seemed to Spear wanton murder by bodies of self-serving lawmakers. Spear considered the Auburn congregate system of penal housing inhumane and immoral, and yet the most outspoken advocate of that system was Louis Dwight, a Congregational minister. Spear was disturbed, too, by the fact that as a spokesman for prison reform he was sometimes denied the right to speak in churches which opened their doors only to strictly religious functions. 48

47 Clark, Plain Guide to Spiritualism, p. 118.

48 Liberator, April 30, 1841 and June 14, 1844: Prisoner's Friend, Feb. 11, and Oct. 7, 1846, and July 28, 1847. For an example of the pro-capital punishment ministers with whom the Spears debated see George B. (cont'd)
Taken as a barometer of Spear's evolving political and social philosophy, the condemnation of church and state confirms his conversion from an emphasis on individual reform to an insistence upon societal reform. The transition becomes even more obvious in subsequent of the Twelve Discourses. In these, the major thrust lay in a call for an armed revolution to free the slave and to destroy the existing form of government. The hope for emancipation rested with the possibility that "some of the people can be brought out from under the influence of these two classes" (politicians and priests).\textsuperscript{49} In all likelihood the emancipators would come from the middle class, since this class was not completely tied to the moneyed class. Slaves themselves were considered too weak and too downtrodden by the system to mount a rebellion against it.\textsuperscript{50}

In the coming revolution, then, an aroused representation from the broad middle class, motivated by a strong sense of morality, would fight on behalf of the weak. The result was to be "an uplifting of the people to a higher and nobler plane of action,"\textsuperscript{51} there being "no struggles so glorious, so sublime, as the struggle of the free for


\textsuperscript{49}Twelve Discourses, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., pp. 36-37.
As is so often the case with utopian theory, the new order which was to result from the revolution was sketched only in vague generalities. The guiding principles were to be "Truth, Love, and Wisdom." In order to insure against exchanging one form of oppression for another, it was suggested that there must be a conscious attempt to instill in the masses "a deep love of liberty and right—a desire to improve the condition of mankind, to make them better, wiser, and happier." In the declaration of principles upon which the new order was to be based there was a strong emphasis upon the brotherhood of man, and in conjunction with it, the idea that "the strong are essentially bound to struggle for the weak."54

In Spear's portrayal of the new society is a pronounced emphasis upon the sense of Christian compassion which is to characterize the new revolutionary:

While he is actuated by a deep and abiding sense of the justice of his cause, there is dwelling within him a deep, a reverential love, even for the vile oppressor, and the mean traitor. He looks upon him with weeping eyes. He would extend to him the helping hand. He would say to him, you, too, are my brother, and while I struggle for the man who is crushed beneath your iron heel, I am at the same time struggling for you. Deep

52 Ibid., p. 28.
53 Ibid., p. 30.
54 Ibid., p. 33.
as he is in the mire of wretchedness, you are
deeper in infamy; and because you are so infamous,
so low, so degraded, so mean, I struggle for you
and for him. 55

The struggle was on behalf of both the oppressor and the
oppressed; it was a struggle "for universal man." 56

Certainly the document is uncharacteristic of Jeffer­
son's lucid thought. It is replete with ambiguities. While
arguing at one point that the only weapons in the revolu­
tionary arsenal are "Truth, Love, and Wisdom," principles
which are claimed to be "more powerful than the sword," 57
a call is shortly thereafter given for "an armed revolution
to destroy the existing form of government." 58 Somehow,
in Spear's work the principles of nonviolence give way to
the holy war—a war designed, of course, to end all war.
The revolutionary tactic consisted of a plan to secure a
section of the country, thus weakening the power of the cen­
tral government while providing a sanctuary for escaped
slaves. 59

55 Ibid., p. 35.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 34.
58 Ibid., p. 36.
59 Ibid., p. 40-41. This type of radical thought falls
into roughly the same category as does John Brown's ill-con­
ceived attempt at insurrection later in the same decade, ex­
cept that the writer of the Discourses had no illusions
about the ability of slaves to conduct an effective insur­
rection on their own behalf.
The contradiction between advocacy of total nonresistance and support for the use of force in assisting the slave was one which plagued a number of abolitionists, notably Garrison and Henry C. Wright. Spear, it will be remembered, had never consciously endorsed total nonresistance, but had insisted upon his right to shed blood by his own hand when he could do so with a clear conscience. The major point in his position—and this emerges in the Twelve Discourses—is that violence can be justified only when the individual has determined according to his conscience that the ends are moral and cannot be achieved by nonviolent means.\textsuperscript{60}

Having endorsed the use of force to destroy the existing government, the document then returns to the theme of non-violence, condemning war as "...one of the greatest curses under which the human race has groaned." The revolutionary government would in no way whatever arm itself, even for defensive purposes, and would thus "set an example for the world."\textsuperscript{61} The defense of the pacifist principle as stated in the Discourses was rather eloquent. It called attention to the massive cost of maintaining armies, navies, and fortifications, and emphasized the negative effect of

\textsuperscript{60}[Spear], "Remarks Offered in a Non-Resistance Convention...1841," cited in Brock, Pacifism in the United States, p. 590; Twelve Discourses, pp. 36-37.

\textsuperscript{61}Twelve Discourses, pp. 54, 59.
war not only upon individuals directly involved, but upon
the nation as a whole:

When a nation is embarked in war, it becomes for
the time a piratical nation. Artifice, cunning,
and despicable means are resorted to, to ensnare,
overcome, defeat, and destroy the enemy. It dis­
regards entirely age, sex, disposition, character.
It slays by any means whatsoever. They who reside
across an imaginary line are declared to be enemies,
and according to the rules of War, he who feeds,
clothes, aids, or comforts an enemy is considered
deserving of everlasting execration. It makes no
sort of difference, if the enemy be a mother's son,
or a father's daughter. It is enough to know that
the son, or the daughter dwells on the other side
of an imaginary line. It is difficult to conceive
of a species of wickedness so mean, so despicable,
and so hellish as War.62

In defining the nature and function of the proposed
government the Discourses again fell victim to inconsis­
tency. On the one hand the document contained a strong
libertarian emphasis. The main purpose of government was
to "secure the largest liberty to all," regardless of "com­
pexion, caste, sex." At the same time, in a statement
which the original Jefferson could never have supported
unless his thinking changed considerably in the after-life,
it was suggested that government be modeled on the pattern

62Ibid., pp. 55-56. It is certain that this section
on the horror of war appealed to Adin Ballou, author of
Christian Non-Resistance, in All Its Important Bearings,
Illustrated and Defended (Philadelphia, 1846). At the same
time, however, he could not endorse the call for an armed
insurrection. In his introduction to the Discourses, Ballou
admitted that he could not see the practicality of institu­
ting the proposed new revolutionary government, "on the
scale contemplated, by the process indicated." Nonetheless,
he described the volume as "Pregnant with fundamental truth
and sterling suggestion."
of the God-man relationship. Just as God was the Father of the human race, so was the new government to be "truly paternal." The revolutionary government was apparently designed to incorporate elements of both socialism and anarchism.

Each individual in the new state would perform the labor for which he was best suited. The governmental function would be performed by those specifically qualified or trained to govern. A system of universal education would be implemented, and the natural desire for religious instruction would be met by teaching the young that "there is a Being called God, who is infinite in Wisdom, Goodness, and Truth," and that His existence dictates the universal brotherhood of man.

Priests, physicians, and lawyers were to be dispensed with because "they have set man against man," and created litigation and disease. Spear's willingness to forego the services of doctors derived quite naturally from his belief that spiritualism offered the key to medical care through the work of healing mediums like himself. In regard to lawyers creating litigation, recall that Spear had often acted as attorney for the poor of Boston, a practice which he provided without charge and which probably led him to

63 Twelve Discourses, p. 43.
64 Ibid., p. 47.
conclude that trained lawyers were merely an unnecessary drain upon the income of the defendant. Criminals in the new order would be treated with a love and patience born of the understanding that they had generally been "badly born, miserably educated, despised, [and] neglected." Such was the blueprint for a harmonious and orderly government.

In Messages From the Superior State, the author said little that differed appreciably from the printed works of John Murray. The emphasis of the messages was upon the essential goodness of man, the need to pursue universal harmony, and similar related subjects. In the introduction to the work, S. C. Hewitt explained that the style of writing exhibited in the essays was characteristic of the long, flowing sentence structure employed by Murray. Spear's style, on the other hand, was said to be less refined. Such an attempt at verification does not necessarily prove Murray's authorship, but probably does suggest that Spear, well acquainted with Murray's writing, was able in an unconscious or semiconscious trance state, to reproduce both his style and the essential content of his theology.

The pattern of Spear's spiritual revelations was established at this early point in his career as a spirit-

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65 F. D. Huntington, "In Prison and Ye Visited Me" (reprinted in pamphlet form from Christian Register, April, 1850), p. 2.

66 Twelve Discourses, p. 48.
universal reformer. The communications he allegedly received reflected his own desire to transform society. Sometimes the voices from the spirit world seemed confused and irrational. In the Twelve Discourses an ambiguity appeared as to whether individual reform is the result of social reform or vice versa. Such a philosophical conflict was indicative of Spear's conscious attitude toward reform, which was at this time undergoing a transition in the same manner as was the thinking of numerous other reformers.

Spear never wavered in his belief that spiritually advanced minds in another world were anxiously waiting to use him for the betterment of this world, and this belief stimulated his behavior and directed the course of his life for a period of more than thirty years.
CHAPTER IV
WORLD IMPROVEMENT AND THE WATER CURE

In early September, 1852, John M. Spear's involvement with the mid-nineteenth century spiritualist movement entered a new phase. Prior to that time he had received spirit assistance in his healing practice, and had produced two works relating to the thought of specific individuals in the spirit world. But at this pivotal point in his life he began to feel that spirit guides had larger, more detailed plans involving the future of the human race—plans in which he was to play an integral part. His certainty that he was an earthly agent of spiritual forces seeking the regeneration of human society was the dominant force in his life for the next twenty-five years.

The impetus for the transformation of Spear's life came from two messages which came to Spear under similar circumstances. In both cases he was at his home and was involuntarily delivered into a trance state. In that condition he was given to utter the words of the spirit messages aloud while his daughter, Saphronia, recorded them on paper. The first of the two messages, dated September 11, announced that "when the new light shines upon the minds of
Spear was urged to have faith, and was told that "the day to spread joy and happiness is near at hand, when all shall love one another... The darkest complexioned man shall not be crushed on account of his color, but you shall live, eat, drink together and not know any difference... Crime shall decrease and beautiful thoughts shall enter men's minds." The second message, coming one day later, informed Spear that friends in the spirit world were waiting to direct him.¹

Spear was most certainly atune to the millenial emphasis which had from its beginnings characterized American spiritualism, but the intimation that he was to be a direct agent of benevolent spirits was initially disturbing to him. Soon after receiving the messages, however, he attended a lecture by his friend, Allan Putnam. The Roxbury, Massachusetts, medium spoke on the subject of spirit manifestations, and his comments temporarily calmed Spear's mind.²

Several month later, On April 1, 1853, Spear again entered into a trance state from which he received an announcement of the formation of a philanthropic organization in the spirit world. Calling itself "The Association of Beneficents," this spirit body had designated Spear to

¹Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, p. 14.
²Ibid.
be its representative agent and communicator upon the earth. The twelve signers of the document constituted no mean group. Among them were Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Socrates, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, Lafayette, John Adams, Seneca, and Emanuel Swedenborg.  

The nature of the announcement, and its implications for him personally caused Spear to question his own sanity. A gentleman with whom he was well acquainted called upon him on the same day that he received the message, and the man's response to the news was that he had long questioned Spear's mental soundness, and that this confirmed his worst fears. A physician, also present at this time, concurred in the opinion that Spear was a lunatic. Spear's personal analysis at the time was that "I do not know but I am; but how is one to know whether one is insane or not? I surely feel as sane as ever I did."  

Others suggested to Spear that he might well have been the victim of "evil and seducing spirits." He felt compelled to reject such explanations, however, because he was certain that in his normal condition he retained full and free use of his mental powers. Furthermore, he had no doubt of the purity of his own intentions, or of his personal concern for the needs of humanity. Such being the case, he did not

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3Newton, ed., The Educator, p. 40.  
believe that he was susceptible to seduction by spirits with evil intentions.\(^5\)

Determined to follow without reservation the edicts of his advisors in the spirit world, Spear set out for Cleveland, Ohio, on Thursday, May 5, 1853, doing so at the insistence of the spirit of Benjamin Rush, who informed him that he would receive some vitally important communications in that location. Spear assumed that the reason for his going to Cleveland was to confer with John Sterling, a Cleveland spiritualist he had met earlier at Worcester, Massachusetts.\(^6\) Instead he became acquainted with Dr. Abel Underhill, Dr. John Mayhew, Horace Fenton, Caroline S. Lewis, and other prominent individuals within the growing body of northern Ohio spiritualists.\(^7\)

Lecturing twice on May 8 in a public auditorium in Cleveland, Spear elaborated upon the plans and purposes of the Association of Beneficents in accord with directives communicated to him from that body. The Association, he explained, intended "to harmonize things apparently discordant, ...to inspire the inactive to high states of activity, ...[and] to introduce, by wise schemes, a new and better era." A new church was to be organized and a new system of

\(^5\)Ibid.
\(^6\)Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, p. 17.
\(^7\)Ibid.
education developed in what would be a new era, or dispensation, in human existence. Unlike the "Jewish era," which had been founded upon "force," or its successor, the "Christian era," which had been an era of "feeling," the new era would be an era of "wisdom." The wisdom referred to would not be the wisdom of books, but of nature, and such being the case, it would be the final era because wisdom based upon the law of nature would never become outmoded. 8

The new era was also to be characterized by the end of the dominance of the male sex. "One sex," the Associated Spirit World reported through Spear, "has monopolized a power which has been wielded to the highest detriment of the other." 9 In the new era, "Truths alone are to be reverenced;" this in contrast to previous eras in which "reverence for individual persons has been taught." Established forms, ceremonies, and observances would become nonexistent, leaving each person to adopt such forms, ceremonies and observances as were found to be individually agreeable. 10

On June 30, 1853, Spear traveled to Rochester, New York, where he met with Charles Hammond, also a former Universalist minister who had earlier become the first

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8 Ibid., pp. 16-17; Newton, ed., The Educator, pp. 42-43.
9 Newton, ed., The Educator, p. 42.
10 Ibid., p. 43.
trance-writing medium. With both mediums in a trance state, further elaboration was received on the structure of the spirit world. The Association of Beneficents, it was revealed, was only one of seven organizations designed to improve the human condition, all of which operated under the general control of a more comprehensive spiritual agency called the "General Assembly."\(^{11}\)

In addition to the Association of Beneficents, there were announced: The Association of Electricizers, which proposed to "teach of electric, magnetic, and ethereal laws, and of heretofore unknown mechanical forces;" the Association of Elementizers, dealing with laws of nature; and other Associations dealing with subjects as diverse as health, agriculture, education, and government.\(^{12}\)

Each association was to have an agent or supervisor in the spirit world as well as a representative on earth. Over

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 45.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 44. A. E. Newton, editor of The Educator, offered a rather interesting explanation for the sophomoric names given to the various spiritual agencies. In the first place, Newton said, it was decided that scientific terminology which the ordinary layman could not understand had to be avoided. And so, the names were constructed from familiar elements which would be readily apparent to the unlearned reader. Furthermore, in selecting the names as it did, the spirit world intended not merely to teach, in which case, for example, the term "electricians" would have sufficed, but actually to "affect persons by the impartation of Electricity," or by implementing a new system of government. Consequently, the appropriate terms were "electricizers," "governmentizers," etc. Newton, preface to The Educator, pp. vii, viii.
the period of the next several months Spear was directed to appoint a number of people to these positions of authority. He took the orders in good faith, traveling about the country commissioning people as far away as St. Louis to be earthly agents of the General Assembly.\footnote{13}

In previous chapters we have discussed the appeal of spiritualism to advocates of universal reform, and have noted that Spear shared with a great many spiritualists a background characterized by interest in a variety of reform endeavors. But Spear, in his adherence to spiritualism, advanced beyond all but a very few American spiritualists. Most spiritualists would have agreed with the statement of Spear's friend, A. E. Newton, that "spiritualism has opened to our recognition actual and available channels of communication...with the exalted intelligences of a higher life, and thus with the Great Intelligence who pervades the universe, and from whom all treasures of love and wisdom flow out."\footnote{14} Spear not only accepted the idea in theory, but put it into practice. It was from such sources that he claimed to have received the announcement of the formulation of the various spirit world associations.

The evolution of Spear's conception of spiritualism

\footnote{13}Spear often would set out for a city without any specific idea of whom he was to contact.

\footnote{14}New Era, July 12, 1854.
closely paralleled the evolution of his thinking in regard to reform. While he was still actively involved in the effort to assist Boston's poor and imprisoned, his attachment to spiritualism was manifest in the practice of spiritual healing. Both the Boston reform work and the spiritual healing practice represented an individualistic approach to reform. Both involved a direct confrontation between Spear and the beneficiaries of his assistance. By the beginning of 1852, the apparent insignificance of his individual reform approach, juxtaposed against the millenial vision of spiritualist writers such as A. J. Davis and R. P. Ambler, led Spear to shift the thrust of his efforts from individual to societal reform. From that time forward, both his independent reform work in Boston and his spiritual healing practice were of secondary importance. Always a man of action, Spear turned to spiritualism for a specific course by which a complete transformation of society might be achieved. In his Twelve Discourses on Government, he attributed to the spirit of Thomas Jefferson a plan by which an enlightened middle class would rise up to free the slaves, abolish all tyrannical forms of government, and institute a just social order. As desirable as such a revolution might have seemed to Spear, there was no tangible evidence that the American middle class was on the verge of becoming either enlightened or revolutionary. Spear's activities late in 1852 represented the beginning of his last and most radical
attempt to synthesize the millennial implications of spiritualism with his own personal zeal for societal reform. Benevolent spirits, he came to believe, would work directly through him to institute specific programs designed to culminate in the perfection of the human race.

Over the course of the next several years, Spear produced a large body of written material in which he (or his spirit advisors) elaborated upon various aspects of spirit-directed reform. More important, he developed a coherent philosophy which provided the intellectual underpinnings for such activities. To the spirit of Benjamin Franklin he attributed a series of observations upon the general subject of cosmogony. The author stated that the "First Cause of all Causes" was "Inherency." How inherency came into existence was a mystery never to be comprehended. Contained within the universal force of inherency were the powers of life, motion, attraction, expansion, and enlightenment. Inherency did not negate God, but rather confirmed his existence, because inherency was considered to be a manifestation of God in the universe. The God who was responsible for the laws of inherency was seen as wholly omnipotent. "All things, and all events of the past, the present, and the future are under [his] control." Throughout the history of the universe God had provided "revelations or communications of laws for the government of human action,"—laws which were progressively higher, wiser, and better.' This process was
to continue until the highest forms of truth were revealed."^15

The laws of inherency were also stressed in the cosmological aspects of Spear's spiritual philosophy. The orbits of heavenly bodies were determined by a union of the inherent properties of motion and attraction. From a point in time when they originated as miniscule particles of matter, the celestial bodies had grown, in accord with the inherent law of expansion, to their present size. Inherent expansion implied endless progress, so that it followed logically that what mortals defined as death was, in reality, part of the process of expansion, or progress, into a higher state of existence. All matter might be changed, but never destroyed, because "all things are immortal, and cannot die." The idea of inertia was considered to be a myth. The smallest possible atom was thought to possess characteristics of life and motion.^16

It was from the spiritual Association of Elementizers, whose organizers included the spirits of Robert Rantoul, Abner Kneeland, and Benjamin Rush, that Spear received certain principles pertaining to the natural order. Every particle of matter was defined as containing either masculine and feminine, positive and negative, or impartive and recep-

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^15Newton, ed., The Educator, pp. 141-142, 147, 150.
^16Ibid., pp. 150-151, 263, 265.
tive dichotomy, was vital to the refinement of all forms of matter. The spark of divinity which was present within man represented "an impregnation from the Grand Essential, or Highest Self, " God. It was this divine impregnation which distinguished man from lower forms of life. "The being called God exists, organically, in the form of the being called man," but not in the lower forms. 17

The human mind was represented to Spear as "matter in its highest rarified and concentrated condition," hence mind, as a superior form of matter, did not depend upon the physical body for its existence. Rather, the mind could enter higher worlds, and experience "higher rarefication" still, "stretching onward and upward to the celestial magnets of the universe." 18

The philosophy of science which emerged from Spear's writings represented a departure from the more general ante-bellum conception of science. Spear's spiritual consultants maintained that any understanding of scientific facts must be preceded by an understanding of scientific principles. Facts were considered to be nothing more than "effects of prior causes." In insisting that deductive analysis offered the only sound approach to scientific understanding, Spear struck out boldly against the Baconian inductive process.

17Ibid., pp. 262, 303, 352-353.
18Ibid., pp. 183-184.
Spiritualism, he maintained, would enable man to pursue as yet unexplored scientific frontiers by familiarizing him with the universal principles upon which such study would be based.¹⁹

Spiritualists were not in complete agreement on their approach to science. While there was general acceptance of the theory that advanced spirits could impart scientific principles, not all spiritualists were ready to discard the inductive process as an avenue to scientific understanding. Charles Partridge and S. B. Brittan, editors of The Shekinah, contended that strict adherence to Baconian principles would confirm the validity of spiritual phenomena. Opponents of spiritualism, they maintained, had on the basis of faulty scientific principles satisfied themselves that spiritual phenomena could not exist, and had, therefore, refused to investigate the subject. "It is obviously within the providence of the human mind to classify these phenomena and to explain their relation and their laws," wrote Brittan. He predicted that "popular science hereafter will comprehend within its recognized domain the imponderable elements of the physical universe, the subtle mysteries and interior principles of human nature, and the powers and functions of the Spirit World."²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 260, 528. For a detailed analysis of the Baconian influence in America see Daniels, American Science in the Age of Jackson, pp. 63-138, passim.

²⁰The Shekinah, Vol. III (1853), pp. 299-300; (cont'd)
In the *Spirit Messenger*, both the inductive and deductive methods were considered useful:

To avail ourselves of facts is the duty of every nation moving in the advance of civilization. But to draw from the great truths of science intelligent inferences, and masterly deductions, and from these to advance to new and beautiful abstractions, is a mental exercise which tends to the refinement and advancement of every human being.  

Most spiritualists appear to have endorsed this dual approach to scientific study. On one hand they asked the public to judge the movement by observing its phenomena in accord with Baconian empiricism. On the other hand, they claimed that advanced spirit agencies were in the process of conveying to mankind the universal principles which would serve as the basis for scientific study in the future. Spear, having first received from his spirit sources the scientific principles which ordered the universe, found that succeeding communications contained supposedly scientific facts derived from those principles. Many of these facts related to the new sciences, such as homoeopathy, hydropathy, phrenology, and mesmerism, which were popular at this time. Several dealt specifically with the medicinal properties of certain types of water, and it was his interest in this subject which directed his attention to western New York.  

(cont'd) *Spiritual Age*, May 16, 1857.

21*Spirit Messenger*, April 5, 1851.

In the early months of 1853 reports began to appear in the spiritualist press of a mineral spring near Carroll, New York, but just beyond the borderline of Pennsylvania, which contained water believed to possess healing properties. Dr. James Greaves, a Milwaukee physician in close sympathy with the spiritualist movement, personally visited the spring in January, 1853, and reported his findings to the Spiritual Telegraph. The owner of the property on which the spring was located was John Chase, who had purchased the tract with the intent of using a small waterfall to supply power for a wagon-building enterprise. The business failed, and for several years Chase tried unsuccessfully to sell the land, even going so far as to purchase an adjoining forty acres which would connect with a road and render the acreage more attractive to buyers.

As Chase and his wife recalled to Dr. Greaves, the original purchase by Chase had been accompanied by an unexplainable occurrence. On the day of the purchase his wife had gone visiting in a neighboring town, and there out of mere curiosity, had visited a woman described as a fortune teller. The oracle told her that her husband was at that moment buying land which contained great treasure, and he

(cont'd) mesmerism and Swedenborgianism is contained in Kett, The Formation of the American Medical Profession, pp. 132-164.

must never part with it. To Mrs. Chase, who did not think her husband had the resources to purchase a farm, the account was humorous. Upon her return home, however, she found that land had indeed been purchased, but that Chase was certain that only himself, the seller, and a witness were aware of the transaction.

Paying no heed to the oracle, the Chases had, as noted, made a serious effort to sell the land, but even after their purchase of the adjoining tract there seemed to be no interest. At this point they were approached by William Brittingham, a "magnetizer" (hypnotist) of the area, who came to them saying that a clairvoyant had told him that the farm contained both great treasure and a valuable salt spring, and that it was not to be sold. Other mediums confirmed Brittingham's report, and finally Chase decided to conduct a search, not so much for the salt spring as for the treasure he had been assured was there.

Lacking the money to finance drilling and excavation, Chase bargained with Brittingham to do the work for a share of whatever profit resulted. No treasure was uncovered, but the efforts of Brittingham did open up a spring which flowed at a rate of about seven hundred and fifty gallons of water per hour. According to Greaves, "The water obtained from this spring flows turbid all of the time, containing a large amount of sediment of earthy matter, of an unctuous character to the touch, emitting a peculiar odor, and the
taste strong alkaline." Experiments showed that the water was alkaline in that by mixing it with flour it was possible to raise bread. The alkaline substance in the water acted as a leavening agent.

In September, 1852, Brittingham was "directed" to commence testing, "under spirit direction," the utility of the water as a cure for diseases. The results were, as one might anticipate, positive. Greaves reported that the water had been very effectively used by people in the vicinity as a treatment for "fevers, dyspepsia, pneumonia, rheumatism, inflammations of the throat, burns and scalds, erysipelas [an inflammation of the skin, accompanied by fever], scarlatina, etc." The water could be used either internally or for bathing. An ointment had been made from it which had proven "truly remarkable." Two serious cases of felon (an inflammation of a finger or toe) had been cured by this ointment in a matter of hours. In conclusion Greaves noted that "the main facts [as narrated]...are fully corroborated by friend and foe in the vicinity." But he remarked, too, "The parties concerned have been subjected to an amount of obloquy and ridicule truly disgraceful, and it is wonderful that their moral courage should have so long sustained them under such trials." Quite possibly the type of ridicule to which Greaves referred was that contained in the pages of

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24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid.
the neighboring *Jamestown Journal*. The *Journal* had looked askance at the Chase-Britttingham operation from its inception. Its own investigation of the water uncovered "nothing in its immediate or subsequent effect that would have attracted our attention, had we not heard of marvels connected with it; and we think this would be the experience of ninety-nine of every hundred of its visitors." Its conclusion was that the Spiritual Springs undoubtedly have virtue in them; but the applications of the water, to be effective, should be accompanied with soap...Thereby will the virtues of the water be revealed."26

More irritating to the editor of the *Journal* than the claims made on behalf of the water were the claims of Brittingham regarding the origin of his information. Spirits of a certain tribe of "Celtic Indians" were reported to have told Brittingham of the spring, having themselves lived in that area, in the valley of the Kiantone Creek, over a thousand years before. These "Celtic Indians" had covered over the springs and their wealth during an attack by some barbaric hordes from the North, and since their tribe had been destroyed during the invasion, the springs and the treasure remained buried.27 Why was this information suddenly revealed to Chase and Brittingham? Quite possibly,

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26 *Jamestown* (New York) *Journal*, Editorial, April 22, 1853.

27 Ibid.
the Journal suggested, "because they owned the land."  

Secular journals may have scoffed at the whole affair, but it attracted considerable genuine interest in the spiritual press. The Spiritual Telegraph, for example, frequently printed letters from mediums who tested the water. In one instance, Mrs. Samantha Mettler, a well-known healing medium from Hartford, Connecticut, and a close acquaintance of Spear, reported that by placing three or four grains of the evaporated residuum from the water into four ounces of soft water and applying the mixture to her forehead she was immediately delivered into a trance state. She claimed, too, that the water was useful for liver and kidney ailments, that it was a "sudorific" (a drug which causes perspiration), and that it would aid in "equalizing the circulation."  

Reports such as that of Mrs. Mettler must, of course, be viewed with considerable skepticism. But so must the report of a medical doctor who claimed to have experimented with the water for over five months and contracted from it burning eyes, itchy and scaly scalp, dry nostrils, bloody nose, mucus in the throat, headache, chills, and violent fever. One can only conclude that the negative prejudging on the part of those disposed to consider the operation a

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28 Ibid.  
29 Spiritual Telegraph, May 18, 1853.  
30 Ibid., November 5, 1853.
fraud affected the outcome of the investigation just as did the high expectations of those who favored it.

It was altogether appropriate that John Spear, a spiritualist familiar with the practice of healing by spiritual impulse, would become interested in the events at Kiantone. Early in 1853 Thaddeus Sheldon, a spiritualist from Randolph, New York, gave a sample of the sediment from the water to Spear for a "psychometrical examination."^^ Sheldon's interest in the Kiantone water had taken him, late in 1852, to New York City. There he delivered a sample of the water to Dr. Greaves, who was in New York at that time. It is quite probable that on the same trip Sheldon went on to Boston, and delivered another sample to Spear.

Whatever the background details, Spear's analysis of the sediment confirmed the testimony of other mediums, and when he traveled to Cleveland, by "order" of the spirits in April, 1853, he organized a party of Cleveland spiritualists and together they journeyed to Kiantone on May 10. Returning to Cleveland, Spear began to see the value which the Kiantone Springs might have for his own personal spiritual-istic endeavors. By mid-summer he returned to Kiantone with a number of benefactors, including Cleveland spiritualists

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^31^Hardinge, Modern American Spiritualism, p. 231.  
^32^Ibid., p. 230.  
^33^Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, p. 16.
Abel Underhill, Horace Fenton, and Hannah F. M. Brown, and purchased the Kiantone Springs.\textsuperscript{34}

The details behind Spear's acquisition of the "valuable" mineral springs are, however, a bit more complicated than would first appear, and reveal a certain lack of harmony, and an all too earthly tendency toward greed and deception within the community of spiritualists. In the September 10, 1853, issue of the \textit{Spiritual Telegraph} there appeared a lengthy letter from the pen of Abel Underhill, regarding the mineral water of the Kiantone Valley. The "Kiantone Spiritualized Magnetic Spring" Underhill described as being about one and one half miles south of the village of Carroll, New York, and within twenty-five feet of the Pennsylvania line and fifty feet of the Kiantone Creek. The spring commonly had been known by inhabitants of the area as the Great Deer Lick.\textsuperscript{35}

About sixty rods up the Kiantone, Underhill wrote, lay the spring of Chase and Brittingham, "the same water, but obtained by digging under spirit direction." Chemical analysis by a Dr. Clinton of New York had shown that the water contained quantities of sulphuric acid, soda, magnesia, iron zinc, chloride of sodium, chloride of magnesia, chloride of sodium, chloride of magnesia, chloride of magnesia,

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Spiritual Telegraph}, September 10, 1853. This report was undoubtedly sent to the \textit{New Era} as well.
and silica. Almost every element found in a variety of medicinal waters appeared to be contained in the Kiantone water. Here was the "sulphur of the sulphur springs, the soda of the soda waters, the magnesia of the epsom springs, the iron of the chalybeate springs, the salt of the salt springs." 36

Beyond this was a property of the waters which could not be accounted for by chemical test—the electric and magnetic properties manifest in the effect of the waters upon mediums such as Mrs. Mettler and John M. Spear. Reasoning in accord with the principles of mesmerism and homoeopathy that the life forces were magnetic in nature and that disease is the result of an "inharmony" in the system caused by the derangement of the normal magnetic body forces, Underhill expressed his conviction that the use of the waters for purposes of healing was much preferable to the use of drugs, which sometimes had a harmful effect upon the body as a whole while healing a specific member. 37

In the vicinity of the Kiantone there were many springs, Underhill cautioned readers, but most were soft water springs and did not compare with the waters of the Kiantone itself. It was only after having tested a variety of preparations from other water in the vicinity that the group of Cleveland spiritualists, with the guidance of the

36 Ibid. 37 Ibid.
spirits, had purchased the "Kiantone Spiritualized Spring," a beautiful tract of one hundred seventy acres lying on each side of the Kiantone. Upon the tract the company planned to erect suitable accommodations in order to facilitate those who wished to come to Kiantone. The goal was not profit, but rather the "relief of suffering humanity."
The water would be absolutely free to all who came to partake. Only the cost of processing would be charged those who ordered by mail. "We purchased them by their [the spirit's] direction," declared Underhill, "and by their direction they are made free to all for their own use."

Until they could build facilities on the tract itself, Underhill wrote, the company would accommodate visitors in a hotel which it had rented in nearby Carroll. Daily transportation to the Springs was to be furnished. Among the earlier visitors had been Doctors Greaves and Platt of St. Louis, and a wide variety of mediums. One of these mediums (Spear), advised Underhill that the spirits had told him "this is now the most important spot on your earth."
For the present Underhill admitted, the truth of such a statement was not quite apparent, but visitors would certainly be impressed "with the purity of the atmosphere and the medicinal properties of these spiritualized magnetic waters."

38 Ibid. 39 Ibid.
The *Spiritual Telegraph* published Underhill's letter without comment. Three weeks later it printed a letter from the Boston spiritualist H. F. Gardner, one of the doctors who had visited the Kiantone area, under the heading "Kiantone Waters Disturbed." Gardner charged that the Underhill letter was "calculated to deceive in regard to the true Spiritual Magnetic Springs," and that it contained a number of glaring errors.

First, Gardner challenged the assertion that the water on Chase and Brittingham's property was the same as that on the property of the Cleveland company. The Chase and Brittingham springs offered two separate kinds of water, he said, a positive and negative. The positive was hard, clear, and slightly salty; the negative was soft, "containing much sediment and a slight... sulphurous taste." The "Great Deer Lick" being the natural outlet of the two, offered a mixture of the waters, and thus the magnetic powers of the positive and negative water were neutralized, with their healing power greatly minimized. 40

Gardner emphasized, too, that in passing through the sixty rods of soil the water from the springs of Chase and Brittingham was combined with water from a number of underground springs, greatly diluting it. Underhill's statement that "these" waters had been closely analyzed, Gardner

40 *Spiritual Telegraph*, October 1, 1853.
claimed, was a deliberate deception in that the doctors, scientists, and mediums who experimented with the sediment had all experimented with samples of the negative water from the springs of Chase and Brittingham. 41

Particularly distressing to Gardner was Underhill's claim that benevolent spirits had led the Cleveland company to the Great Deer Lick. If that were the case, he argued, why would spirits have led Chase and Brittingham to dig a pit twenty feet in diameter and forty feet deep at a cost of around five hundred dollars when they could have bought the Great Deer Lick for about fifty dollars?

As it appeared to Gardner, the Cleveland company had from the start wished to gain control of the "genuine" spiritual magnetic springs, but since the spirits had directed Chase not to sell his property, they purchased instead the Great Deer Lick. 42

Such may, indeed, have been the case. The record is not complete enough to allow a firm conclusion. It does soon, however, that the Spear forces worked out a modus vivendi with Chase and Brittingham which combined the best of both locations, so that subsequent spiritualist activities encompassed both of the adjacent properties. 43

41 Ibid. 42 Ibid. 43 Later spiritualist endeavors were conducted jointly on both the Pennsylvania and New York properties, and Brittingham built a thirty-five room hotel at the site of the springs.
Whatever the merits of the case presented by Gardner, the debate over the springs was still active in July, 1854, at which time Spear's close friend, S. C. Hewitt, paid a visit to Kiantone to judge for himself. His report shed little light on the confusion at Kiantone, but provided further evidence that like other universal reforms, spiritualists could agree on general goals but often became seriously divided by small and seemingly inconsequential differences.

Hewitt suggested that the first spring dug by spirit direction by Brittingham was not the same spring that was claimed to offer both positive and negative water. The latter was owned by John Chase and lay a little beyond the New York-Pennsylvania border near Farmington, Pennsylvania. Tasting the water from the spring, around which Chase had built an enclosure which he kept locked, Hewitt tasted not both positive and negative characteristics, but only strong and weaker negative characteristics. He noted that when water was pumped from negative sources the positive source stopped flowing. With the support of a Pittsburgh chemist, Hewitt contended that there were not two veins, but only one, and that the water from the "negative" tap merely ran through a deposit of clay which accounted for its color and greater alkalinity. \(^4\)

\(^4\)New Era, March 15, 1854.
As might be expected, since he was a close friend of Spear, Hewitt lent his full support to the Cleveland enterprise, telling his readers that since the tract was to be used as a "free boon to humanity...You and I are equal owners...of this one free spot of earth, and may come and drink most freely, of these waters of life, whenever it may please and benefit us so to do." But although the Kiantone Springs were to be used initially as a source of physical rehabilitation for wayfaring spiritualists, Spear and Hewitt had more grandiose plans for this secluded spot. Hewitt had for some time spoken of a model "Circular City," a divine home on earth. The most advanced spirits, he believed, "are looking earnestly, and longing deeply, now, for some method of social reorganization, whereby the sweet foretaste of a life of true harmony...may become a matter of fact in everyday life." Such was the goal of the spirit world.

In October, 1854, Spear produced a series of articles which were intended to serve as the foundation of a "new social order." The messages stated, too, that a location had been selected and was to be consecrated to carrying out the plans of the spirit world beneficiaries.

On the surface, Kiantone might not seem a likely place...

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\[45^\text{Ibid.}\]  \[46^\text{Ibid.}\]  \[47^\text{Ibid.}\]  \[48^\text{Spiritual Telegraph, October 28, 1854.}\]
to create a "new social order," particularly in light of the very real disharmony caused within the spiritualist community by the dispute over the springs. But given the nature of Spear's philosophy and the fact that in spite of his idealistic zeal he could also be highly pragmatic, the choice was reasonable. Kiantone had the advantage of being isolated from the major urban centers which both reflected and contributed to the ills of the existing social structure. Like many another utopian community, disengagement from the larger society in favor of an unspoiled rural locale was considered highly desirable.

Furthermore, Kiantone, while isolated, was centrally located and accessible to spiritualists from both East and West, and although spiritualists had quarrelled over control of the springs, none disputed that the springs were of significant medicinal value and would serve as a major attraction. Finally, Spear's supporters in Cleveland had already made a sizable purchase of land at Kiantone, and so the guiding lights in the spirit world, or more probably in the recesses of his own mind, chose that plot of ground as the spot where John M. Spear was to usher in the New Dispensation.
CHAPTER V
GOD'S LAST, BEST, GIFT TO MAN

John Murray Spear's adherence to the spiritualist philosophy was closely linked to his desire to transform the condition of the human race. With the guidance of beneficent spirits in another life, he was convinced that the earthly life could be redesigned in such a way as to render sickness, suffering and sorrow virtually nonexistent. None of Spear's various spiritualist activities reflect his thirst for reform more graphically than does his chimerical pursuit of what he called "The New Motive Power."

In their emphasis upon a utilitarian approach to science, intellectual proponents of spiritualism were in harmony with the dominant currents of thought in ante-bellum America. In science, as in other areas of human endeavor, spiritualists called for "practical measures...for the progress of humanity."

Spear claimed, as early as November, 1852, to have received from the spirit realm a series of communications dealing with "Motion as an Inherent Property in Nature." From this scientific principle, subsequent

1Spiritual Telegraph, Oct. 15, 1854.

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communications deduced plans for a mechanical device which would illustrate to mankind the principle of perpetual motion, or, as the communications frequently referred to it, "Universal Activity."²

In July, 1853, several of Spear's supporters, chief among them S. C. Hewitt, editor of the Boston-based spiritualist periodical, New Era, assembled Spear's papers and began to construct the machine according to the dictates of the spirit world. Applying what were supposed to be immutable chemical, electrical, and mechanical principles, the builders, over a period of nine months, produced a device which one observer described as being like nothing which had ever before existed, "on the earth, or in the waters under the earth." To those disposed to support this labor, the machine represented "...a most conclusive as well as unique evidence of supra-mundane or spiritual interposition,—as conclusive probably as was ever afforded by any event or transaction occurring within the range of human..."  

²Newton, ed., The Educator, p. 239. The earliest account of the perpetual motion machine appeared in the pages of the New Era. Since only about one third of the issues of that publication appear to have been preserved, it is necessary to rely in part upon the treatment contained in The Educator, which was published three years later. In large part The Educator quoted directly from the New Era, but A. E. Newton added editorial comments to those accounts, which provide valuable information. There is reason to believe, however, that Newton's 1857 interpretation of the events differed somewhat from the interpretation which he and others offered in 1854.
The nature of the device, as A. E. Newton described it, was as follows:

...upon the centre of an ordinary circular wooden table, some three feet in diameter, were erected two metallic uprights, six or eight inches apart; between these, and reaching from the one to the other, near their tops, was suspended on pivots a small steel shaft, which was crossed at its centre by another shaft, about six inches in length, on the extremities of which were suspended two steel balls enclosing magnets. The first named shaft was nicely fitted with sockets at its extremities, so that the balls could revolve with little friction. Beneath these suspended balls, between the uprights, and the centre of the table, was arranged, a very curiously constructed fixture,—a sort of oval platform, formed of a peculiar combination of magnets and metals. Directly above this were suspended a number of zinc and copper plates, alternately arranged, and said to correspond with the brain as an electric reservoir. These were supplied with lofty metallic conductors, or attractors, reaching upward to an elevated stratum of atmosphere. In combination with these principal parts were adjusted various metallic bars, plates, wires, magnets, insulating substances, peculiar chemical compounds, etc., arranged, by careful direction, in accordance with the relations of positive and negative, or masculine and feminine...At certain points around the circumference of the structure, and connected with the centre, small steel balls enclosing magnets were suspended. A metallic connection with the earth, both positive and negative, corresponding with the two lower limbs, right and left, of the body, was also provided. Certain portions of the structure were subjected to very peculiar processes, such as immersion for a time in novel chemical preparations, exposure to heat and to electrical action...designed apparently to fit them to perform their respective functions... All the parts were adjusted with mechanical nicety, and finished with tastefulness.

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3 Newton, ed., The Educator, p. 239.
4 Ibid., p. 240.
In essence, the machine was designed to correspond to the human body, and contained parts analogous not only to the brain and limbs, but also to the heart and lungs. Because it was constructed upon the human model, it was believed that the device would not need to be powered by electric current generated by the ordinary processes, but could be linked to the "electric life-currents of the universe," in somewhat the same manner as it was believed life was stimulated in the human body. Before attempting to power the machine with the universal life current, its designers charged it with electricity from an ordinary electrical generator, the purpose being "to bring it into relation with the ever-active vital or electric currents of Nature, in consequence of which it might manifest a perpetual motion." In order to make the machine more receptive to the natural electric current, four large magnets, each fourteen feet long were connected to the apparatus, and to the magnets was connected an antenna-like conductor which extended through the ceiling of the building in which it was housed.\(^5\)

The next preparatory step was to bring human beings into direct contact with the machine in order to impart to it their "personal magnetisms." On several occasions persons of both sexes gathered to sit for a specified time,

\(^5\)New Era, May 10, 1854; Newton, ed., The Educator, p. 240.
in a circle around the table with their hands resting directly upon it. The theory upon which their procedure was based was also the theory used to explain the lifting of tables and other forms of levitation. Objects which moved contrary to commonly understood laws of gravity and motion did so because they were charged by emanation of electrical force from the hands of the practicing medium. In the same way, the machine was to be given an influx of power which would emanate from those gathered about it.6

Applying the theory in still another way, spiritualists claimed that it was possible to discern the personality of an individual by feeling a ring or some other article worn by the person. Emanations from the person's mind were thought to be contained in such articles, so that a highly sensitive medium could gain from them evidence of character traits. As questionable as such claims may seem, many serious critics of spiritualism responded to them not by contesting their validity, but by insisting that the existence of such phenomena was no proof of spirit activity.

In the 1840s, a German chemist, Karl Baron von Reichenbach, announced the discovery of a new force which he named Odyle. Reichenbach reported that certain individuals were able to sense when a large magnet was passed

6Ibid.
before them. He claimed to have observed light streaming from the poles to the magnet. Odyle was characterized by Reichenbach as an imponderable force, one with observable effects and measurable properties, but without measurable size or weight.\textsuperscript{7}

American opponents of spiritualism such as Asa Mahan, the first president of Oberlin College, seized upon Odyllic force as a means of proving that almost all phenomena associated with spiritualism could be attributed to natural, physical laws. Such an attack was easily refuted by learned spiritualists. A. E. Newton debated Mahan in a series of exchanges in the \textit{New England Spiritualist}, and appears to have defeated him handily. Newton reminded Mahan that spiritualists had always insisted that spiritualist phenomena represented the workings of natural universal laws; hence, to describe Odyle and the phenomena associated with it as "natural" in no way detracted from the claims of spiritualism. Mahan viewed Odyllic force as an interaction of mind and matter, which prompted Newton to comment that Mahan had erred in describing it as a purely "physical" force. If Mahan accepted the power of mind to act upon matter, could he deny that a mind might retain its power over matter—its Odyllic force—after the

physical body had died? Unless he wished to acknowledge the death of the soul (mind) at the point of physical death, Mahan could not.  

However one chose to define the power by which mind influenced matter, the laying on of hands by interested parties was insufficient to impregnate the mechanism with the necessary life force. His spirit world counselors responded to this failure by announcing to Spear, while he was in a trance state, of course, that a finer quality of vital magnetism was needed. As the process was described by A. E. Newton three years later, the various procedures were in full accord with the theory given in advance by the spirits to Spear. Judging, however, from the fact that Spear continued to receive directives throughout the nine-month period in which the machine was under construction, it can be reasonably assumed that the directives sometimes came as responses to the failure of earlier directives to activate the machine.  

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8 New England Spiritualist, Aug. 18, Sept. 29, 1855. The debate continued in the issues Oct. 13 and Nov. 14, 1855, and Jan. 5, 1856. For the basis of the disagreement see Asa Mahan, Modern Mysteries Explained and Exposed (Boston, 1855), pp. 326-327.

9 In The Educator Newton's account gives the clear impression of a trial and error operation, but he explained this apparent contradiction by making a distinction between the theory of the effort, which was made clear at the outset, and the practical implementation of the theory, which was an outgrowth of human effort.
the credibility of the agencies of the spirit world may be seriously questioned.

The "final quality of vital magnetism" was declared to be contained within Spear himself. "In accord with directions minutely given," Spear allowed himself to be encased in an apparatus "composed of a combination of metallic plates, strips, and bands" plus assorted "precious metals, jewels, and other minerals alleged to enter prominently into the constitution of the human body..."

In this peculiar situation Spear was thrown into a trance state, and a "clear-seer" who observed his contact with the machine described "a stream of light, a sort of umbilicum [sic], emanating [from the enclosed person] to and enveloping the mechanism."\(^{10}\)

While friends of the project were enthusiastic over what they construed to be scientific truth revealed through the spirit world, the machine did not run. The reason for its resistance was contained in a treatise on Celestial Magnetism first printed in the *New Era* which contained the assertion that "the bodies and minds of females, as a class, are in purer conditions than are those of males, and consequently a higher degree of the celestial magnetism is by them exhibited." The female, it seemed, contained "the more especial embodiment of the love element," which

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\(^{10}\) Newton, ed., *The Educator*, p. 245.
was considered "the inmost of all things—the Divine essence."11

At this juncture, in the early months of 1854, a Boston woman who had established herself as a practicing medium appeared at High Rock as the single element needed to complete the constructive process. Functioning as the "Mary of the New Dispensation," she was led to approach the machine, and was thereupon seized for a period of two hours by a series of pains typical of those related to childbirth. But her suffering was said to be "internal and of the spirit rather than of a physical nature." Although those about her seemed unable to grasp the nature of her mission, she began to sense clearly that "the most interior and refined elements of her spiritual being were imparted to, and absorbed by, the appropriate portions of the mechanism." The culmination of her labor was achieved as indications of life appeared in the machine—indications "at first perceptible only to her keenly sensitive touch, but visible ultimately in movement and pulsation to the eyes of all."12

Over a period of several weeks the woman remained with the machine, which continued its pulsations at

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frequent intervals. From time to time throughout the process she was visited by spirits who conveyed to her the philosophy upon which the construction of the machine was based. These visitations had the effect of instilling in her mind the importance of her contribution to the development of the machine.\textsuperscript{13}

The location of the machine, and the building which housed it, are as mysterious and intriguing as the course by which it allegedly came to life. The construction of the machine as well as most of the revelations that Spear claimed to receive regarding it were carried out at High Rock Cottage in Lynn, Massachusetts. The cottage was located near the middle of the community, but was built atop a steep, rocky hill from which one could view the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the city of Boston eight miles to the north. The locale seemed to offer a special attraction to spiritualists. In August, 1852, Andrew Jackson Davis had spent considerable time there, and it was from the vantage of High Rock that he looked into the sky and saw a distinct vision of the "spiritual congress." Owned by Jesse Hutchinson, a man who was apparently in sympathy with spiritualism, it became a spiritualist retreat when Hutchinson left Massachusetts for California.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}New Era, Jan. 28, 1854.

\textsuperscript{14}Andrew Jackson Davis, \textit{Present Age and Inner Life} (New York, 1853), p. 82.
Until spring of 1854, when life was reportedly imparted to the machine, the New Era had restricted itself to mysterious hints concerning "this thing" which was to "awaken the world to wonder." At one point S. C. Hewitt, editor of the New Era and Spear's closest associate, had been explicit enough to assert that a spiritual body concerned with electric power was in the process of transmitting through Spear, "God's last, best, gift to man."\(^{15}\)

When the device seemed to exhibit qualities of human life, however, the editor of New Era could barely contain his exuberance. "It is with no ordinary feelings of satisfaction," wrote Hewitt, "that we announce...that spirits have revealed a wholly new motive power, to take the place of all other motive powers," and that "this revelation has been embodied in a model machine by human cooperation with the powers above."\(^{16}\) The writer then elaborated upon the philosophical implications of the achievement:

> We may also say that we have the birth of a new science, a new philosophy, and a new life. The time of deliverance has come at last, and henceforward the career of humanity is upward and onward—a mighty, a noble, and a Godlike career. All the revelations of Spiritualism heretofore, all the control of spirits over mortals, and the instruction and discipline they have given us, have only paved the way... for the advent of a great practical movement,

\(^{15}\) Emma Hardinge, Modern American Spiritualism (New York, 1870), p. 221, citing New Era.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 222.
such as the world little dreams of, though it has long deeply yearned for it and agonized and groaned away its life because it did not come sooner. And this new motive power is to lead the way in a great, speedily-coming salvation. It is to be the physical savior of the race... Hence we most confidently assert that the advent of the science of all sciences, the philosophy of all philosophies, and the art of all art has now fairly commenced. The child is born; not long hence he will go alone. Then he will dispute with the doctors in the temples of science and then—"17

The unbounded faith which Hewitt exhibited in the machine is clearly reflected in his and Spear's conviction that spiritualism implied not only a future life but the regeneration of humanity here and now. The faith manifested in the "New Motor" was, in fact, indicative of an extreme form of the perfectionist impulse. But while the ranks of spiritualism were filled with intellectuals who were attracted to the philosophy by its reform implications, few were ready to accept the new motive power as the savior of the human race. Hewitt's announcement in the New Era was immediately countered by a cautionary note in the New York-based journal, Spiritualist Telegraph. The Telegraph did not quarrel with Hewitt's assertion that "The Thing Moves," but reminded readers that the movement described referred only to "some little balls connected with the machine." The main drive mechanism had never moved, suggesting that while there had indeed been movement,

17Ibid., p. 221.
there had been no actual power. The Telegraph was willing to admit, too, that the construction of the machine indicated a "good deal of philosophic principle," and that in all likelihood "Spirits have had something to do with it." This conclusion was based on the editor's conviction that the "earthly parties engaged in it could not have thought of such a thing." 18

Interest in the developments had led Andrew Jackson Davis to High Rock in the first weeks of 1854. At the time he had suggested the addition of another part of the machine. In mid-May, soon after Hewitt's announcement, he returned again to conduct his own investigation of the progress that appeared to have been made. Davis's reaction to what he found was contained within a lengthy letter to the Spiritual Telegraph which was subsequently reprinted in a variety of spiritual and secular journals. 19

Davis had no quarrel with the philosophy upon which the machine was based, namely that there existed a universal electricity which could be incorporated with mineral matter through the construction of a mechanism based upon the human physiology, and could be fed by atmospheric electricity obtained by absorption and condensation as opposed

18 Spiritual Telegraph, April 17, 1854.

19 Telegraph Papers, Vol. V, (May-Aug. 1854), pp. 182-192. This was a separately published series of volumes containing the major articles from the Spiritual Telegraph.
But Davis had difficulty accepting the idea that the spirit world had, in fact, given Spear the key to the construction of a machine which would revolutionize the world. Regarding the mechanism, he wrote, "...if the object to be gained is a demonstration of the fact of spiritual intercourse, then, in my mind, they have accomplished that object by presenting a construction superior to the mechanical information of the medium. But if the object is to prove that Spirits (who were once men) can overstep the boundaries of human intuition and reason, and give us light which we cannot obtain by the proper means and extent of investigation, then, in my mind, they can never more successfully discover their mistake and its impossibility." 

The importance of Davis's criticism cannot be overestimated for it struck at the very heart of the philosophy of spiritualism as it was propounded by Spear, Hewitt and their supporters. Undaunted by Davis's philosophical frontal assault, Hewitt printed the entire letter on the front page of the New Era, and then printed his own

20 Telegraph Papers, V, p. 183.

21 Ibid., pp. 190-191.

22 New Era, June 21, 1854. S. C. Hewitt was quite willing to print on the first page of the New Era articles opposing the paper's spiritual philosophy. Like Garrison, who printed proslavery letters and articles and then used them as a basis for his antislavery views, Hewitt (cont'd)
lengthy response. Davis's failure to comprehend the role of the spirit world in improving the human race through creations such as the new mechanical device could be best explained, Hewitt argued, in terms of Davis's craniological structure. Applying phrenological analysis which Davis himself was fond of using, Hewitt noted that "his back-brain is small—his cranium perpendicular in that region, and his Love-inspirations correspondingly weak...hence...he fails to see the true relation of Jesus to the Human Race, as the Representative and Promoter of the great Spiritual Life and Love Functions of Humanity."23

Hewitt argued that the new machine was an expression of the Love of Christ and of his concern for humanity. "The Love-element or Christ-Spirit," he insisted, "is the very soul and spirit of the Spiritualist Movement...The New Philosophy and its application to the New Mechanical creation...involves all the essentials of...the Love, or Creative element." Spear and Hewitt felt certain that the world was entering a "New Dispensation" and that spiri-

(cont'd) wished to bring opposition to his efforts into the open so as to be better able to defend himself. He did, however, print opposing articles under the heading "Refuge of misconception."

23New Era, June 28, 1854. Phrenology was, of course, employed by Americans at all levels of society, regardless of attitude toward other reforms. For a study of phrenology which views its introduction as a reflection of the reform impulse and an expression of a legitimate attempt to understand human behavior see Davies, Phrenology, Fad, and Science.
tualism was the means by which Christ was transforming the Human world through "the practical embodiment of those principles of Nature, in mechanics and other spheres, through which alone the principles and spirit of Heaven can find expression to any desirable extent upon earth."  

Discussion of a "New Dispensation" and the use of the spirit world to solve the problems of the human race brought a close friend of Spear's, Adin Ballou, into the debate. Ballou, founder of the Hopedale Community, and like Spear a Universalist, had first encountered spiritualism at Hopedale. In a study of spiritualist manifestations he had included a chapter of Spear's healing ministry. Likewise, he had written a favorable introduction to Spear's *Twelve Discourses on Government*. Ballou, however, took a dim view of the "New Motive Power."

Whatever spiritualism meant, Ballou contended, it did not justify a reliance upon the occurrence of "some wonderful and unparalleled event to be brought about mainly by spirits for the regeneration and harmonization of the world." Such thinking tended to discourage attempts to improve the human condition through ordinary means and fostered the belief that nothing could be accomplished in the way of reform until spirits prepared the way. The type of claims made on behalf of the "New Motor" suggested

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24 *New Era*, June 28, 1854.
to Ballou that the human race was to be redeemed, that society would be harmonized, that other sublime discoveries would be made, all with little human anxiety, toil, or discomfort. Even if the machine were totally successful, Ballou reasoned, "...still it is very improbably that the great moral and social revolution desired would take place in the easy and speedy way anticipated." God, he maintained, did not work that way. Furthermore, given the very minimal chance that the machine would ever become a useful motor, Ballou lamented the expenditure of time it had involved, and its cost in terms of wasted talent which would better have been devoted to more tangible reform activity. He was, as always, "the practical Christian."\textsuperscript{25}

Ballou's broadside, like the Davis letter, was published in numerous spiritual and secular journals and undoubtedly had a stunning effect upon the champions of the New Motive power. It was by now mid-September, 1854. The work on the machine had been concluded in mid-May. There still had been no sign of motion beyond the occasional pulsating of two steel balls. Hewitt's response to Ballou's charges clearly indicates a retreat from the supremely confident, almost flamboyant rhetoric of earlier issues of

\textsuperscript{25}New Era, Sept. 6, 1854. Ballou's attack was first printed in the Practical Christian as an article titled "Modern Spiritualism--Its Good and Evil," and was subsequently referred to frequently in the secular news media and reprinted in both the New Era and the Spiritual Telegraph (Sept. 30, 1854).
The editors now adopted a more conservative stance. No, they argued, they never had expected heaven to drop into their midst with no trouble on their part. No, they did not expect, never had expected that angels would do the desirable work of regeneration while earthly reformers were hardly aware of it. Yes, they had believed, and still did believe, that "highly Philosophic spirits of the Higher Life have been successful in revealing and embodying the principles of a New Motive Power, which will ultimately do the majority of the world's work," and they remained "firm and calm in the conviction that Heaven has something here worthwhile for the human race." What they did not believe was that any particularly dramatic results regarding the machine in the way of "working power" would be realized "for some considerable time to come."^27

Critics of the "New Motive Power," the New Era contended, were suggesting that its supporters were predicting the immediate transformation of the human race. This was something, Hewitt wrote, "...which never entered our heads to expect."^28

A gradation in the levels of perfectionist thought is indicated in the dispute between Ballou and supporters of

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^26 New Era, Sept. 13, 1854.

^27 Ibid.

^28 Ibid.
the machine. Ballou had cautioned against the expectation of heaven-sent devices to aid in the process of universal reform. His God did not work in that way. Hewitt and Spear, however, accused Ballou of a lack of vision. Is it not possible, they asked, "that God may sometimes have new methods by which to work out new and desirable ends?" Were the methods of God exhausted in the olden time, "so that He is obliged to follow in the self-same track in all the future ages?" Their own conviction, which Ballou did not share, that a New Dispensation was being ushered into being, led them to expect God to employ a variety of innovative methods in the process of transforming and perfecting human society.  

As a stimulant to a re-examination of the fundamental principles of modern spiritualism the introduction of the perpetual motion machine could not have been more effective. It raised, for example, a whole range of questions regarding the nature of spirits and the type of human response which spirit communications ought to elicit. The philosophy to which Spear adhered linked the spirit world with a divinely ordered plan for the improvement of the human race. It assumed that spirits were perfectly capable of advancing to levels of knowledge and understanding beyond anything achieved in the earthly sphere. It assumed that God could,
and did, use the spirit world as an agency for transmitting to mortal minds the outline of His plan for the betterment of the human condition.\textsuperscript{30}

For this reason Spear was reluctant to disregard what he perceived to be divinely inspired communications from the spiritual world. His total commitment to his spirit advisors was a trait which those closest to him admired immensely, for it seemed indicative of his all-encompassing desire to relieve the suffering and sordid condition of humanity. The total willingness to accept the dictates of spirits seemed, too, to elicit a comparison to the lives of the great Biblical patriarchs. To be willing to submit oneself wholly to the will of God even when it was impossible to discern the ultimate plan of God, even when it meant enduring abandonment by friends and ridicule from enemies, this was to be like Noah, Job, and the prophets of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{31}

As long as Spear confined himself to the recording of treatises he claimed were given him through counselors in the spirit world, his work caused no great stir. A great many writers were producing written material for which they credited authors in the spiritual realm, and although they

\textsuperscript{30} New Era, July 26, 1854.

\textsuperscript{31} Brown, "Biographical Sketch," in The Educator, p. 31; Putnam, Introduction to Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, p. vi.
were ridiculed by the general public, spiritualist journals were willing to print advertisements for such works and allow readers to judge for themselves. But when Spear went to the point of actually implementing the ideas of his spiritual contacts by building the motor, the fantastic nature of the operation posed a threat to the credibility of the spiritualist movement as a whole. Consequently, Davis, Ballou, Dr. J. H. Robinson, and numerous other leading spiritualists all felt that it was essential to pursue the question of Spear's use of the spirits.

In his critique of the project, Davis openly questioned whether all of the information Spear was receiving actually came from the spirits. Spear's religious nature and former ministerial profession, Davis believed, colored his writing; "his extreme beautiful simplicity—his teachable and therefore receptive nature—without the exercise of a vigilant reason and practical estimation of psychological laws—subjects him to the terrible misfortune of being easily imposed upon by his own impulses, his own desires and secret tendencies, mistaking them at least two thirds of the time for 'impressions' from higher intelligences."\(^{32}\)

Coming from a scholarly student of human psychology such a criticism would have seemed appropriate. Coming

\(^{32}\) *Telegraph Papers*, V, p. 184.
from Davis, who had himself already produced several volumes of spiritualist philosophy over the signature of Swedenborg and others, it seemed rather out of place. The charge, wrote Hewitt, was the same charge which had been levied against Davis by a wide range of "small wits." How could Davis succumb to the tactics of his own critics? Furthermore, in claiming that Spear's writings resulted in large part from self-Mesmerism, Davis was not consistent with his earlier assertion that the principles upon which the motor was built were clearly spirit-related, or with his assertion that Spear personally was "intellectually disqualified for the development of absolute science." The New Era was happy to admit that Spear had no scientific skill or training whatever, for that fact seemed to contradict the argument that the plans for the machine were the produce of self-Mesmerism. Self-Mesmerism could not elicit sound scientific principles from a man with no knowledge of science.

In part the opponents of the "New Motive Power" explained both the attempt and the subsequent failure to create a machine with any driving force as an indication that Spear was too prone to listen to unreliable spirits. Dr. J. H. Robinson, a spiritualist at least in the limited sense that he believed in the ability of mortals to commun-

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33Ibid.

34New Era, June 28, 1854.
cate with the departed, often played the role of the devil's advocate within the movement. In a lengthy letter to the *Spiritual Telegraph*, Robinson railed against the passivity of certain mediums, and his reference was obviously to Spear. To subject oneself totally to the will of spirits, Robinson insisted, was to subject oneself to a form of slavery. He personally refused to be a slave to anyone, "whether in or out of the body." How could a man be called wise, he asked, who "abandons himself blindly to the guidance of beings whose truthfulness and wisdom he had no means of knowing?" In an altogether practical vein Robinson commented, "Observation and experience have convinced me that there is no absolute safety outside of one's own common sense." Like Ballou, Robinson saw the work at High Rock as having a negative, rather than positive, effect upon efforts of universal reform:

He who aspires to be a genuine reformer is sometimes obliged to speak plainly, with one great object in viewing the best interest of that cause which he considers sacred. A thousand times better are a few words of sense from the mundane sphere, than pages of folly from an origin professedly spiritual. It is what is communicated, and not who communicates, that gives value to that which is received. The world will never be revolutionized by Spirits out of the body—that task is reserved for those in the flesh...

Let the machine stand at High Rock as a lasting

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35 *New Era*, August 9, 1854, reprinted from the *Spiritual Telegraph*.
evidence of human credulity; and let no one hereafter surrender his judgment to the dictation of beings, visible or invisible, without seeing perfectly, step by step, the practical application of a reasonable, comprehensible principle. Jesus of Nazareth has not yet made his second advent, in zinc and copper, at Lynn, not do I expect to recognize him in such 'questionable form.'

A. J. Davis was considerably less sardonic than Robinson, but the thrust of his argument in regard to Spear's use of the spirits was approximately the same: "It is with deep and deepening sorrow" he wrote, "that I recognize a species of unreasoning faith—I may say, a frightful and pernicious tendency to fanaticism among the true and faithful and teachable friends of spiritual intercourse...If spirits tell you to do this or that...follow them only when you can give the world a philosophical reason for the faith you possess." Ballou concurred. To trust indiscriminately the wisdom of angels was to court disaster. The communicating spirits might be "angels of darkness,...self-conceited, fanatical demons." No reasonable spirit, Ballou believed, would ask that earthly communicants be "completely passive, completely subservient, completely credulous and blindly obedient to his dictation." Neither would a well-intentioned spirit question "reasonable distrust of what

37 Ibid.
38 Telegraph Papers, V, p. 184.
39 New Era, Sept. 6, 1854.
While much of the criticism levied against Spear, Hewitt, and the machine was perfectly valid in that it raised fundamental questions about the nature of the spiritualist philosophy and specifically about the relation between the spirit world and the human condition, there were also certain types of criticism which appear in retrospect rather superficial. Some critics, for example, without knowing Spear personally or having conducted any extensive investigation of his claims, denounced him as a clever and conscious fraud. This was almost universally the point of view of the secular press, as might be expected. Spiritualist editors were always anxious to expose frauds and charlatans because they tended to discredit the movement as a whole. Yet in the case of Spear and the New Motive Power, not a single leading spiritualist has been found who suggested that there was intentional deception on his part. A participant in the modern spiritualist movement in both England and the United States, Emma Hardinge Britton, wrote of him, "That Mr. Spear honestly believed in a spiritual origin for the various missions he undertook none who have ever come into personal contact with him can question." A. J. Davis, even while critical

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40 Ibid.
41 See New York Tribune, Aug. 11, 1854.
42 Hardinge, Modern American Spiritualism, pp. 218.
of Spear, commented that "He is naturally a religious, spiritually-minded, plain, direct, believing, confiding, simple, honest, philanthropic man—doing good with all his guileless heart, and standing fearlessly out in unpopular reforms."  

It is significant too, that in all the publicity given to the electric motor, there is not the slightest evidence that Spear and Hewitt had any thought of using the machine for personal gain. If their claims on its behalf sounded like hucksterism, it was because they were personally enthralled by the implications of their work. Neither is there recorded evidence that they gave any thought to a patent—though granted, they never really had anything seriously to consider patenting. Their enthusiasm did not focus upon what the machine might mean to them, but what it could do for the human race. Their motivation was philanthropic, not selfish.

One aspect of the developments at High Rock, however, which was clearly offensive to large numbers of spiritualists was the manner in which a woman, who was never referred to by name but identified only as a reputable Boston medium, was involved in "imparting life" to the machine. The whole description of her undergoing symptoms of pregnancy and birth were the subject of open scorn.  

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43 Telephograph Papers, V. p. 184.
44 Hardinge, Modern American Spiritualism, p. 226.
manner, promoters of the machine repeatedly used religious symbolism to describe the process, likening the birth of the machine to the Biblical account of the virgin birth. To many, such symbolism smacked of sacrilege. Others, such as A. J. Davis, were dismayed by the implication that the people at High Rock still believed the literal Biblical account of the birth of Christ. Generally speaking, the reaction was one of distaste.45

In an attempt to exonerate itself from the charge of sacrilege and also from the charge of having used the Boston woman in a lewd manner, the New Era published an eloquent defense of the procedure by an unsigned author.46 The first contact that the woman in question had with the development of the machine occurred when spirit intelligences announced to her, early in 1854, that she was to be "the Mary of the New Dispensation." At the time, neither she nor any about her suspected that the revelation was related to the work at High Rock. Prior to this time, however, the woman had been aware of symptoms characteristic of gestation. These continued after the announcement, but she did not associate them either with the vision or with the work at High Rock. At this point Spear received notice from the spiritual world

45 *Ibid.*: Telegraph Papers, V, p. 188. In a letter to the *Spiritual Telegraph*, (Dec. 16, 1854) a prominent western New York spiritualist, Eliab Capron, wrote, "The second 'miraculous conception' has proven an abortion, and the 'motor' is a still-born child.

46 *New Era*, June 28, 1854.
that the woman was to appear at High Rock on a specific day.  

Reasoning from these facts, the writer maintained that the behavior of the woman had not been "psychologically induced" by Spear. The mind of the subject did not act "in conjunction with" other minds, but independently of them. This point was insisted upon as a rebuttal of the interpretation of the events by Davis, who had suggested that through the use of his highly magnetic personality, Spear was able to implant thoughts in the minds of others, and that the woman had come to High Rock under Spear's influence.

There is no way of ascertaining with any certainty precisely how the woman became a part of the enterprise at High Rock. Two facts are worth noting, however. First, the woman was a close friend of those engaged in the work on the machine, and while Spear may not have openly solicited her help, he undoubtedly discussed the development of the machine with her, and thus may have implanted in her mind the need to provide the machine with the life force.

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47 Ibid. The identity of the woman referred to was never revealed in print. Hardinge suggested that she was the wife of a "talented and highly-esteemed" resident of Boston (Modern American Spiritualism, p. 26). She may well have been a Mrs. Peabody, a healing medium of the city and close acquaintance of Spear.

48 New Era, June 28, 1854.
Secondly, the account in the *New Era* does not quite square with an account written by A. E. Newton between two and three years later and printed in *The Educator*.

As previously noted, Newton stated that Spear received a spiritual edict to the effect that it was essential that a woman be brought into contact with the machine in order to impart to it the "love-element" which it required. If this had, indeed, been the case, then Spear probably would have mentioned this need to a close friend who also happened to be a woman with mediumistic skills. In any event, if Spear had received a communication calling for a woman to impart female qualities to the machine, he would not have been aware of the purpose of her visit to High Rock. While the *New Era* succeeded in portraying the role of the "Mary of the New Dispensation" on a somewhat higher plane than that which critics had suggested, the precise nature of her involvement remains rather shrouded.

There were also certain inconsistencies in regard to the use of Biblical symbolism. The *New Era*, again in response to the criticism of A. J. Davis, claimed that there had been no overt attempt to pattern the development of the New Motive Power with the Biblical virgin birth, in part because the builders of the machine did not adhere to the scriptural account of the "miraculous conception." Moreover,

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since the builders of the machine followed spiritual dictates, they were not in a position to shape the events to conform either with past history or myth.  

Here again the later account of Newton is of interest. Newton openly admitted that supporters of the machine had drawn an analogy between the birth of the machine and the Biblical virgin birth, and he quoted a communication Spear had allegedly received at the time, which stated "Unto your Earth a child is born. Its name shall be called Electrical Motor. It is the offspring of mind,—of the union of mind with matter impregnated by invisible elements." Such an analogy was appropriate, he contended, because the machine was a child of the builders in the same sense, for example, that the telegraph was conceived and born in the mind of Morse, or that the steam engine was a child of Watt.  

Furthermore, considering the beliefs of the builders with regard to the potential of the machine, Newton felt it understandable that they would consider its importance to the world as an extension of the coming of Christ. Christ had ministered to the world's spiritual needs--the "New Motive Power" was destined to minister to the world's physical needs. While the New Era account responded in  

50 New Era, June 28, 1854.  
51 Spear, The Educator, p. 248.
defense against Davis's opposition to the virgin birth, Newton attempted later to reach believers in the Biblical account by showing that the analogy was not blasphemous.52

These inconsistencies do not suggest any conscious duplicity on the part of those associated with the machine, but do indicate an attempt by the supporters of Spear to justify and make palatable the undertaking to the larger body of spiritualists. Throughout the summer of 1854, the editors of the New Era could do little else. The machine showed no additional signs of life, and was increasingly held up to ridicule. Occasionally its builders received letters of support, usually anonymous, which they hastened to print. In one instance a reader sent a note saying that he had had a vision in which he saw masses of people laughing at the machine. But the machine then spawned thousands of identical machines which commenced to go about breaking up great cathedrals while the people wept. The figure of Christ then appeared upon the horizon and said to the people, "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. The long sought philosopher's stone is at length discovered and all the earth shall have a portion."53 It was the kind of letter which Spear and Hewitt savored.

52 Ibid.

53 New Era, July 5, 1854.
By late July, 1854, the new motive power still had not advanced beyond the embryonic state, and its designers had become a laughing stock. They nevertheless professed not to be discouraged. Hewitt wrote in the columns of the New Era that "We counted the cost somewhat before we began this work." "We feel," he added, the "deep satisfactions which Truth alone gives." Then apparently concluding that nothing more would transpire at High Rock, the builders disassembled the machine and transported it to Randolph, New York, where, they believed, electric conditions in the atmosphere were more conducive to the operation of the main drive wheel. Although there is no record of it, it may be assumed with a high degree of certainty that Spear received a communication ordering him to undertake the move. However, the choice of Randolph, a small town lying directly east of Jamestown, is not without reasonable earthly explanation. Thaddeus Sheldon, already referred to as a strong supporter of Spear, resided in Randolph, and Spear had previously visited him there. By moving the machine to Randolph, two things would be achieved. First, the designers would escape the close attention they had been receiving in the East and could hopefully carry out their work undistracted.

54 Ibid.

55 Spear, The Educator, p. 251; New Era, August 16, 1854; Thaddeus S. Sheldon, [undated and untitled], Sheldon Papers, Dec. 18.
Secondly, by locating in Randolph they would be close to Sheldon and his financial resources, which might be needed to make further improvements.

But the renewal of the work at Randolph had barely begun when Spear and his associates discovered that there was considerable popular resistance to spiritualist encroachment in Randolph, and that western New Yorkers were not so tolerant as the more urbane citizens of Lynn, Massachusetts. A mob of local residents "under the cover of night," as Spear reported, entered the temporary building where the machine was housed, and "tore out the heart of the mechanism, trampled [it] beneath their feet, and scattered it to the four winds."\(^56\) The destruction of the enterprise, unfortunate as it was, worked to Spear's advantage. In his letter to the *New Era*, reprinted in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, he could say, "From the hour that it...had been undertaken to introduce to...this earth a new motive power, the press and the pulpit have assailed, ridiculed, and misrepresented it, until a public sentiment has been generated which encouraged the mob to assail and destroy it."

The failure of the perpetual motion machine could be attributed to the fact that "the world has not yet arrived at a condition when it could welcome a philanthropic effort of this kind...It did not wish the effort to succeed, and

\(^{56}\) *Telegraph Papers*, V, pp. 398-399.
determined that it should not."57

By rationalizing away the failure as the responsibility of a hostile public, Spear could continue to defend the nature of the project; "...if this effort to use electricity as a motive power fails at this time," he commented, "I am persuaded that in the coming future, when man becomes more intelligent, and more fully unfolded, he will be able to command this element with great ease and with more economy than he now does steam."58

Spear's response to the destruction of the motor was typical. He used it to reinforce his confidence in his work by reasoning that public repudiation was directly proportional to the righteousness of the cause. Likening his own case to that of other reformers he admired, Spear wrote, "Garrison has been mobbed, Birney's press was thrown into the river, Lovejoy was murdered, yet anti-slavery still lives, and the oppressed shall yet be free. So shall it ever be with all truths which have been communicated to man. They are immortal and cannot be destroyed." The world, he concluded, never recognizes its benefactors, and invariably treats them badly; "but in due times, as man advances in wisdom and knowledge, they are justly appreciated and wisely honored."59

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
The pursuit of the electric motor did not end with the destruction of Spear's mechanism at Randolph. Two years later, A. E. Newton, who had joined forces with Spear and Hewitt at about the time that the machine was showing the first signs of life, noted that the work was still continuing. Although the power of the machine had never been channelled into effective use, that did not prove to its builders that the project had been of no value. Steam coming from a teapot serves no useful purpose, Newton noted, yet the principles of steam power were of tremendous scientific importance in the hands of a Watt. Likewise, the work of High Rock has shown clearly that there was an electrical force which could be drawn from the atmosphere, and all that remained was to demonstrate the manner in which that potential force could be adequately contained.  

As late as 1860, John Murray Spear still claimed to be receiving scientific treatises on the subject of electricity from the spirit world. But, as Newton had made clear, the spirit world could give the principles, but "man would have to do his part in working out the details."  

Neither Spear nor any of his associates ever came closer to working out the details than they had come in their first attempt at High Rock.

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60Spear, The Educator, p. 251.
The greatest historical value of Spear's attempt to introduce a perpetual motion machine lies in the fact that it forced spiritualists to define their conception of the movement more carefully than before. As a result, it became apparent that there were at least three schools of thought within the reform wing of the spiritualist movement.

The conservative faction, of which Adin Ballou serves as a good example, found in spiritualism proof of immortality and evidence of the growing sophistication of the human mind—and by extension, of the elevation of the human race. But although spiritualism portended human progress, it was not the means to that end. Progress, and ultimately, perfection, would result from the painstaking work of human reform, and spirits were not expected to provide direct assistance in that endeavor.

A moderate position was taken by A. J. Davis and his supporters. Moderates were strongly influenced by Davis's emphasis on the coming "Dispensation of Wisdom" and the millennial implications of that idea. They were attracted by the vision of spiritualism ushering in an age of universal harmony, and were attune to the possibility that spirit revelations might contain great truths imparted by enlightened and progressive minds of the spirit realm. But they were reluctant to grant spirits the authority to prescribe specific programs of humanitarian reform.

Spear and his supporters constituted the most radical
element of the movement. They confidently predicted the
dawn of the millennium, and relied upon spirit sages to
supply new truths. Their most distinguishing feature was
their willingness to trust implicitly what they felt were
benevolent spirit agencies proposing to direct specific
endeavors geared to the betterment of humanity.
Early in the year 1855, Thaddeus Sheldon, close friend and supporter of John Murray Spear, wrote an essay in which he attempted to analyze the root causes of the difficulties besetting the human race. His defense for such an undertaking was that as a believer in spiritualism he conceived it "quite proper to consider all practical subjects inasmuch as the true Harmonial Philosophy embraces within its ample forces all that has to do with the unfolding and developing of the physical man."\(^1\)

One of the most serious afflictions of the human race, Sheldon believed, was war. Considering the Crimean War as an example, he asserted that the source of the conflict was the despotic nature of the governments involved, governments in which the rulers "prepare the masses for the battlefield," and in which people were taught from birth to believe that "the operations of their rulers are necessary to control and keep in submission their fellow beings."\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Thaddeus Sheldon [untitled], 1855, Sheldon Papers Document 1b.

\(^2\) Ibid.
The masses submitted to this wanton exploitation, he reasoned, because eighty-five percent of the land in Europe was held by twenty-five percent of the population, resulting in the monopolization of God-given elements by a class of landlords, so much so that the masses "had come to look upon this system of distinctions as natural and just." 3

The consequence was that while those who controlled the land used the masses to fight their wars, the human race had little chance of advancing. This was so because rather than bringing progress to society, war inevitably aroused, expanded, and strengthened the lowest passions of man's nature. "When," Sheldon wondered, "will mankind as a whole look at nature as she truly is—a true, loving mother—holding out to the children on every hand unlimited, unbounded, fields of wealth? Nature does not ask for exploitation, war, great cathedrals built with tithes from the poor." These things, he contended "bring hatred, selfishness, discord—influences unfavorable to a harmonial unfolding of the intellect." Existing forms of government, Sheldon concluded, "are not in harmony with nature." 4

And yet, he was not totally despondent. He believed that in time, perhaps over several centuries, "a new form of government" would evolve, which would "embrace in its ample folds all nations." The reason for this optimism—

3Ibid. 4Ibid.
this belief that "the leaven is at work,"—stemmed primarily from an announcement by John M. Spear that seven associations had been formed in the spirit world for the specific purpose of reorganizing human life and ushering in a new dispensation of world order and harmony.\(^5\) It was through Spear that Sheldon had come to believe that the "leaven" would begin its initial work in the valley of the Kiantone Creek.

The first clear suggestion that Spear and his associates were contemplating some sort of associative scheme came in March, 1854. At that time it was announced that the Association of Governmentizers was planning a "great, radical movement" which was to "transform the governments of the world, by peaceful means." At the same time it was revealed that the Association had appointed the Massachusetts abolitionist and feminist Eliza J. Kenney its general agent. The communication was purported to have been signed by Robert Rantoul, Daniel Webster, John Quincy Adams, Martin Luther, Roger Williams, and Socrates.\(^6\)

In commenting upon the proposed work of the Association of Governmentizers, the editor of the *New Era*, S. C. Hewitt,

\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)*New Era*, March 15, 1854. It is quite possible that the *New Era* had addressed itself to the subject of social reorganization at an earlier date, but numerous issues of the periodical are missing, making it impossible to date the origin of the idea precisely.
wrote that "the curse of the race is social abuse," and that the communication from the Governmentizers indicated clearly that the goal of the spirit world was not merely "to excite, entertain, and amuse," but to effect a complete social reorganization. Such an undertaking was both necessary and desirable, he insisted, because one could easily perceive "the utter stupidity of the government...[and] the beastly habits and wretchedness of the millions who are said to be governed."  

By May, 1854, Hewitt was printing a series of articles in which he proposed the establishment of a "Circular City," which would become a "divine home on earth."  

By October, 1854, the land in the Kiantone valley which had been purchased earlier by Spear's Cleveland associates was chosen by the spirit world for the inauguration of a "Model Social State."  

According to the spiritual Association of Beneficents the site had been chosen for four reasons. It had "peculiarity favorable electrical emanations, producing a specially salubrious and spiritualizing atmosphere." Also, the soil was deemed rich in mineral and agricultural resources and the topography was "admirably adapted to orna-
mental arrangements." Finally, the waters of the tract were "highly valuable for remedial and cosmetic as well as ordinary purposes."\(^{10}\)

The cornerstone of the social enterprise proposed, as the representatives of the spirit world told Spear, rested on a series of eternal principles: 

(1) Man is immortal, 
(2) As he improves his opportunities in one life, he becomes better prepared for the lifes [sic] which are to succeed, 
(3) The interests of a single individual are inherently inwoven with the interests of all other individuals, and 
(4) The highest happiness of the individual is found in promoting the individual and collective good for others."\(^{11}\)

In their desire to see the "New Social Order" get off to a sound start, the representatives of the spirit world also offered a set of twelve principles which were to serve as the basis of association and a list of goals to which the operation was to be consecrated. The author of the twelve associative principles was identified only as a "distinguished Socialist," but since Spear later claimed to have received several communications from Francis Wright, she might well have been the source of this one, too.\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\)Ibid. 
\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 136. 
\(^{12}\)Ibid., pp. 138-139; New Era, October 14, 1854; Spiritual Telegraph, October 28, 1854.
Whatever their source, the principles given to Spear are worthy of note. In the best utopian sense, all property was to be held in common by the association, education was to be "free, thorough, equal, [and] universal," each participant was to be allowed to choose his own labor or vocation, and there were to be no "distinctions of climes, of conditions, [or] of sexes." The individual was to have "unlimited freedom," with the single qualification (but a very essential one) that while seeking his or her own good, he was to seek the good of the associated whole. Misconduct was to be dealt with verbally, there being no penal enactments or corporal punishment. Each member was to be granted the right to "individual opinion, worship, observance or speech," and each member was to be allowed to withdraw at will.13

For the most part, the goals to which the association was to be consecrated repeated the principles upon which it was to be based. There were, however, some interesting additions. For example, the enterprise was consecrated to all "New Inventions, and to the encouragement of Inventors when they most require assistance." Emphasis was placed, too, upon the need for the association to serve as a shelter for the outcast, oppressed and homeless, and to aid the diseased, the lame, and the "disharmonized." And, of course,

13Ibid.
it was consecrated "to a full and perfect Union of the Earth-Life with the Spirit-Life, so that the twain may be truly one in thought, in purpose, and in act."\textsuperscript{14}

Such were the lofty ideals upon which the community at Kiantone Springs was to be founded. As enthusiastic as were Spear and the editors of the \textit{New Era}, their enthusiasm was not shared by the whole of the spiritualist community. The \textit{Spiritual Telegraph} willingly printed the spirit world edicts, but refused to endorse the enterprise, stating that it would withhold judgment "as to the policy or propriety of such a movement in the present incipient stage of the spiritual unfolding, or as to the probable degree of success that will attend it." Still concerned over the destruction of Spear's and Hewitt's perpetual motion machine, however, the \textit{Telegraph} asked "that these good brethren and their spirit-guides...be left to work out their idea without obstruction or unkind criticism from those who may feel that their own particular 'mission' does not lie in that direction."\textsuperscript{15}

But while the editors of the \textit{Spiritual Telegraph} proclaimed their intention of withholding judgment, they had already devoted most of the front page of the \textit{Telegraph} of October 14 to an attack upon the proposed communal experi-

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Spiritual Telegraph}, October 28, 1854.
ment by Doctor J. H. Robinson, who had earlier taken a sharp knife to the "New Motive Power." In this instance Robinson was more restrained, but nonetheless telling in his attack. He was particularly concerned with an item printed in the *New Era* of September 13. In that issue of the paper S. C. Hewitt had taken the liberty to voice some of his own reasons (i.e. independent of spirit world direction) for the formation of a central institution, and among them were the need to make available "more abundant opportunities for the witnessing of spirit manifestations" to the public, the need for a locale in which to develop more capable mediums "for the transmission of elevated philosophy and practical wisdom," and a need for "a common home, or center of social interests and attractions, where congenial associations can always be enjoyed by mediums."16

Robinson found Hewitt's ideas out of tune with the larger goals of the community, namely to assist the homeless and the outcasts. Why establish a community of mediums, he asked, if the goal is to help the oppressed? Most spiritualists, he reasoned, already had homes, jobs, wholesome food, and decent clothing, while there were "scores of ragged, degraded, suffering children in the streets who have none of these blessings." The principles of "truth and justice and progress," Robinson asserted, "are better

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16 *New Era*, September 13, 1854, cited in *Spiritual Telegraph*, October 14, 1854.
subserved by giving homes to such unfortunates, than to a few persons who are not greatly wanting in the things of this world.\textsuperscript{17}

Robinson's criticism was almost prophetic. In spite of all its protestations, the Kiantone community never advanced far beyond serving as a commune for practicing spiritualists. The design of its buildings, for example, was based not upon a desire to furnish simple, efficient housing for needy people who come to Kiantone, but reflected, instead, the desire of the spirit world to erect structures which would contribute to the development and expansion of the human mind.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, the community came to consist of ten oval and octagonal houses, some approximately ten by fourteen feet, others eighteen by thirty, as well as a larger house which was known as the "Castle" and reserved to the "Communicator," Spear.\textsuperscript{19}

Since man was the "true model," the buildings, like the machine which Spear and Hewitt had constructed earlier, theoretically were to be designed to correspond to the human body. The central part, or body of the structure,\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17}Spiritual Telegraph, October 14, 1854.
\textsuperscript{18}Spear, The Educator, pp. 342-350.
\textsuperscript{19}Oliver F. Chase, "The Kiantone Movement," in Centennial History of Chautauqua County (Jamestown, N. Y., Chautauqua History Co., 1904) II, pp. 827-830; William S. Bailey, private interview with Mark Cheney, February, 1924, notes in the Sheldon Papers.
\textsuperscript{20}Reference here is to a model suggested by (cont'd)
presented a "double swelled front, with a wing at either side,—the center being surmounted by a large dome." Considering that the dome represented the human head, the lower part of the structure could be roughly construed to represent the human body, "seated upon the ground, with arms hanging closely by the sides." Within the buildings were to be a number of oval-shaped rooms which were also representative of the human form, "the dining-room of the stomach, the worship-room to the heart (the inmost and most vital of all the organs), the mother's private room to the liver (the grand secretory organ), the sitting-room and sleeping rooms to the lungs." The dome corresponded, as one might expect, to the brain, and was designed "for study, observation, recreation, etc." Not more than one of the buildings at Kiantone appears to have come close to the description given through the spirit world. All the buildings, however, were round, octagonal, or oval-shaped with domes.

Certainly a unique element in the architecture at Kiantone was the attempt to make the dwellings advantageous to spiritual receptivity. The rooms were painted in pastel colors, and sharp angles were eliminated because

(cont'd) edict from the spirit world. Buildings at Kiantone followed this general pattern but were less elaborate.

they conveyed a mood of tension that it was felt made both humans and their spirit world associates uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{22}

There seems good reason to believe, too, that at least one of the buildings at Kiantone was constructed on a foundation of long, heavy glass bottles, which allowed the building to be rotated at will, presumably to enhance receptivity with the spirits.\textsuperscript{23}

Like many of the ideas which Spear claimed originated with spirit advisors, however, the architectural forms which appeared at Kiantone were not wholly novel, but rather constituted variations on an already existing theme. Between 1850 and 1854, the famous phrenologist, Lorenzo Fowler, built a mammoth, four-story, domed, octagonal home for himself and published a book describing the functional merits of octagonal buildings. In addition, he printed his architectural theories in his publication, the \textit{American Phrenological Journal}. It seems certain that Spear


\textsuperscript{23}Ernest M. Miller, private interview with Gerald G. Staples, January 13, 1949, notes in the Sheldon Papers. The account of the glass bottles, which had circulated among residents of the area for a number of years was confirmed by Staples, who in 1920 took possession of the land in Pennsylvania which lay just across the state line from several of the buildings constructed by the residents of Kiantone. A search for the bottles, conducted by Staples and others, was unsuccessful. A farmer of the area thought that there were some remaining in his barn, but none were found.
and Hewitt were familiar with Fowler's theories. They may even have visited his mansion, which was located along the Hudson River in New York State and attracted a great many tourists.24

It was in the small, domed buildings along the Kiantone Creek that Spear and a small band of followers, probably never more than thirty in number, gathered to usher in a "New Dispensation." There they contemplated the evil of government and consulted the spirits on the course by which government might ultimately be eliminated. The communications received by Spear through the Association of Governmentizers contained a strong emphasis upon natural rights coupled with the philosophy of perfectionism. Conceding that man in his present state was incapable of living without a government, such government needed to be constructed according to the conditions and wants of man. If governed in such a manner as to allow the greatest possible degree of individual freedom, man would advance in wisdom and knowledge, needing increasingly less external government. Ultimately, "in a highly advanced condition," man would come to "disregard and lose sight of all external governmental institutions, establishing a system of self-government." In such a state, the Governmentizers contended, man would enjoy "a freedom and independence which cannot be comprehended by

24Davies, Phrenology: Fad and Science, pp. 115-117.
persons in lower planes of development." In that condition, also, man would become "his own administrator...,his own king or president." In what was, in effect, to constitute a return to Rousseau's natural state, man would become "an individual, an independent being, able, governmentally, to take care of himself." 

Ideally, the Kiantone Community was to serve as a social laboratory in which the principles of government, as suggested by the Association of Governmentizers, could be put into effect. But certainly in its first years the nature of the community was such that it could in no way serve that purpose. In the first place, it lacked sufficient numbers of justify being considered a microcosm of the larger society. Principles of government which may work for a group of twenty or thirty people will not necessarily work for the whole of the human race. Second, the participants in the Kiantone experiment were all of like mind, and did not represent a cross-section of society any more, for example, than did the participants of Brook Farm, and such being the case, any attempt to argue that their community could possibly serve as a testing ground for the governmental theory of the spirit world must be considered erroneous.

Furthermore, even though (in stating the principles

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and purposes for which the colony was established) the Governmentizers had stressed the importance of serving the downtrodden of society, other spiritual discourses stressed to Spear the importance of initially establishing the community with as high a degree of uniformity as possible. In a series of communications on the subject of group life Spear received the following:

Unless...a judicious selection be made at the first, and all the framework be wisely arranged, the whole enterprise, sooner or later, will crumble to pieces. Admitting to the new colony all applicants at the outset, what do you have? The lazy, lame, blind, weak, malformed, stub­born, and uncultured. These are like so many weights hung upon the shoulders of a new-born infant, and it cannot grow. Hence ordinary attempts at communism have been a blunder. Whoever expects that persons, coming together indiscriminately, from society as it is, without previous preparation, can work and act harmoniously, to say the least, must be quite uninformed in respect to social laws.26

In yet another way the Kiantone community was untrue to its goal of mirroring the larger society. Unlike members of the communitarian societies of religious origin, participants in the Kiantone community felt no sense of total commitment to the community. For the most part they went their various ways when the cold weather made survival difficult. Until the year 1858, only one family could be considered permanent residents of the community. Most of the participants were people of at least moderate means,

26 Ibid., p. 133.
and consequently felt no great pressure to make the community self-sufficient. The only real incentive to produce an income from the land came from the spiritual Association of Agriculturalizers, which indicated that the community was to serve as the proving ground for a socialistic type of agricultural enterprise. Members of the community did cultivate strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries as cash crops, and at one point osier willows were imported from England with the hope of establishing a basket-weaving enterprise. Many of the willows planted by the Kiantone participants are still standing. The idea of a basket-weaving enterprise probably came from Thaddeus Sheldon, in whose papers was found a pamphlet describing the means of procuring, planting, cultivating, and binding the osier basket willow.

The Associated Spirit World, as indicated through its communications to Spear, was also much interested in redeveloping the concept of education. In his philosophy of education, Spear found much in common with contemporary educational reformers such as Bronson Alcott and Robert and Robert Dale Owen. Alcott founded the Temple School where he trained the children of the Boston intellectual elite

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27 Ibid., p. 366.
between 1834 and 1836. The Owens were responsible for the theory upon which education was based at New Lanark, Scotland, and later at New Harmony, Indiana.

Like Alcott, Spear was concerned with the development of the mind by a process of self-awareness through self-examination. The purpose of education, and more generally, of human culture, Alcott reasoned, was to enable man to realize "the true Idea of his Being," and in doing so to open the way for the "growth, renewal, and perfection of his Spirit." In Spear's philosophy the same idea was expressed as "an unfolding of the interior," which was the inner being—that part of the individual which emanated from the divine being, God. The source of all understanding lay in eternal principles which originated with the divine being, and which could be grasped, not by the use of reason, but by intuition—or "interior consciousness"—alone.

The function of education, then, lay in creating an environment in which the intuitive understanding of eternal principles would be encouraged. In Spear's thinking, this could be accomplished by an approach best described as investigative learning. He called for the use of laboratory


31 Newton, ed., The Educator, pp. 300-301.
techniques, even for the very young, and suggested that school children should be taken on frequent trips in order to introduce them to nature "in its primal conditions." They were to be allowed to experiment in the cultivation of the soil, and to observe the behavior of the animal world.\textsuperscript{32}

Spear believed, too, that the human body should be the basis of thorough investigation— that "the human structure should be discoursed of, until the relations which naturally exist between the sexes shall be thoroughly understood."\textsuperscript{33} From such an understanding "there would come to be a divine familiarity, a true control of all the faculties, and a balance of all the powers." After being brought into natural and harmonious relations with their environment and with each other, students would branch out into whichever discipline they found most appealing.\textsuperscript{34}

As was the case with the spiritual philosophy of government, the Kiantone community was neither large enough nor stable enough to put into effect the radical ideas of its participants with regard to education. Spear was, however, a close friend of Doctor O. W. Wellington (also a spiritualist) who established a progressive school in


\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, Newton, ed., \textit{The Educator}, p. 335.
Jamestown, New York, at about the same time Spear was organizing the Kiantone community. Spear and Wellington were in general agreement regarding the proper approach to education, and Spear and others at Kiantone undoubtedly worked in conjunction with Wellington. Perhaps some of the children at Kiantone attended the school.

At Wellington's school such students were encouraged to develop their powers of communication by engaging in lengthy discussions with one another and with instructors. An observer of the school wrote, "We saw mere children, ten or twelve years old, who would engage earnestly in conversations...[on] principles of science, often confronting the opinions of adults, and even the assistant teachers, and sometimes successfully."\(^{35}\)

The moral sense of the students at Wellington's school was developed "by the entire absence of specific rules and of all forms of reward and punishment." Students were encouraged to establish goals for themselves, and if they failed to achieve the goals were encouraged to continue working, but were never induced to work by offers of reward or threat of punishment.\(^{36}\) This practice followed closely


\(^{36}\)This principle is in the same radical vein as mid-twentieth century proposals for non-structured, (cont'd)
the thinking of Robert Dale Owen, who forbade "all rewards and punishments" whatever, at the New Lanark school. Punishment was seen as "debasing the character and destroying the energies" of the student, while rewards generated pride and encouraged "inordinate ambition." Owen saw the only legitimate rewards and punishments as inherent in nature. Right behavior would increase the happiness of the individual and the community, and would thus provide its own reward. Misbehavior would diminish the happiness of both, hence the student would naturally tend toward acceptable behavior.37

Wellington's approach to the study of agriculture was also noteworthy. Each pupil was provided with a small garden plot, where he could sow the kinds of seeds which would be found on a typical farm.38 Yet highly praised as the school was, it did not last more than five or six years. Wellington's health deteriorated in 1859 and he returned permanently to New York City. The fact that the yearly fee for attending the school was one hundred sixty dollars (including room and board) may also have been

(cont'd) none-graded curricula, which also stressed the avoidance of artificial learning incentives.


38 Brown, Jamestown, N. Y. Schools, pp. 26-27.
prohibitive to most people of the immediate area.\textsuperscript{39}

The mission of education upon earth, Bronson Alcott theorized, was to enable humanity to "reappear in the consciousness of Physical Purity, Inspired Genius, and Spotless Holiness," to the extent that "Man shall be one with God."\textsuperscript{40} For Robert Owen, the chief function of education was to produce rational human beings, and in the process, to "prepare the world for the long-promised millennium."\textsuperscript{41}

In the final analysis, Spear and Wellington, like Alcott and the Owens, were attempting to use the school as a microcosm of society, with the intent of producing individuals who would then reform and perfect the whole of the human race. These ideas represent clear expressions of perfectionist millennialism. But this type of millennialism needs to be clearly distinguished from the millennialism of certain fundamental religious groups. The latter envisioned the imminent physical return of Christ to the earth, an event which was to be accompanied by the destruction of the wicked and the beginning of a thousand-year reign of Christ. The theology which teaches this doctrine is termed pre-

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40}Alcott, \textit{Essays on Education}, pp. 54-55.
\end{flushright}
millennialism, indicating the return of Christ prior to the beginning of the millennium. Most of the millennial thought which is associated with the theory of universal reform is of the post-millennial variety, and as such envisions the appearance of Christ after a millennium of peace and harmony has taken place. For post-millennialists the most significant expression of God's omnipotence rested not in his impending physical return, but in his perfecting of humanity, the completion of which would usher in the millennium. A whole range of reformers came to view their efforts not merely as humanly-inspired reform, but as part of God's grand design to perfect humanity.  

In his desire to make the community serve as a microcosm of society, Spear believed that Kiantone would be the seed which would produce transformation of the whole of society. It was, of course, a very grandiose dream. As a general rule Spear and his followers spent much of their time attempting to drum up interest and support for their enterprise. This was undoubtedly necessary, but it had a negative effect upon the community because it meant that the number of people actually attempting to make the community a viable social structure was always small.

42 For a detailed analysis of the various forms of millennialism see Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 221-222, 225-237 passim., Cross, The Burned-Over District, pp. 32, 287, 297-298, and Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven [Cont'd]
Between 1854 and 1856, for example, Spear spent a considerable amount of time traveling from place to place meeting with fellow spiritualists and commissioning people to the work of human regeneration. In June of 1854 (while Hewitt and Newton were in Boston attempting to defend his "New Motive Power") he traveled west to St. Louis, where he named the Fourierist spiritualist Warren Chase to be the General Agent of the Association of Elementizers. Later in the same month Spear found his path directed back to the East and specifically to Hopedale (Adin Ballou's community) where he commissioned Hopedale communitarian Angelina Munn as General Agent of the Association of Educationizers. Among that association's spirit advisors were Miss Munn's father and former editor of the Spirit Messenger, Apollos Munn, and Adin Augustus Ballou, the son of Adin Ballou, who was planning to open a school at Hopedale when he died unexpectedly. 43

The procedure by which Spear consecrated people to his work was dramatic and impressive. The commissioning of Mrs. Semantha Mettler, of Hartford, Connecticut, was reported in full detail in the New Era. Spear, it was reported, had gone to Hartford on an impulse from the spirit world, not


43 Newton, ed., The Educator, pp. 259, 297.
knowing for what specific purpose. Upon his arrival, friends arranged a public forum for him, and Spear gave his usual address, recounting the manner in which he had been directed to abandon friends, social status, and security, and to devote the remainder of his life to the reforming of the world through the aid of beneficent spirits. The speech concluded with an explanation of the General Assembly (in the spirit world) and the role to which it had assigned Spear.

Following the speech, Spear passed "into the superior state," and singling out Mrs. Mettler, enunciated the following:

How fondly, how constantly, how widely is this one beloved! How beautiful is the influence this woman exerts! Wherever she is she attracts! In this particular she possesses a most remarkable character. Her friends know no bounds to their affections for this one; and there is nothing which they would leave undone to gratify her. There passes from this woman a very marked influence. It is not precisely the religious influence; it is not precisely the moral influence; it is not precisely the practical influence; but it is, so to speak, a compost of all; and these are charmingly intermingled, imparting a most adhesive influence.

This medium has been commissioned to wisely instruct this woman for a high purpose. There is before this woman a new and beautiful labor. At ten o'clock tomorrow the purpose of his mission to this place will be unfolded. Let this woman be in the region of the tranquilities at that hour.

Then, at the appointed hour, Spear, on bended knee pronounced the following words:
Father of Fathers, and Deity of Deities; Thy wills be done on the earths, as they are done in the heaven of heavens. This fondly loved one shall be consecrated to the charities. Thou shalt henceforth be called Charity.

Receive not this blessed power. [Here Mrs. Mettler's hand was closed and breathed upon, after which Spear said] This hand shall be unfolded to dispense blessings...It is done.\(^4^4\)

Ceremonies such as the consecration of Mrs. Mettler were generally deemed to be of great spiritual import, and were often recorded in the spiritual journals. One senses in Spear an extremely forceful, dynamic, almost charismatic personality. The recipients of his attention almost invariably felt "something akin to the passionate emotions of a great revival season."\(^4^5\) It is obvious that he developed a technique which could be calculated to be extremely effective. Arriving in the community unannounced, claiming in all sincerity to have been sent there by guiding spirits, playing upon the sympathy of the audience with a detailed account of his own "conversion," Spear laid thorough groundwork before lapsing into a trance state and singling out people to be consecrated. For anyone who believed in spiritualism it would be extremely difficult to reject such a consecration.

Like evangelists of the traditional sense, Spear found

\(^4^4\)Hardinge, Modern American Spiritualism, pp. 219-220, citing New Era; Spiritual Telegraph, February 19, 1853.
\(^4^5\)Hardinge, Modern American Spiritualism, p. 219.
that many of his "converts" did not retain their zeal. Of
the seven people chosen as earthly representatives of the
spirit world associations, only three became actively
associated with Spear's movement. For at least a few,
however, the commissioning experience created real emotional
trauma. One such individual was Thomas Richmond, a Chicago
spiritualist and friend of N. P. Talmadge, one of the more
prominent converts to the faith.

Richmond had first
encountered Spear in June of 1857 when he (Richmond) made a
trip to the East for treatment of a physical ailment. Led
partly by curiosity and partly by his "desire to criticize
Mr. Spear and his teachings," Richmond called upon him
personally. He was immediately impressed by Spear, he wrote
later, because "upon shaking hands at the introduction... he
delineated my character very perfectly." Richmond went
on to Vermont, but returned to Boston in September, at
which time "he [Spear] made a personal address, consecrated
me, and gave me a name, as I learned he was accustomed to do
to such as the Spirits saw they could make able instruments
in working out their plans upon earth." 47

Richmond was deeply impressed both because Spear seemed

46 Talmadge had served as United States Senator from
the state and also as territorial governor of Wisconsin.

47 Richmond to N. P. Talmadge, Nov. 14, 1858, Sheldon
Papers, Document 11.
to know so much of his past, and because of "the beneficent design" of Spear's philosophy. In the last months of 1857 no fewer than five of Spear's entourage assembled at Richmond's home in Chicago, all by "spirit direction."

While there, Spear received about thirty papers mainly addressed to Richmond and dealing with the duty and importance of the mission to which Spear had consecrated him. In November, 1858, Spear returned again and delivered some twenty additional papers dealing with the same subject, though the specific purpose of that visit was to minister to Richmond's son who was ailing with an affliction of some sort.48

The problem which plagued Richmond as a result of these experiences was a very real one. Either, he concluded, "the whole pretension or claim to spirit intercourse is a most profound humbug, fraud, falsity, or... the teaching of John M. Spear, intelligently, philosophically, scientifically, and practically, is far above any and all others in these directions."49

A month later Richmond wrote directly to Spear at Kiantone:

I have been questioning myself closely of late to see if I am all that is required of me. To see if I am purposed to suffer, to sacrifice, to become if need be a martyr for truth, for principle. The old Bible says 'the heart of man is deceitful

48Ibid.  
49Ibid.
above all things and desperately wicked.' Has not
my heart deceived me?...I think I am ready for the
services of the spirit world. Perhaps I am not...
Who shall say to me this and this alone is truth
and wisdom? Who shall be to me the star in the
East...Spirit communication leading in one direc-
tion and God's providence in another...How shall
I know which is, and what is truth...What is the
instrument I am to use to discern the true or the
false?...I know of no other than to look within
myself, use the wisdom God has given me, and abide
the result.50

Richmond apparently decided that truth lay outside the
teachings of John M. Spear, at least there is no further
record of his support of Spear's endeavors, either in person
or with his financial resources.

Traveling about the country in search of converts was
not the only way in which Spear sought to obtain support for
his fledgling community. He also remained active within the
larger body of spiritualists, particularly in the Boston
area. In the summer of 1854, when the Kiantone experiment
was still in the planning stages and the battle over the
"New Motive Power" was at its peak, both Spear and his
daughter Saphronia Spear Butler retained positions on the
business committee which regulated the proceedings of the
meetings of the spiritualists of Massachusetts. Also on
the five-member committee were Rufus Elmer, who generally
supported Spear, and Andrew Jackson Davis, who by now
clearly did not. Some of the questions which the committee

50 Richmond to Spear, Dec. 13, 1858, Sheldon Papers,
posed for the convention to deal with clearly bear Spear's stamp. "Are associations formed in the Spirit-world?" was one of the subjects, and if so, "what relation do they have to the condition and needs of the inhabitants of the earth?"

Another question posed was "what measures...can this Convention adopt for the more perfect unfolding of the new era?" Such subjects undoubtedly paved the way for Spear to expound upon the spiritual General Assembly and its designs for the world.

The resolutions which were adopted as the sense of the convention, while not repudiating Spear's activities, nevertheless took a middle ground, expressing beliefs which almost all spiritualists could endorse. It was resolved, for example, that "the great, leading object of the Spiritual Movement is not amusement or excitement, but rather the radical reform and permanent well-being of the whole human race." In this same vein, the convention resolved its sympathy for all the reform movements of the age (including social reorganization) and asserted that "all these reforms...come legitimately within the range of the Spiritualist Movement, are embraced in the objects it has in view, and will be finally most effectually accomplished by its instrumentalities."

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51 Telegraph Papers, V (May to Aug., 1854), pp. 243-245.
52 Ibid.
In a resolution which sounds very much like Spear's writing and thinking, it was admitted that the work of the movement might be considered initially "destructive," but that the "constructive element of Spiritualism...teaches us that while it may be necessary to tear down the old, our great work is, after all, to build up—to construct a new world of thought, of feeling, and of life."\(^{53}\) Such a statement may, of course, be seen as a defense of both the "New Motive Power" and the Kiantone community and as an expression of the convention's support for those measures.

Another resolution, however, reflected the thinking of Davis in that it repeated a point which he had already emphasized in his criticism of the activity at High Rock: "The only standard which the human race has ever had, or now has, by which to test the divineness or value of inspired or spiritual communications, is its own intuitive perceptions as to what is worthy of God and useful to man." Here was a very clear cautionary note, insofar as radical schemes and proposals from the spirit world were concerned.\(^{54}\)

As its final order of business, the convention chose thirteen persons to compose a State Central Committee for the following year. Among those chosen were Spear and his daughter, S. C. Hewitt, Dr. H. F. Gardner (who was closely linked with the New Era), and Eliza J. Kenny, the general

\(^{53}\text{Ibid.}\) \(^{54}\text{Ibid.}\)
agent for Spear's Association of Governmentizers. Five of
the members, then, were directly allied with the Spear
enterprises, and at least two others, Rufus Elmer and
Charles Buffum were in close sympathy with him.55

Another round of meetings was held in Boston in
October, 1854. The sponsor was a committee of five Boston
spiritualists, among them Eliza Kenny, Saphronia Spear
Butler, A. E. Newton, and John Orvis, all, of course,
associates of Spear.56 Spear himself did not attend the
meetings (he was either at Kiantone or on the road), but
his supporters dominated them and clearly seized the oppor-
tunity to perpetuate Spear's philosophy.

With Kenny, Hewitt, Newton, Orvis, and Gardner all
holding positions of authority at the meetings, the outcome
was such as might have been expected. The purpose of the
spiritual movement, it was stated, was to institute
"practical measures for the physical, social and spiritual
elevation and progress of humanity," the culmination of
which was to be "the inauguration of the kingdom of Heaven
on earth."57 Though they did not do so by name, the Boston
spiritualists lent their support to Spear's Kiantone move-
ment in a resolution which stated that "we recognize the

55 Ibid.
56 Spiritual Telegraph, Sept. 23, 1854.
57 Ibid.
principle of co-operative effort, as the basis of all true progress, and as being sanctioned by the wise communications from the Spirit-world..." The resolution went on to recommend "the formation of a co-operative association with such rules and regulations as shall best secure the end proposed...to wit: a Unitary Home--attractive, social life, living at cost, spiritual manifestations free from charge, the publications of books, papers, and tracts at the lowest cost."\(^{58}\) Here again, Spear's supporters were obviously dominant.

In 1857, operating from his Kiantone base in western New York, Spear participated in a conference in Buffalo which was sponsored by spiritualists but was designed to deal with moral, religious, and social, as well as purely spiritual issues. The subject of associative movements was not on the agenda, but since Spear and a number of his supporters were there, the Kiantone movement undoubtedly received a considerable amount of attention.

One of the most interesting points with regard to the Buffalo conference was the slate of speakers. Even though the locale of the conference was the "burned-over district," and many from that area were probably in attendance, only one of the principal speakers was from that area (unless one chooses to consider Spear and his followers products of

\(^{58}\text{Ibid.}\)
the "burned-over district" by virtue of their establishing the community of Kiantone). This is significant because in his account of the spiritualist movement Whitney Cross found that in western New York the popular, spirit-rapping type of spiritualism was much more prominent than was the intellectually oriented phase of the movement. The rostrum of speakers at the Buffalo conference tends to verify Cross's findings and to suggest that intellectual leadership of the movement came primarily from areas outside the "burned-over district."  

Included among the subjects for discussion at the Buffalo Conference were the usual intellectual spiritualist concerns and also such questions as "Has woman a just claim to equality?", "How can harmony of the sexes be best secured?", "What constitutes a thorough education?", and "What is the relation of agriculture to the rearing of fine animals and the cultivation of soils?" Addressing themselves to these subjects were Spear, John Allen (the former Brook Farm Fourierist and Swedenborgian lecturer), John M. Sterling and Mrs. Caroline Lewis (Cleveland spiritualists and participants at Kiantone), S. C. Hewitt, and Eliza J. Kenny. Daniel Gano, a Cincinnati spiritualist who was interested in animal husbandry, was a speaker, as were

60 Cross, The Burned-Over District, pp. 345-349.
Thaddeus Sheldon and Henry C. Wright, the Boston abolitionist who had been attracted to spiritualism by La Roy Sunderland. Meetings such as the Buffalo Conference prove conclusively that the reform wing of the spiritualist movement deserves a legitimate place in the annals of mid-nineteenth century American reform. 61

The Buffalo Conference appears to have gone smoothly, with a minimum of friction among the participants. But a frequent problem at such gatherings stemmed from Spear's insistence upon expounding the virtues of reform endeavors which were peculiar to his own spirit counselors. Spiritualists could agree with one another as long as they limited themselves to proclaiming a new and better day, or restated what they considered to be the general benefits of spiritualism for humanity. When an individual like Spear, however, attempted to explain the specific ways in which guiding spirits sought to improve humanity, problems arose. This was particularly true when the proposals did not conform to a simple test of reason. Unlike Spear, most spiritualists resolved conflicts between reason and spirit direction by adhering to their own better judgment. When opposition to his schemes was voiced, Spear was inclined to become impatient and defensive.

The spiritualists with whom Spear was most comfortable referred to themselves as "practical spiritualists." They used the term to distinguish themselves as believers in the principle of direct spirit guidance in the area of social reform. In late May, 1857, a group of these individuals, most of them from Boston, held a three-day conference at Mechanics' Hall in New York City. The purpose of the conference was to discuss "aspects and questions of practical Spiritualism."^62

Most of the speeches were devoted to a discussion of the types of changes which spiritualism sought to encourage within society. Mrs. Eliza Farnum, the former matron of the New York State prison at Sing Sing, contended that through the aid of benevolent spirits womankind would become "so pure, so holy, that evil can find no place in her bosom." In her condition of purity woman would be able to exert a regenerative influence upon man. Caroline Hinckley added that in time the marital relationship would no longer be based upon "the mere desire to gratify the lower propensities." On a related subject, Thaddeus Sheldon proposed that an extensive study be undertaken to determine the conditions under which the most healthy children are produced, as well as the type of environment in which children are most likely to develop their mental abilities. "Spiritual-

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ism," he reminded his listeners, "comes...to so develop man, [and to] so purify him, so enlarge his powers, that he shall understand that he is an immortal being."\textsuperscript{63}

S. C. Hewitt addressed the body on his two favorite subjects, spiritualist architecture and the perpetual motion machine. He brought with him a small model of the machine, the earliest form of which had been introduced in 1854. Ultimately, Hewitt claimed, spirit advisors would direct the construction of a device which would retain information and dispense it upon human command. The Kiantone community was also considered, as was the spiritual philosophy of government. Sheldon spoke of "the labors of an agricultural character" which were being undertaken at Kiantone, and Eliza Kenny described "the dying remains of the Republic of the United States," which, she claimed, "has failed to achieve the objects for which it was framed, has lost its vitality, is superannuated, and never did rest upon a basis broad enough to secure to...every person his...inalienable rights." The "divine government" which was to be implemented, she claimed, would be "a theocracy, recognizing only those fundamental principles which exist in the nature of things, and which are implanted by God in the nature of every man and every woman."\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{63}The Spiritual Age, June 13, 1857.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid.
Although the conference attracted about one hundred persons, Spear and his Boston supporters felt that the New York spiritualist press was guilty of attempting to sabotage the proceedings. Spear told the assembly that he had expected to see the leading spiritualists of New York City and the editors of the spiritualist press giving their support to the convention. But instead he saw only a reporter from the New York Herald. "Let the spiritualist papers go where they please," Spear determined; "we can get along without their aid."\(^{65}\)

There was some validity in Spear's charges. The Spiritual Telegraph neglected the conference completely. The Spiritual Age sent a reporter (whom Spear failed to notice), but its editor, S. B. Brittan, attended only the Sunday session. His absence on Saturday and Monday, he explained to his readers, was due to his responsibilities in preparing the Age for publication. His associate editor, Brittan said, had just been married and could not attend for that reason. The Age had published a notice of the conference, but failed to mention the names of the organizers. This, too, offended Spear and his supporters, who saw in the failure a conscious attempt to play down the importance of the conference. If there was, in fact, intentional neglect, Brittan would not acknowledge it. He

\(^{65}\)Ibid.
was personally acquainted with Hewitt and Sheldon, he responded, and respected "their intelligence and moral worth." He had for some time admired Spear as "an eminently good man..., a fearless and self-sacrificing reformer." 66

The frustration that Spear and his supporters experienced stemmed from their deep-seated conviction that they had invaluable information to impart, and were encountering a society which could not listen. Not only the general public, but the conservative New York spiritualists as well, seemed uninterested. John Orvis spoke specifically to the problem in the final session of the conference:

We believe in the Spirit-world,—that it contains at least as much wisdom as our world...The fact that Jesus taught the doctrine of the sentiment of love has inspired the whole Christian world to endeavor to spread...its benefits to all the world. We then answer that the object of Spiritualism is to introduce a divine society upon the earth. Persons in the spirit-life are organized and cooperative bodies. Each association has a distinctive purpose. Man has a three-fold destiny—a spiritual, a material, and an intellectual destiny to fulfill on this planet...Where are our friends Horace Greeley, George Ripley, Charles A. Dana, and Park [sic, Parke] Godwin? They are nowhere. 67

Although benevolent spirit agencies had endorsed the formation of the Kiantone community in 1854, few of the project's supporters took the directive seriously enough to move permanently to the chosen site. In part, as has been suggested, this was because Spear and his supporters felt

66 Ibid. 67 Ibid.
the need to travel about lecturing and soliciting support for the project. But the pattern also is indicative of Spear's inability to devote himself exclusively to one enterprise for an extended period of time.

In 1855, for example, when one would have expected him to have been working diligently to make Kiantone a viable, self-sufficient community, he instead joined Thaddeus Sheldon and John Orvis in traveling to St. Louis and then as far south as New Orleans, "collecting statistical and other information relating to the production, cost, and transmission, of various commodities." The purpose of their activity was to lay the groundwork for a cooperative commercial scheme which Spear called a system of "Equitable Exchange." Returning to Boston, he, together with Orvis and Sheldon, organized what they named "The New England Association of Philanthropic Commercialists." The main intent of the group was to cut the cost of commodities by eliminating the middle man. In the winter of 1855-1856 the group experimented with a similar operation described as the "Boston House of Equity." The scheme failed, but was, they maintained, "confirmatory...of the wisdom and practicability" of the principles upon which it was based. 68

In early 1857, the attraction of Boston again lured Spear away from Kiantone, this time to organize a Committee

of Arrangements on Behalf of Human Progress, which held meetings on a number of subjects ranging from the institution of marriage to the importance of individual versus collective rights. In August of the same year, Spear announced that for a "short season" he would be available in Boston "for the examination and counsel of diseased and disharmonized persons, for delineations of character, and for other beneficent labors."70

Still later in the year, Spear left with his recently acquired amanuensis (recording secretary), Caroline Hinckley, for the city of Chicago where he spent two weeks in the "elegant mansion" of "one of the ablest merchants of the west." The merchant was Thomas Richmond, who earlier had been commissioned "Apostle of Commerce." Spear's purpose was to convince Richmond and other businessmen to supply the cash needed to organize a cooperative system of trade which would supply New England with the wheat of the West and would make readily available in the West the manufactured products of New England.71 In spite of Spear's claim of spirit guidance in devising the plan, none of the businessmen to whom it was proposed were persuaded to subsidize it.

70 Ibid., August 8, 1857.
71 Spiritual Age, letter from John M. Spear, Feb. 13, 1858.
At the height of Spear's comings and goings between 1854 and 1858, tragedy struck in the form of the death of his daughter Saphronia. The relationship between father and daughter had been extremely close. Saphronia was Spear's first child, and like him, had become a medium and an ardent believer in the beneficence of the spirit world. Still in her early twenties at the time, she had been faithful to him throughout the ridicule which accompanied his pursuit of the New Motive Power, and had insisted that he continue his healing practice even when it absolutely failed to provide steady support for the family.

The nature of Saphronia's death and burial are truly fascinating as expressions of the spiritualist faith. Spear was in the West when the message came to return home. Soon after arriving he found Saphronia growing weak as she spoke her last words to her mother and brothers and sisters. As her father approached, she smiled and said merely, "I have many things, dear father, to say, but I am weary. To you I can say then anytime." Such were her last words. Sensing that she was dying, Saphronia had specifically requested that there be no formal clerical service, but rather that those in attendance spend the time conversing with one another upon the nature of the spirit life, and its labors and relation to the present life.72

72New England Spiritualist, April 19, 1856.
At the funeral, friends began the service by singing a joyous hymn. Then John Spear rose and calmly spoke of his relationship with his daughter, concluding with words spoken by Benjamin Franklin upon the death of his brother in 1765:

"It is the will of God and Nature, that these mortal bodies be laid aside when the soul is to enter into the real life. This is rather, an embryo state, a preparation for living. A man is not completely born until he is dead. Why, then, should we grieve that a new child is born among the immortals, a new member added to that happy society...."

A number of speakers, including John Orvis and Charles Spear, then spoke informally of the insignificance of physical death, and as the service progressed, the spirit of Saphronia was felt to be in the midst of the room.  

Spiritualism, for John Spear and his associates, was a radical expression of the millennial dream of human perfection. Equally significant, it embodied a deeply personal faith in the immortality of the human soul.  

73 Ibid.
CHAPTER VII

THE KIANTONE MOVEMENT: A PROFILE

What would compel a man or woman to abandon a traditional style of life in order to follow the dictates of unseen intelligences as perceived by a mystic Universal minister? A number of possible explanations come to mind. Might it be possible, for example, that the same religious emotionalism of the "burned-over district" which spawned followers for figures such as William Miller and Joseph Smith could also have engendered followers for John Murray Spear? Did his support come from unsophisticated people whose uneducated minds were titillated primarily by the awesome presence of the man and his mystical contact with departed spirits? Or did his supporters come, as he did, from the ranks of the humanitarian reformers who turned to spiritual utopianism in response to the seemingly inconsequential results of traditional reform efforts?

Any attempt to discern the nature of John Murray Spear's spiritualist appeal, and more especially the appeal of the spiritualist communal society he founded, must take into account the people who were attracted to his leadership and the factors in their backgrounds which may have led them in that direction. Not enough information exists to
compile a biographical sketch for each of the persons who were associated with Spear. There is enough evidence, however, to justify certain generalizations regarding the nature of his support, and also the conclusion that in some respects there were no general patterns.

One of Spear's earliest and most devoted supporters was Thaddeus S. Sheldon. Sheldon was born in the state of New York, in 1818, but spent his early life in Rupert, Vermont. In 1836, at the age of eighteen, he located in Randolph, New York (in the southwest corner of the state), where he took advantage of the construction of the Erie Railroad through Randolph to open a general store.

In 1839 Sheldon married Rosetta Crowley, and their relationship endured until Rosetta died in March, 1847. During the next years Sheldon's business continued to prosper and he invested in a sizable amount of real estate. One of his projects was the development of a business block in Randolph which consisted of a series of buildings which he erected and leased to other merchants. Not only did

1MSS., Official Census Schedule, 1850 and 1860 (microfilm), National Archives; William Adams, Historical Gazettier and Biographical Memory of Cattaraugus County, New York (Syracuse, N.Y.: Lyman, Horton and Company Ltd., 1893), p. 1031.

2Ernest Miller, private interview with Mrs. Margaret Fish (granddaughter of Sheldon), July 5, 1947, notes included in the Sheldon Papers; Randolph Register, Sept. 23, 1932.
Sheldon became known for his business acumen, he also gained a reputation as a philanthropist. He could be counted on to contribute to the building of new churches, and was involved in a broad range of "benevolent enterprises." Among his major interests during the early 1840's was the science of phrenology, the theory of which suggested an unlimited potential for human development.\(^3\)

Six months after the death of his first wife, Sheldon married Agnes Calhoun. Her brother, James, had been a director of the Erie Railroad from its beginnings in 1831, and he appears to have loaned Sheldon a sum of money which Sheldon in turn invested in the railroad. The assistance of this brother-in-law, coupled with prudent investment of profits from his other commercial activities enabled Sheldon, by about the age of thirty, to become a director and major shareholder in the company.\(^4\) In Thaddeus Sheldon then, one discovers an energetic young man who had extremely good fortune in the field of commerce. Not only were his associations with the Erie Railroad and his general store in Randolph profitable ventures, but by 1850 he had


\(^4\)Miller, interview with Mrs. Margaret Fish, July 5, 1947; Randolph Register, Sept. 23, 1932.
accumulated real estate valued at more than fifteen thousand dollars, this at the age of thirty-two.5

And yet, Sheldon's concerns continued to extend beyond the accumulation of wealth. In 1848 he helped to organize the Randolph Electric Medical College and for a time served as the president of its board of directors. For several years the school operated with a faculty of seven and approximately forty students. After that, internal problems led to its removal to Syracuse, New York, and later to New York City.6 Sheldon was also politically active in the Whig Party. The presidential victory of the Whig Party in 1848 led to his appointment as postmaster of Randolph in June, 1849.7

In spite of having acquired financial wealth and social status, Sheldon became absorbed after 1850 in the philosophy and practice of spiritualism. It remained the driving force in Sheldon's life for as long as he lived. In time his loyalty to the spiritual cause, and specifically to Spear, meant the abandonment of his business, his fortune, and, to a large extent, his family.

5MSS., Official Census Schedule, 1850.
6Adams, Historical Gazetteer, p. 1031.
7Miller, interview with Mrs. Margaret Fish, July 5, 1947.
Exactly why Sheldon should have been so totally transformed by the development of American spiritualism is difficult to ascertain. He was not college educated but was certainly knowledgeable and quite sophisticated in his thinking, so the typical explanation of spiritualism holding sway with the uneducated and superstitious simply does not apply. Neither was he closely associated with the perfectionist wing of the reform movement, as was the case with a great many members of the Universalist clergy.

A more likely, though not altogether satisfactory explanation lies in the fact that Sheldon was a progressive, forward-looking businessman, a philanthropist who was open to the consideration of any new theory or proposal which offered the improvement of the human condition. For one who believed optimistically in the continual and on-going nature of progress in America, the harmonial spiritual philosophy of A.J. Davis could have a very real appeal. Davis, it will be recalled, was first visited by the spirit of Emanuel Swedenborg in 1844, and the revelations he received spoke in glowing phrases of a coming age of world harmony and order. Within the next five years, Davis had

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9See Davis, *The Great Harmonia*. Whitney Cross noted that "a naive optimism characterized Americans generally in the Jacksonian days," and that "the rapid growth and enhanced wealth introduced by the [Erie] canal could only (cont'd)
several books in print on the subject of spiritualism and his own spiritualist revelations, and the works of Emanuel Swedenborg had been translated and printed in the English language. In the library which Sheldon left were ten volumes of the works of Emanuel Swedenborg. Admittedly, it is impossible to determine definitely whether Sheldon purchased the works of Swedenborg and became a spiritualist as a result, or whether he became a spiritualist and bought the books later. Some of Sheldon's writings from the year 1851, however, generally reflect the philosophy of Swedenborg, suggesting that Swedenborg's writings, if they did not actually lead him to a belief in spiritualism certainly shaped his spiritualist thinking.

By the late summer and fall of 1850, Sheldon's name began to appear frequently in the spiritualist press. Sometimes he was given public acknowledgement for his "generous" or "substantial" contributions to specific

(cont'd) strengthen this buoyantly youthful mode of thought" in the "burned-over district" (The Burned-Over District, p. 79). This optimism was characteristic of Sheldon, but he was associated not with the Erie Canal, but with the Erie Railroad, which was notably unsuccessful until after 1850. Furthermore, the town of Randolph lies in the Susquehanna-drained area of western New York which did not become economically prosperous until after the mid-point in the nineteenth century (The Burned-Over District, p. 70).

Miller, interview with Mrs. Margaret Fish, July 5, 1947.
Quite often he submitted short essays which expressed his own spiritual philosophy—essays which were regularly printed in the Spirit Messenger. His first effort of this type was called "Progressive Light of the Present," and in it he exhorted readers to come out from the "cold and gloomy folds of a soulless church . . ." and to "bask . . . in the eternal sunlight of Nature's teachings, and learn those divine principles which emanate from the fount of Order, Wisdom, and Love." A diary which Sheldon filled out at infrequent intervals referred with regret to those individuals who continued to "bow down to the shrine of fear and subscribe to the dogmas of tradition and barbarism"—who chose to "blind their own souls to the . . . God of Love, Purity, [and] Progress."

The discovery of spiritualism seemed to liberate Sheldon's soul, and he felt free to "drink in the truths and revelations unfolded from the world of spirits!" His soul was freed because spiritualism, a "feast of reason and happiness," had enabled him to break the bonds of traditional theology, with its "Superstition, Fanaticism, [and]

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11Spirit Messenger, August 4 and Dec. 7, 1850.
12Ibid.
13Thaddeus S. Sheldon diary, May 27, 1849, Sheldon Papers.
Idolatry." He could say with complete confidence that "henceforth our pathway will be illuminated with increasing knowledge, unfolding still greater beauties, and revealing an eternal succession of new truths relating to the 'Spirit-Home.'"\textsuperscript{14}

In a short essay entitled "The Dawn of Spiritual Science," Sheldon alluded to his personal religious pilgrimage. "My own spirit," he wrote, "passed through the doubts, fears, and hopes that belong to all idolatrous worshippers, up to my twenty-second year; since that time it has gradually broken loose from the galling chains of modern Theology, and assimilated itself to the teachings of harmonious Nature."\textsuperscript{15} The "beauty, order, and progression" which he saw "written on every page of vegetable life" could not be reconciled with an "angry and vindictive" God who would destine "immortal human beings to an endless hell."\textsuperscript{16} In short, Sheldon characterized himself as one for whom the evangelical fires of the "burned-over district" had produced a mind charred by disillusionment, and a religious outlook reduced to ashes. For many, the repetitious winds of revival fanned the flames

\textsuperscript{14}Spirit Messenger, Sept. 28, 1850.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., Feb. 22, 1851.
\textsuperscript{16}Sheldon diary, June 10, 1849, Sheldon Papers.
of fundamental religious fervor. For others, the great winds put the fire out altogether.

For Sheldon, then, spiritualism served to confirm the repudiation of a dogmatic theology which sustained itself by threatening the eternal fires of hell as the penalty for unbelief. The first cracks in the seemingly impenetrable wall of traditional theology had come from Unitarianism and Universalism. Yet Sheldon's revolt against orthodoxy originated with neither of these, but rather with individuals such as Johann Spurzheim, George Combe, and Lorenzo Fowler, all advocates and practitioners of phrenology in the late 1830's and 1840's. These were the types of people Sheldon encountered in his early twenties, and it was men such as these, he declared, who were responsible for the "emancipation of the race from error."\textsuperscript{17}

The "emancipation" of which Sheldon spoke most likely referred to the fact that phrenology claimed to be a science based upon natural law, and as such viewed human behavior as attributable to the shape of the brain rather than to any supernatural force. In other words, sin was not a reflection of willful rejection of God, but rather an indication of a physical deformity. The theory which accompanied the practice of phrenology struck a serious

\textsuperscript{17}{\textit{Spirit Messenger}}, Feb. 22, 1851.
blow against traditional revealed religion, and as such earned the whole-hearted support of Thaddeus Sheldon.\textsuperscript{18}

The difficulty with the rejection of traditional revealed religion, however, was that it tended to give way to an atheistic materialism, or possibly to some form of deism, and neither of these was suited to Sheldon's mentality. Being an optimistic advocate of human progress, he was the type of individual who, as Whitney Cross has suggested, tended to transform political and social optimism into belief in an early millennium.\textsuperscript{19} But where does a believer in universal progress go if he rejects the dogma which calls for the ushering in of the millennium? In the case of Thaddeus Sheldon he turns to the spiritualist philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg, Andrew Jackson Davis and John Murray Spear.

Certainly the spiritual philosophy to which Sheldon adhered bore a close resemblance to scriptual millennialism. The day was not far distant, he proclaimed, when "the earth shall become a habitation of righteousness, and all the paths of men shall lead to peace and harmony, while the morning star of the New Philosophy reveals a reality to the soul, which has long sought . . . something tangible,

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19}Cross, \textit{The Burned-Over District}, p. 326.
reasonable, and demonstrative." The "New Philosophy" and the "evidences of human progression" made it abundantly clear to Sheldon that "this [progress] is really a universal law of our being."20

Spiritualism could usher in a world of harmony and order because, unlike traditional religions, it was based upon natural scientific law. "The seeds of science have been scattered on productive soil," Sheldon wrote, "and the gentle dews of heaven are bringing them fast forward into blooming flowers." Among the seeds of science were physiology, phrenology, magnetism, and psychology, which, Sheldon contended, "overlap the whole, and introduce us to the spirit-home."21

Sheldon believed that these new sciences, particularly psychology and mesmerism, confirmed the existence of life forces which extended beyond the physical human body, and that such being the case, spiritualist religion and philosophy were rooted in scientific fact. It was the coupling of the new sciences with millennialist spiritualism which Sheldon felt "must ultimately work out the complete salvation of humanity."22


21Spirit Messenger, Feb. 22, March 8, March 15, 1851.

22Ibid.
Thaddeus Sheldon's first direct contact with John Murray Spear probably occurred in the late summer of 1851. At that time a brief article appeared in the *Spirit Messenger* which was dated September 8, 1851, Randolph, New York, and signed "J.M.S." Why Spear would have been in Randolph at that time is somewhat a mystery. There is no reference to a meeting between the two at that time in the papers of either Spear or Sheldon. And yet it is almost certain that Spear traveled to Randolph for the specific purpose of meeting Sheldon. The two must have been aware of one another through the pages of the *Spirit Messenger*, since Sheldon had already written a number of articles, and Spear's work on behalf of the poor and imprisoned had been lauded by the paper on more than one occasion. It was in August, 1851, a month earlier, that the *Spirit Messenger* had printed Spear's letter pertaining to the communication from his deceased son, Henry C. Wright Spear.\(^23\) Judging from Spear's rather limited exposure to spiritualism at the time of his stay in Randolph, it must be concluded that he purposely sought out Sheldon in order to acquaint himself more fully with the spiritualist philosophy, from which he later molded plans for a New World Order with himself at the helm and Thaddeus Sheldon as one of his chief supporters.

\(^{23}\) *Spirit Messenger*, August 16, 1851.
At the time that he wrote to the **Spirit Messenger**, Spear's spiritualist thought was in its embryonic stages. He was still laboring diligently on behalf of Boston's poor and had, as yet, received no legible communications from the spirit world. It is possible that he traveled to New York as part of his prison reform work and while there, took the opportunity to journey to Randolph for the purpose of meeting the author of some of the articles he had encountered in the **Spirit Messenger**. Certainly the ideas which Sheldon had expressed would have had a major effect upon Spear, who had by that time become thoroughly disenchanted with traditional forms of Christianity.

In the article Spear wrote from Randolph, he discussed the oppressive nature of the religious establishment, reiterating a number of points to which Sheldon had addressed himself earlier. In general, Spear asserted the existence of universal truth independent of the Bible, while at the same time emphasizing that not all of the Bible could be considered "Truth," particularly the account of the six-day creation. He encouraged the clergy to use the standards of "Truth and Reason," in weighing the value of the Bible, and to discard any religious dogma which did not conform to the principles of nature.²⁴

Another close associate and supporter of Spear's commercial enterprises, as well as a participant in the Kiantone Community, was John Orvis. Orvis, two years older than Thaddeus Sheldon, was born in 1816 at Ferrisburg, Vermont, of parents who were Hicksite Quakers. Although Orvis did not remain associated with the Quaker religion, his general conception of life reflected the Quaker influence.25

Orvis grew up on his father's large farm receiving his early academic training from a man named Wholley, an English pedagogue. Later he attended Oberlin College for a time, but left before graduating. Returning to the East, he took up residence in Boston and soon espoused a number of reform causes, most specifically abolitionism. In 1843 Orvis became a participant in the Skaneateles Fourierist Community, probably having come under the influence of its founder, Boston abolitionist John Collins.26

After spending several months in the poorly organized Skaneateles Community, Orvis returned to Massachusetts to cast his lot with the residents of Brook Farm, and it is


from his stay at Brook Farm that we have the most valuable information regarding his personality and character. Orvis was reported, for example, to have been "addicted to hypnotism," at one point pleaded with Fred Cabot, a Brook Farmer with some talent along those lines, to hypnotize him for the purpose of curing a cold, sore throat and headache. That having been done to his satisfaction, Orvis tried his own mesmeric powers by placing his head upon a girl's forehead and delineating her character. At other times he was reported to have communed with the spirit of Fourier. Even before the advent of the rapping Fox sisters in 1848, then, Orvis was a devotee of the new mental sciences and a believer in the ability of human beings to commune with unseen intelligences. It is easy to understand that the healing practice of John Spear, which developed some five years later, would have stirred the interest of Orvis.

The inclination of Orvis toward the supernatural should not imply that he was in any way emotionally unstable. Just the opposite was true. In the summer of 1844, when Brook Farm seemed about to crumble in the debate over whether to become a phalanx, it was Orvis whose bouyant optimism rallied the spirits of the others. As a member

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27Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 193.
of the community's farming group he worked earnestly and conscientiously, and his sense of humor always livened up the gatherings of young people in the evenings.28

In 1845 and 1846, after Brook Farm had become Brook Farm Phalanx, Orvis, already having developed a reputation as a lecturer, was chosen to travel about the country for the purpose of lecturing on behalf of Fourierism generally, and Brook Farm specifically. This phase of his career showed Orvis to be a "particularly convincing speaker," who used to good advantage his "clear, rich and beautifully modulated voice" while addressing his listeners in a "simple and earnest manner" which carried great weight.29

Sometimes Orvis became impatient when he felt that his audience had not given him a fair hearing. Lecturing on Cape Cod in December, 1845, he encountered an audience which he described as "barbarous scalawags." His fellow lecturer, John Allen, wrote that Orvis was "perfectly furious" with the "follies and miseries of civilized numskulls."30

28Swift, Brook Farm, pp. 175-176; Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 218.

29Swift, Brook Farm, p. 177.

30Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 271.
But while the lecture tour may have revealed Orvis's temper, it also revealed the man's tremendous persistence and resilience. In February, 1846, he and John Allen headed off into the Green Mountains of Vermont. After speaking at Brattleboro, they sent their trunks on to Putney by stage, choosing for themselves to walk, "it being only ten miles." When they arrived the trunks were missing, and Orvis spent an entire day tracing them to Walpole while Allen journeyed on to Saxtonville for the next engagement. On the following day, Orvis found a friend with a horse and cart who was willing to take him on to Saxtonville to join up with Allen. As it turned out, they started out in "the stormiest day of the winter," riding "nine miles in the teeth of a fierce Northeaster." Orvis wrote that "the roads were filled with snow," and that they followed "a perfectly unbroken track." But he also reported that he had truly enjoyed the ride.31 Even though the only real success of the speaking tour had come at John Humphrey Noyes' Putney Community, it was not until news that a fire had destroyed the new Brook Farm phalanstery reached them that Orvis's spirits were dampened. He returned to Brook Farm "rather worn and disappointed, but with undying hope, faith, and devotion."32

31Swift, Brook Farm, p. 276-77.
32Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 273; Swift, Brook Farm, p. 178.
On December 24, 1846, Orvis married a fellow Brook Farm participant, Marianne Dwight, who was a sister of John Dwight. Marianne had joined Brook Farm late in 1843 and when Orvis came soon after he was assigned to Pilgrim Hall, which was also her place of residence. Their relationship grew out of the informal evening discussions which were so characteristic of Brook Farm. With regard to the wedding, Marianne wrote that she hoped that "on that evening, as in some of the olden times, we should all feel, though but for a little while, the sentiment of Universal Unity glowing in our souls." The ceremony was simple and informal, in keeping with the life style of the community. William Henry Channing gave a short talk, and John Dwight married the couple with a five-word phrase, probably something like "may ye love one another."33

The marriage of John Orvis and Marianne Dwight came at a point when Brook Farm was dying a slow but certain death, yet neither of them wished to accept defeat. In the fall of 1847, Orvis began another speaking tour, this on behalf of the small group of Brook Farmers who continued to maintain their collective unity as the American Union of Associationists. Throughout western New York, Orvis and Allen, who was again accompanying him, found unresponsive

33Orvis, The Orvis Family in America, p. 62; Swift, Brook Farm, p. 178; Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 303.
and hostile audiences. At first they were unwilling to admit that the lack of interest stemmed from the weakness of Fourierist social theory. Rather, they blamed it on the record of communities such as the one at Skaneateles. Collins's "disastrous failure after making such an outcry in behalf of a better order of society," they reported to the Harbinger, "and the ignorance of the people, who have not intelligence enough to discriminate between a true Constructive Reform, and a No-God, No-Government, No-Marriage, No-Money, No-Meat, No-Salt, No-Pepper system of Community, but think that Collins was a 'Furyite' just like ourselves, has closed the ears of the people in this neighborhood against our words." 34

In Rochester, New York, Allen and Orvis reported that due to the failure of the Sodus Bay Phalanx, "the very name of Association is odious with the public, and the unfortunate people who went into these movements . . . have been ridiculed till . . . they have slunk away from the sight and knowledge of their neighbors." 35 In the end the lecturers found that the only way to obtain an audience was to completely delete the word "association" from their lectures


and to replace it with "national reform." If the view held by John Humphrey Noyes, namely that Brook Farm and the Harper started out advocating Fourierism but soon came to advocate Swedenborgianism instead, is correct, one may also conclude that elements of that philosophy appeared in the lectures of Orvis and Allen. John Dwight (Orvis's father-in-law) became a strong advocate of Swedenborgianism, and his influence upon Orvis, coupled with the obvious attraction which Swedenborgianism would have for one who had himself communed with the spirit of Fourier, makes it almost certain that during this period of his life Orvis became attached to Swedenborgian spiritual philosophy.

By 1848 Brook Farm was totally insolvent, and John and Marianne Dwight Orvis joined the last remnants of the community in an attempt to continue the principles of Association in a Boston boarding house. During the year Orvis served on the editorial staff of a labor journal, the Voice of Industry, and following its demise, published and edited The New Era of Industry. That journal, too, suffered from lack of support and died after a run of three months. For the next several years Orvis sold life insurance, part of

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36 Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 314.

37 Noyes's treatment of the relationship between transcendentalism and Swedenborgianism is discussed in Chapter I. For John Dwight's attitude toward Swedenborg see Noyes, History of American Socialisms, pp. 546-47.
the time being associated with the Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company. By 1852 he had established a home in Jamaica Plain, apart from any associative involvement. 38

The life of the established, middle class insurance agent seems not to have satisfied Orvis. Desirous of social reform, still anxious to experiment with associative schemes, and undoubtedly still fascinated by extrasensory phenomena, by 1853 he had found his way into the inner circle of Boston's community of spiritualists. In 1853 the healing talent of John Murray Spear was still a prominent topic of discussion among Boston spiritualists. In addition, Spear's Twelve Discourses had been published, and, aided by Adin Ballou's introduction, was attracting considerable attention.

It is impossible to say exactly what drew Orvis into Spear's personal group of friends and supporters, but it is clear that almost from the time his name began to appear in the spiritualist press he was a strong advocate of some sort of associative enterprise. Between 1854 and 1858 he lent verbal support to the Kiantone experiment, and was a leading figure in Spear's New England Association of Philanthropic Commercialists, the cooperative scheme which

38 Curtis, A Season in Utopia, p. 314; Boston Directory (Boston, 1852); Orvis, The Orvis Family in America, p. 62.
was to cut out the middle man in the east-west trade. The scheme never had any real success, but in typical fashion, Orvis was not discouraged. Over the next five years, until 1863, he worked closely with Spear, sometimes at Kiantone, sometimes in Boston, and sometimes on the road, attempting to put into practice the commercial dictates of Spear's Associated World.

It is probable that John Allen, Orvis's associate on the Fourierist lecture circuit, was involved with Spear for a brief period during 1861 and 1862. Before coming to Brook Farm Allen had been a Universalist minister, but had left his church because of congregational discontent over his moderate abolitionist views. In 1844, he and a number of other labor reformers organized the New England Workingman's Association, the chief goal of which was the establishment of a ten-hour work day. Allen was for a time the editor of the organization's journal, *The Voice of Industry*, but he resigned in order to spend more time lecturing. After the dissolution of Brook Farm he went west,

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39 The 1859 listing for Orvis in the Boston Directory (Boston, 1859) described his occupation simply as "flour," indicating that he was involved in Spear's scheme to bring flour from the west to the east at minimal cost and to sell it at low prices to the poor and needy.

where his wife soon became ill and died. Nothing more is known of Allen until 1861. At that time John Orvis described a tract of land near Patriot, Indiana, which Spear and his supporters had by then acquired, as the home of John Allen. If such was the case, Allen was probably one of several individuals, perhaps the "Liberator," who can be identified only by the names Spear bestowed upon them.\textsuperscript{41}

Undoubtedly the most intriguing of the individuals who associated themselves with Spear was Daniel Gano of Cincinnati, a "renaissance man" of the western frontier. Gano's roots were in the state of New York, where his grandfather had been a Baptist minister and Revolutionary War veteran. His father was also a military man, a commissioned major, who fought on various occasions with Generals Arthur St. Clair and William Henry Harrison.\textsuperscript{42}

Daniel Gano was born in 1795, and received his early schooling in Hamilton County, Ohio. In 1811, at the age of fifteen, his father enrolled him in Brown University, and with an uncle, Gano set out on an eleven hundred mile horseback trip to Providence, Rhode Island, to further his education. Nearing the end of the trip he was thrown from his horse and suffered a skull fracture which forced him

\textsuperscript{41}Mortgage transfer, Cowles to Orvis, Oct. 8, 1861, Sheldon Papers, Document 106.

\textsuperscript{42}Diary of Daniel Gano, Gano Papers.
to abandon his plans for higher education. Later, in 1825, he received another skull fracture as a result of a riding accident, this one requiring the removal of eight inches of his scalp. This injury bothered him for the rest of his life, and he always read with one eye closed.\textsuperscript{43}

Returning to Cincinnati, Gano was appointed an assistant to his father, who was the Cincinnati Clerk of Courts. The position became his exclusive responsibility in 1818 when his father moved to Covington, Kentucky, and he held it until his retirement in 1856. Not only did the elder Gano arrange employment for his son, he was also able to obtain a military commission for him. Daniel Gano was assigned the rank of major and became his father's military assistant (his father was by then a major-general). For the duration of his life Gano used his military commission in signing his name, and always chose to be referred to as Major Gano.\textsuperscript{44}

The earliest evidence of Gano's interest in national politics is contained in his reaction to the outcome of the presidential election of 1824. "We have heard the result," he wrote, "and make crooked faces in eating codfish against our will."\textsuperscript{45} But though he did not favor John Quincy Adams, he became a strong supporter of the Whig Party in

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45}Daniel to Stephen Gano, Feb. 19, 1825, Gano Papers.
the 1830's, and described himself as "a close personal friend and admirer of Henry Clay." His were the politics of a liberal Whig. Over a period of years he provided the means to free families of slaves, and he was "ever ready to hail the introduction of everything which tended to the aid and comfort of the race." Although he described himself as anxious to "aid and comfort" the slave, there is no record of his participation in the underground railroad or of support for programs of immediate emancipation. Neither is there record of his having been associated with more radical forms of abolitionism.

Over a period of years Gano became deeply interested in agriculture and horticulture. He had his own elaborate green house where he raised rare trees, a variety of shrubs and plants, and tropical and exotic fruits including pineapples, oranges, and lemons. He also cultivated a wide variety of flowers, and had a collection of rare cacti.

For thirty-five years Gano claimed to have used only domestic silk, much of it the product of his own successful efforts in the cultivation of the silk worm through experimenting with a wide variety of mulberry plants. At one point he tried raising Catawba grapes for wine, but gave it

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46 Diary of Daniel Gano, Gano Papers; Cincinnati Past and Present: Or, Its Industrial History as Exhibited in the Life-Labors of Its Leading Men (Cincinnati, 1872), p. 15.
up because the grape crops were not dependable. He also attempted to produce an improved type of honey by importing a large number of Italian bees, but his entire hive was wiped out by bee cholera. 47

Gano was interested, too, in the breeding of farm animals, and by the time of his retirement had accumulated three farms where he conducted a number of experiments in selective breeding. At various times he worked with cattle, hogs, and poultry, and at one point even had a buffalo bull in his collection. He was convinced that Ohio should lead the way in the breeding of horses, believing that such breeding could be "productive of lasting and great benefit to our Western Country." On one occasion he presented his friend Henry Clay a pair of full blood South Dawn sheep. 48

Gano's religious affiliation was with the Campbellite sect, which between 1813 and 1832 represented the most radical wing of the Baptist Church. His attraction to Campbellism probably stemmed not from its emphasis on adult baptism by immersion but rather from its advocacy of a single, creedless, Protestant church. Alexander Campbell,

47 Diary of Daniel Gano, Gano Papers.

48 Ibid; Daniel Gano to General James Findlay, Feb. 18, 1827, Torrence Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society. Gano's interests were limitless. He was also a patron of the fine arts in Cincinnati and the inventor of a machine which made barrel staves by horse power.
who baptized Gano, practiced an egalitarian religion in which the sacrament of communion was offered to any member of any sect who wished to participate. Liberal practices such as this, plus the growing emphasis of Campbellites upon post-millennialism, caused orthodox Baptists to disassociate from them. After 1830, the Campbellites abandoned the vision of unified Protestantism and established themselves as The Disciples of Christ denomination. By 1850 their membership surpassed two hundred and fifty thousand.  

When William Miller, who preached the imminent return of Christ, appeared in Cincinnati, Gano took him into his home, and offered him hospitality because, Gano said, he "desired to investigate the subject which created such excitement." Miller did not convince him that the house of Israel was about to be restored, nor that the wicked were on the verge of being annihilated, nor that a rapturous second coming was at hand. But Gano did believe, like Alexander Campbell, that the close of the Christian era was at hand, and that the millennium would soon be established upon the earth. His religious views were also decidedly liberal in that while he believed there were many important truths in the Bible, he also found in it many "errors,


\[\text{50} \text{Diary of Daniel Gano, Gano Papers.}\]
contradictions, allegories, fictions, poetry, and figures," which would not stand up to a literal interpretation. For himself, he trusted his sense of reason to tell him which parts of the Bible to accept as literally true and which to reject. 51

It was with the same open mind that Gano became a believer and practitioner of mesmerism, better defined as hypnotism, and a strong supporter of the use of various vegetable preparations as medicines. Both Gano and his wife Rebecca were active practitioners of home medicine and treated a great many patients in their home. As noted in Chapter I he was a trustee of the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati, and on numerous occasions was called upon to hypnotize patients about to undergo surgery, and sometimes to help patients who were paralytic to regain the use of their limbs. On one occasion, for example, he was able to restore to full health a girl who had reportedly been partially paralyzed as a result of a sun stroke. 52

As was the case with Thaddeus Sheldon, Gano saw the introduction of new and beneficent sciences as an

51Ibid. Although he was open-minded in his religious and philosophical outlook, Gano adhered to a rigid code of personal conduct, rising early and taking a cold bath each morning, and abstaining from the use of profanity, intoxicating liquors, and tobacco.

indication of some sort of dispensational change. When the idea of communicating with the deceased was introduced, Gano considered it a future manifestation of "a great miraculous movement." Late in his life he traced his interest in spiritualism to the year 1843, which meant that his introduction to the subject predated both Andrew Jackson Davis and the Fox sisters.\(^{53}\)

The philosophy of spiritualism seemed to Gano to be atune to the world of science for another reason. It identified man as an "organized mentality or spirit" which existed apart from the physical body. Such being the case, death was no supernatural mystery, but merely a physiological and chemical change which affected the physical body while leaving the individuality of the mind complete.\(^{54}\)

Believing as he did in an intimate relationship between earthly intellects and those of a spirit world, Gano was anxious to experiment with communication between the two. In the early 1850's he was closely associated with a Mrs. Lowe, a Cincinnati medium, who put him and his wife Rebecca in contact with his deceased father and brother. Also received were messages from Emanuel Swedenborg and other leading minds of the spirit world.\(^{55}\)

\(^{53}\)Ibid. \(^{54}\)Ibid. \(^{55}\)Spiritual Telegraph, Sept. 11, 1852, April 16, April 23, July 9, 1853.
The first recorded meeting between Gano and John M. Spear occurred at the Buffalo Conference of 1857, where Gano was a principal speaker, probably on the subject of animal husbandry and the cultivation of soil.\footnote{New England Spiritualist, March 28, 1857.} It is possible that they had met earlier, perhaps in the course of Spear's travels to the West in 1856. Certainly both were familiar with one another through their reading of the spiritualist press.

Being interested in agriculture as he was, Gano was probably attracted by Spear's Association of Agriculturalizers. In a more general way, however, the various plans and programs which Spear claimed were authorized by the spirit world appealed to Daniel Gano because they seemed to further substantiate his belief that a great dispensational change was occurring which would substantially alter the existing world order. And so Gano, responding as always with an open mind and a spirit of inquiry, offered considerable financial support to the commercial and communal schemes of the Association of Beneficents, and between 1859 and 1861 was, next to Spear himself, the highest ranking earthly member in Spear's official hierarchy. Gano probably thought himself too old to consider actually leaving his comfortable Cincinnati surroundings for the rigors of life at Kiantone, but he gave the
community his enthusiastic support, and was the driving force behind an attempt in 1860 to establish a branch community at Mount Patriot, Indiana, where Gano believed conditions were conducive to the implementation of a self-sustaining cooperative agricultural endeavor.57

Several of John Murray Spear's recruits came from the city of Cleveland. One of the more prominent of these was John M. Sterling. Born in Lyme, Connecticut, Sterling was the son of General Elisha Sterling, a Yale University alumnus. John Sterling followed in his father's footsteps, graduating from Yale in 1820 before studying law. In 1823 he was admitted to the Connecticut Bar, and in that same year married Marianne Beers. In 1828 Sterling moved with his wife and two small children to Cleveland.58

In Cleveland Sterling built up an extensive law practice and also established himself as a civic leader and reform advocate. Between 1835 and 1840 he wisely invested in a three hundred-acre tract of land on the east side of Cleveland. The property later became one of


58Gertrude Van Rensselaer Wickham, The Pioneer Families of Cleveland, 1796-1840, Two Vols. (Cleveland, 1914), II, 1937, on file in Oberlin College Archives; S. J. Kelly, "When the Sterlings Came to Cleveland," The Plain Dealer (Cleveland), April 23, 1942.
the wealthiest residential sections of the city. In 1841, while he was in the midst of constructing an elegant mansion on the tract, Sterling generously donated the use of the land to the Cuyahoga Agricultural Society and Farmers' and Mechanics' Cattle Show and Fair. During the 1830's he was elected president of the Cleveland Reading Room Association and also served as the chairman of the Cleveland Temperance Society. 59

Sterling also came to be closely linked with the development of Oberlin College. He contributed substantial sums of money to the institution, at one point pledging a gift of one thousand dollars. A close acquaintance both of Oberlin's first president, Asa Mahan, and of its most renowned theologian, Charles G. Finney, Sterling was from 1841 to 1851 a member of the college board of trustees. 60

Sterling's attachment to Oberlin stemmed from the fact that the school was an outgrowth of the antislavery reform movement. An early opponent of slavery, he attended the 1833 organizational meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia where he served on a committee which drafted the society's Declaration of Principles. In Northern Ohio his reputation as a successful

59 *The Plain Dealer*, April 23 and 25, 1942.

attorney helped to bring respectability to the antislavery movement. "Urge Mr. Sterling of Cleveland to come and speak," an antislavery advocate wrote to Theodore Weld; "his mere presence would aid us much." It was in Sterling's Cleveland law office, in 1835, that Weld first trained a group of antislavery agents. In 1841 he was elected president of the Cuyahoga County Anti-Slavery Society. 61

Sterling had met Spear at a spiritualist gathering in Worcester, Massachusetts, during the early 1850's, and when Spear felt compelled to travel to Cleveland in April, 1853, he believed it was for the purpose of contacting Sterling. 62 Though it was to Spear's surprise that he did not meet with Sterling on that occasion, Sterling nevertheless became a devoted follower of Spear, contributing to the purchase of Kiantone, living there at various times between 1858 and 1862, working to implement Spear's commercial schemes, and finally in the mid-1860's traveling with Spear to Europe in hope of developing a commercial enterprise there.

61 Sterling to Asa Mahan, April 18, 1836, Oberlin College Archives; Charles Stuart to Weld, Nov. 24, 1834, and J.S. Carpenter to Weld, October 3, 1835, Barnes and Dumond, eds., Letters of Theodore Weld, I, pp. 176-177n, 235-236.

62 Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, pp. 16-17.
It is not easy to understand why a man past his fiftieth birthday—with a lucrative law practice and prominent social status—would be attracted to the radical and visionary schemes of Spear. We know that Sterling, like a great many citizens of Cleveland, was caught up in the first wave of spiritualist activity in the early 1850's. A personal attraction for him may have been the desire to communicate with the spirit of his daughter Susan, who at the age of fourteen, in 1844, had drowned in a cistern. We may be certain, too, that Sterling had been exposed to the Christian perfectionism which Mahan and Finney preached between 1835 and 1845. Like a great many spiritualists Sterling may have become impatient in his desire to witness the perfection of humanity—perfection which orthodox evangelism implied but failed to produce. Certainly John Spear envisioned a more radical transformation of the social order than most reformers or evangelical theologians had ever contemplated.

Abel Underhill was also a Cleveland recruit. His ancestors had been Dutch colonists, and he was born near Poughkeepsie, New York. Although his parents were Quakers, neither Abel nor his brother Samuel, who also became a

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63 The Plain Dealer, April 25, 1942.
64 On Christian perfectionism at Oberlin see Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 103-113.
spiritualist, adhered strictly to the faith. Both were practicing physicians and Abel was described as "an intelligent spiritualist and a medium . . . who . . . outgrew the 'straight jacket' of medical sectarianism . . . emerging into the genial regions of freedom and of joy."

Underhill was one of the early mainstays of the Kiantone experiment. He supported the enterprise financially by assisting in the purchase of the land, and he was one of the more permanent residents between 1858 and 1861. He was first attracted to Spear during Spear's visit to Cleveland in 1853, but he had been a practicing spiritualist for at least two or three years prior to that time. Like the others of the community he believed in the regeneration of the world through the assistance of beneficent spirits, but he was drawn into the movement initially by the reports concerning the medicinal waters at Kiantone.

The Kiantone movement did not appeal strictly to males. One of Spear's earliest and most enthusiastic supporters was Caroline S. Lewis. While in a trance state Spear picked her out of an audience to be his "Leaderess." At the time of her selection for that position she was unknown to Spear, and neither of them understood the meaning

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65 *Spiritual Telegraph*, July 15, 1854.

of the appointment. A resident of Cleveland, Mrs. Lewis and her husband, Gleason F. Lewis, lived just a few blocks from John M. Sterling on the city's prestigious Euclid Avenue. Mrs. Lewis became a spiritualist in the early 1850's and her chief interest in Spear's movement lay in the area of woman's rights and reform of the institution of marriage. She spent considerable time at Kiantone, and traveled extensively with Spear's entourage both in the United States and Europe.

Gleason Lewis, while never as enthusiastic toward spiritualism as was his wife, nevertheless contributed to Spear's support. An extremely successful businessman, "Popcorn," as he was known for his early days as a popcorn vendor in Cleveland, was reportedly worth more than a million dollars at one point, having acquired a fortune through land speculation, banking, and ownership of several small railroad lines, including the Chautauqua Lake Railway, which ran from Cory, Pennsylvania, to Brocton, New York.

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70 *Lewisiana* (newsletter of the Lewis family), XIV, p. 191; "'Popcorn' Lewis Dead," *Cleveland Leader*, Dec. 12, 1903.
For a number of years during the 1850's Lewis printed a newspaper which he called The Old Soldier's Advocate. In it he claimed that the federal government had squandered millions of acres of federal land on "soulless railroad corporations" while neglecting to inform veterans of their right to one hundred sixty acre claims as a bonus for performance of military service. His concern was probably real, but he also drummed up much business for himself, because for a fee he offered to trace the claims of veterans.71

Besides Caroline Lewis, the Kiantone movement was also supported by several of Spear's female associates from the East, most importantly by Caroline Hinckley, who served as Spear's amanuensis, and Eliza Kenney. Nothing is known of Miss Hinckley before she became associated with Spear, but Eliza Kenney had been an active member of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, and had been associated with the spiritualist movement in Boston from its inception.72

Some of the participants of the Kiantone movement came from the immediate area. Stephen and Mary Gardner

71Record books, 1863-1867, Gleason F. Lewis MSS, Western Reserve University Archives; Spiritual Telegraph, March 17, 1855.

72Liberator, June 6, Nov. 1, 1844.
and their family of four daughters lived at nearby Farmington, Pennsylvania. The oldest daughter, Calista, began at age thirteen to paint pictures of flowers while in a trance state. S.C. Hewitt met the family in 1854, and convinced them that Calista's talents came from the spirit world. He also called their attention to the proposed community where mediumistic talents might be more fully developed. Whatever the specific circumstances may have been, Mary Gardner was given major responsibility in the operation of the Kiantone community during the period from 1860 until 1862.73

Probably the only permanent residents of Kiantone from the time it originated until its dissolution eight years later, was the family of Horace Fenton. The background of the Fenton family was quite diverse. Fenton was born in Canada, and his wife Katherine in Ireland. As late as 1848 they appear to have been living in Massachusetts; at least a son, George, was born in that state at that time.74 In the early 1850's they lived in Cleveland, where Fenton met Spear and became one of the initial investors in the Spiritual Springs.75 Two daughters were born to the Fentons


74MSS., Kiantone, N.Y., Official Census Schedule, 1860 (microfilm), National Archives.

75Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, p. 21.
at Kiantone, the first in 1859 and a second in 1860. Fenton, who was thirty-four when the community was organized, was the youngest adult member of the community whose age has been traced.

For many of those who were associated with Spear at one time or another, no biographical information is available. It is apparent, for example, that between 1854 and 1856 numerous people came to Kiantone for short periods in order to take advantage of its supposedly therapeutic water. After 1858, when the community was attempting to combat its image as a free-love establishment, itinerants in search of broader sexual freedom passed through frequently. In the summer months, the community regularly attracted individuals who would exchange labor for food and shelter. For these various types of participants no biographical information or numerical statistics have been found, but judging from the accommodations at Kiantone, not more than about thirty persons could have been living on the grounds at any one time. The individuals who have been considered above represent the leadership of the movement, and were attracted to Kiantone not specifically by the idea of communitarianism, but by Spear's broader program of universal reform.

Considered as a whole, the characteristics of the leading participants in the Kiantone experiment suggest some interesting and revealing patterns. They came from
middle and upper classes. They were in almost every case the embodiment of social and financial success—doctors, lawyers, businessmen, public officials. Few, it would seem, had any tangible reasons for wishing to opt out of the larger society. Indeed, their financial independence appears to have contributed significantly to the failure of the community to become self-supporting.

It is obvious, too, that the Kiantone movement was not a youth movement. None of the leading figures were younger than thirty, and most were in their forties and fifties. Their geographic backgrounds were diverse, but most were descendants of families whose roots in America descended back beyond the Revolutionary War. Almost all had been exposed to a basic education, and several were college trained.

The religious background of the members ranged from the more fundamental Baptist and Methodist denominations to the liberal Quaker and Universalist faiths. Yet almost all seemed to share a common faith in the universal improvement of the human condition. None were millennialists in the Biblical sense of the word, but there was a common conviction among them that a new dispensation in the history of mankind was approaching which would bring harmony, progress, and order, that spiritualism was an expression of that change, and that by their association with John Murray Spear they could participate in the progress.
Finally, the profile of the Kiantone communitarians suggests that almost all the supporters of Spear had been linked with one or more of the reform movements of the period, or were at least in strong sympathy with such movements. By appealing to the individual reform mentality, and by suggesting that the spirit world was concerned with the advance of virtually all the major reform movements of the time, John Murray Spear was able to bring together a body of believers in spiritualism whose goal, like his, became the transformation of the world.
1858 was a year of almost continuous activity at Kiantone. In the first months of the year Spear's supporters assembled from various parts of the country for the purpose of implementing a new project organized by a directive from the spirit world. Great treasure was purported by the spirits to have been buried at Kiantone, and the task of earthly representatives of the General Assembly was to locate it. For seven months, the main thrust of the Kiantone Community was the search for hidden wealth.¹

Exactly when or with whom the story of buried treasure originated is uncertain. One early account linked it with William Brittingham, one of the original champions of the healing properties of the Kiantone waters.² By 1858 it was reported that the originators of the story were the wife and daughters of John Chase, the owner of the land at the time of the discovery of the medicinal waters. Whatever the source of the story, however, it was John M. Spear who received

¹Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, 27.
²See chapter IV.
the counsel from the spirit world pertaining to the exact location of the wealth and the means of recovering it.  

The directive which Spear received ordered the construction of a tunnel into the side of a hill near the Kiantone Springs and almost precisely on the state line. Throughout the spring and summer months of 1858, Spear and his associates bored their way into the hillside, "enduring many privations," and "suffering much through doubt and anxiety of mind."  

Soon after the digging began, with the tunnel extending into the hillside at a forty-five degree angle, a serious water problem was encountered. The spirits encouraged continuation, however, and so an elaborate system of pumps was constructed which had to be manned around the clock in order to keep the cavern from filling with water. The tunnel had been extended approximately one hundred seventy-one feet into the ground before the underground springs proved insurmountable.

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4Ibid; Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, 27.

5New York Tribune, September 15, 1858; Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 27, 1938; William S. Bailey, private interview with Mark E. Chaney, February, 1924 (notes are included in the Sheldon Papers).
Estimates of the dimensions of the underground passage have varied according to the memory of those who actually saw it. An account written in 1894, based quite possibly on the testimony of Oliver Chase, an area resident who had worked on the tunnel, described it as "wide enough for two people to walk side by side." Mark Chaney, who as a young boy had spied on the operation with his friends, remembered some sixty-eight years later that the passageway was seven feet high, six feet wide, and two hundred seventy feet long. Chaney also recalled that although the explorations were terminated by the failure of the pumps, certain stone Indian relics and "some things which resembled diamonds and pearls" were found, and that these "were prized by the ladies of the institution." His testimony is the only known report of anything besides earth and water being discovered in the search.6

Stories of Spear's search for the treasure of ancient Indians had by the twentieth century become almost legendary in the Kiantone Valley. In 1944, Gerald G. Staples, then the owner of the land on the Pennsylvania side of the state boundary, decided to lay the legend of buried treasure to rest. Attempting to locate the entrance to the passageway,

6William S. Bailey, private interview with Mark E. Chaney, February, 1924, in the Sheldon Papers.
Staples and a crew of searchers systematically stripped away the crust of earth from the area of the hill where they believed the original entrance had been dug. After considerable effort they found the entrance, boarded up and completely covered, quite probably intentionally hidden by the followers of Spear.7

Finding the opening to the cave was among the less difficult tasks facing Staples. Upon forcing open the entrance he found the passageway filled completely with water and an accumulation of silt. By installing a power pump, he was able to clear out enough of the water and debris to survey the first fifty feet of the tunnel; beyond that distance the water proved insurmountable.

In the portion of the tunnel which he explored, Staples found careful and durable construction. The massive plank door which had sealed the entrance was still intact. The tunnel itself was supported by the logs overhead, on the walls, even on the floor. All were reported in perfect preservation. Contrary to earlier reports, however, Staples found that the tunnel was in no way large enough for two people to walk abreast, but was only three feet wide and four and one-half feet high.

The direction of the tunnel reflected a certain inconsistency in the directives from the spirit world. The

7Jamesstown Journal, November 18, 1933.
first twelve feet extended into the hill on a slight downward slope. At that point a series of steps took the tunnel downward and sharply to its right. As Staples and his crew pumped out more water, they discovered that the tunnel then turned again to the left, and at the point where the water level forced cessation of the exploration, again to the right. Staples recovered several small articles which had apparently been left behind when Spear's workers abandoned the cave. The most significant was a crude gas lamp which was discovered on a stone ledge a short distance into the tunnel. 8

The most obvious explanation for the abandonment of the project by the residents of Kiantone is the difficulty presented by the underground springs. One account, however, cites as the immediate cause for abandonment an act of vandalism in which some youngsters from near the community tossed burning sheaves of wheat into the entrance, forcing the skeleton crew of workers on the pumps to come out for air, thus allowing the water to fill the cave. 9

Whatever the reason for the failure of this "spirit-directed" search, it was obvious that the spirits, as in

8Ibid; Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 27, 1938.

9Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 27, 1938. This account is the only known source which mentions the burning sheaves as the reason for abandonment of the project. It seems reasonable to conclude that the story was manufactured to provide a logical conclusion to the Plain Dealer's story on the "lost colony."
the development of the "New Motive Power," did not possess either the information or expertise which Spear attributed to them. One of the most fascinating features of the failure is that it seemed to have almost no effect upon the loyalty of Spear's followers. Thaddeus Sheldon and John M. Sterling bore most of the financial cost, estimates of which range from six thousand to eighty thousand dollars. Yet both remained close associates of Spear for a number of years.

In the spiritualist press, however, the reaction to the treasure hunt at Kiantone was adverse. This was due in part to the fact that the popular press had generally looked upon the project as another example of the absurdity of spiritualism, concluding that Thaddeus Sheldon's financial resources had been "carried off by spiritualism." Journals which consistently attempted to present spiritualism as a philosophy offering a systematic, rational approach to the betterment of the human condition invariably were chagrined when something like this happened which allowed

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10 William S. Bailey, private interview with Mark Cheney, February, 1924; Banner of Light, October 23, 1858. Cheney's memory was inaccurate on several points, and was probably low on his estimate of six thousand dollars. At the same time, the figure of eighty thousand dollars cited in the Banner of Light appears to have been taken from the public press, and was probably an exaggeration.

11 Banner of Light, October 23, 1858.
the public press to scoff at the movement as a whole.

In the case of the quest for the remains of an ancient civilization at Kiantone, the reaction of the spiritualist press was to attempt to disassociate such schemes from the mainstream of the spiritualist movement. Sheldon, it was argued, was "carried off by his own folly," and was probably much wiser as a result of his great financial loss. He had learned, it was hoped, that "spirits do not come to teach us how to gather up such treasures." At the same time, spiritualists were cautioned to be discriminating in the spirits they trusted, being cognizant that "It is a high crime against nature for a man to ignore his own reason and follow the lead of another man's against it."\(^{12}\)

Although it is easy to understand the defensive nature of the spiritualist press in regard to Spear's activities (some, such as the Spiritualist Telegraph and the Spiritual Age dealt with the cave episode by steadfastly ignoring it), nevertheless it must be noted that the criticism of Spear and Sheldon in the public press, criticism which the Banner of Light did not dispute, was not entirely valid. The suggestion that the Kiantone group was attempting to use the spirit world to pile up earthly treasures, for example, had

\(^{12}\)Ibid. The Banner of Light was at this time linked with Andrew Jackson Davis, who, it will be recalled, had also been critical of Spear's "New Motive Power."
no basis in fact. Neither Spear or Sheldon ever hoarded money. If they hoped to uncover great wealth, they certainly intended to use it to further the cause they championed.

Furthermore, the search was not for wealth alone. They believed that a civilization had been buried at Kiantone, and as such their work, however poorly conceived, constituted a crude type of archaeological research. Finally, Spear followed the policy of accepting what he thought were spiritual dictates, without reservation, and so the question of his intent in digging is in a sense irrelevant. His spirit guides asked him to search for the remains of a civilization, and so he did. If one wishes to raise the question of Spear's unconscious motivation, the most that can be said is that he may have unconsciously constructed the directives in order to draw attention to his own position within the spiritualist movement.

If, however, his motivation had been to gain support, why would he either consciously or unconsciously have engaged in an activity which common sense would indicate would result not in support, but scorn and ridicule? The safest conclusion which can be drawn is that Spear, genuinely devoted to human improvement and supremely trusting in what he believed to be spiritual advisors, pursued a course which by any standard of earthly measurement was rationally indefensible.
As damaging as the reports of the unsuccessful search for treasure at Kiantone may have been to the image of the spiritualist movement, even more threatening were the rumors of immoral behavior at the community. Early in 1858 the Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican alleged that a community had been organized "under the direction of John M. Spear . . . the history of which has been carefully suppressed by the spiritualist papers." The reason for the suppression, the Republican claimed, was that Spear claimed that the spirits had advised him that members of the community were to "cease to use clothing for the concealing of their persons, and trust to the purity of each other." The report did not charge that the advice was accepted, but rather that numerous of the communitarians became aware that Spear's counselors were not to be trusted, and the consequence was the abandonment of the community by most of its participants.

The charge was answered in the Spiritual Age by its editor and Spear's former co-laborer, A.E. Newton. Although he disclaimed responsibility for the activities of any medium any further than those activities seemed reasonable to his own judgment, Newton felt obligated to respond

13Cited in Spiritual Age, January 30, 1858.
14Ibid.
because he considered the charges blatantly false. He willingly admitted that Spear was often "peculiar and seemingly erratic in his proceedings," but denied that there was any tangible evidence to support the charge of indecency. So determined was Newton to discredit the charge that he rather deceptively denied that a community had ever existed at Kiantone under Spear's leadership. Perhaps since the community had no legal or permanent status Newton felt justified in stating that it did not exist. Yet he was personally well aware the Spear and several supporters had for the past several years spent several months of the year living communally at Kiantone.\(^{15}\)

Newton did admit that Spear had been in contact with a society of spirits "who have taken to unfold through his instrumentality the principles of a system of social reorganization which they wish to introduce upon the earth." But here again he played down the importance of the point, noting that "comparatively few spiritualists have as yet taken any special interest in this scheme, or in any way identified themselves with it." Many, he said, "have from the first strongly discountenanced it." Opponents of spiritualism, Newton contended, must learn that spiritualists act not as a sect, but as individuals, and each is

\(^{15}\)Spiritual Age, January 30, 1858.
responsible for his own opinions and for those of no other. Newton's personal attitude toward communitarian experiments of all types was pessimistic. He held that man in his present condition was still motivated largely by self-seeking considerations such as selfishness and love of power, and thus the self-sacrifice on which a successful community must be based was lacking.\(^{16}\)

Yet in spite of his generally defensive posture, Newton remained steadfast in his belief that "Spiritualism is a divinely appointed instrumentality for bringing about man's redemption from sensualism and all sin, without which no millennium or perfect social state can ever dawn upon earth." The charges linking Spear with nudity, he explained as nothing more than a misreading of Spear's writings in The Educator, which Newton himself had edited. Spear had written in The Educator:

"Spiritualism comes . . . to call out a few persons, who shall be all that is idealized here [i.e., so pure that low and lascivious thought cannot be generated in their minds, or indulged in their presence], and more. Women who shall be divinities or goddesses in human form; who shall know no shame; who shall seek no fig-leaf coverings; who shall be so pure that garments shall not be used for pur-

\(^{16}\)Ibid, May 8 and August 14, 1858. Newton's lack of faith in communitarian movements was in all likelihood the major factor in his gradual disassociation from Spear.
poses of concealment, but only for comfort and convenience."¹⁷

To Newton, such words were in close accord with the Biblical concept of the desire to concealment as indicative of conscious impurity. Any "filthy-minded wretch who could construe . . . [Spear's] expression into evidence of 'sensualist tendencies,'" he claimed, "clearly belongs to that class whom an old apostle charged with turning 'the grace of God into lasciviousness.'" To the specific charge that certain companies of Boston spiritualists were sitting in circles "perfectly undisguised with clothing," he could say merely that he was unaware of such behavior and that the charge should either be substantiated or dropped.¹⁸

The residents of Kiantone were probably not guilty of meeting in the nude. Nevertheless the community came upon heavy fire again later in 1858 when word leaked out that Spear's amanuensis and closest associate at Kiantone, Caroline Hinckley, was pregnant. No one at Kiantone seemed willing to accept responsibility for the unborn child, and John M. Sterling wrote a letter to the Spiritual Telegraph complaining of the treatment of Spear and Miss Hinckley in both the secular and spiritualist press. Disregarding the pregnancy, Sterling insisted that Spear and Hinckley were [at Kiantone]

¹⁷Ibid. January 30, 1858.
¹⁸Ibid.
"for the sole purpose of receiving spiritual communications."

He announced that Spear's wife would accompany him to Kiantone in the coming spring.\(^{19}\)

The response of the *Spiritual Telegraph* to Sterling's letter indicated the bitterness of that journal over the events at Kiantone and their effect upon the larger spiritualist movement. Its editors did not believe in immaculate conceptions, either ancient or modern. What had happened at Kiantone, they caustically observed was "Spear-ism gone to seed, which 'ism' we are not inclined to make apologies for." Even if Miss Hinckley steadfastly refused to name the father of the child, and Spear denied his responsibility, "still the fact that Mr. Spear had left his family, and has lived at Kiantone several months at least, in a small . . . shanty, with only one bed . . . is an outrage on social order." No amount of apology or denial, the *Telegraph* insisted, would absolve the parties of their irresponsible and indefensible behavior.\(^{20}\)

The facts and the rumors pertaining to Kiantone which circulated throughout 1858 fed the fires of a more general charge which opponents continually leveled against spiritualism, that it promoted "free love." As far back as 1854

\(^{19}\) *Spiritual Telegraph*, November 20, 1858.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
Spear's operations had been clouded by charges of free love. At that time critics had seized upon the use of the Boston woman in the impregnation of Spear's electrical machine at High Rock. To many her behavior was lewd, immoral and reflective of the sensual nature of the movement. The Spiritual Telegraph reported at that time that an editorial in a major New York newspaper stated flatly that spiritualism fostered "a change in partners as obtains among the Oneida Perfectionists." The editors of the Telegraph adamantly denied the charge, but at the same time criticized the New Era and proponents of the "New Motive Power" for certain kinds of unorthodox behavior which gave rise to such charges.

At this same time, Adin Ballou split with Spear and his associates and warned of the pernicious danger of free love posing in the guise of "the promotion of sexual purity and female elevation." In a prophetic statement which turned out to be unfortunately accurate, Ballou wrote of the fascination of the doctrine of free love:

Mediums will be seen exchanging its significant congenialities, fondlings, caresses and indescribilities [sic]. They will receive revelations from high pretending spirits cautiously instructing them that the sexual communion of congenitals will greatly

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21 Ibid., Sept. 9, 1854.
22 Ibid.
sanctify them for the reception of angelic ministrations. Wives and husbands will be rendered miserable, alienated, parted, and their families broken up. There will be spiritual matches, carnal degradations, and all the ultimate wretchedness thence inevitably resulting.23

Ballou's warning provoked a series of charges and counter-charges within the spiritualist community. The New Era told its readers that it was certain that Ballou's evidence of free love was not "conceived and born in Boston," and suggested that perhaps Ballou had witnessed such "indescribilities" at Hopedale. "Let it be known," the New Era proclaimed, "that the majority of Spiritualists are sticklers for purity of life and conduct, conscious that it is essential to health, happiness and the exaltation of the immortal nature."24 Highly irritated by the reference to Hopedale, Ballou retaliated by warning that his reference was not to Hopedale but to the Boston vicinity, and that the New Era and its correspondents "will be wiser for themselves not to compel me to defend myself on this point."25

Opponents of spiritualism stressed what they claimed was its relationship to a general pattern of moral decline, the origin of which was traced to the activities of Robert

23 New Era, Sept. 6, 1854.


25 Spiritual Telegraph, December 16, 1854.
Owen and Francis Wright. Owen’s contribution had been, supposedly, to encourage breaking up the institution of the family through the establishment of scientific socialism. The generation of spiritualists which followed had contributed the doctrine of "free affinities," the effect of which was to undermine the institution of marriage. In some cases ex-spiritualists testified openly to the corrupting influence of the spiritual philosophy. J.W. Towler, identifying himself as a Universalist minister from Cleveland, confessed that he had endorsed the claims of spiritualism in 1852 and had thereafter become a free lover—"one who holds that the individual has the right to make and remake his or her connubial relations without consulting any authority, religious or legal."

It was unquestionably certain spiritualist teachings with regard to marriage and women’s rights which gave rise to the charges of free love. The belief that spiritualism was to usher in an age of harmony and understanding led to the conclusion that in the true spiritual marriage, "two congenial souls must be irresistibly attracted and perfectly conjoined . . . by the spiritual 'natural law of affinity.'" If a marriage fell far short of the spiritual ideal, and the

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partners felt that they could not continue to live together in harmony, then "they should do the next best thing, which may be to separate by mutual consent."28

The spiritualist philosophy considered love to be a sentiment which "originates in the very essence of man's being, and is an element of the All-creative . . . Spirit which we call God, whose essence is love, in whose image man is unfolded." Because God's love was considered perfect, and because man was created in the image of God, spiritualism viewed the desire to achieve a perfect marital relationship as indicative of the divinity of love.29 Love was "the divine and infinite element of Godhood in man seeking after the ideal love needed to make existence complete," and yet when the unhappily wed decided to separate, they invariably found themselves "uniformly condemned without any qualification."30

Many leading spiritualists admitted, however, that certain professed spiritualists carried the idea of accepting divorce too far. These people, wrote spiritualist minister Uriah Clark, "talk largely of 'freedom,' 'individuality,' 'rights,' [and] 'social reform,' and if asked whether

29Clark, Plain Guide to Spiritualism, p. 135.
30Ibid., pp. 136, 139-140.
they are free lovers they give an equivocal answer." Such people, he asserted, were "the abomination of desolation, and the slime of the serpent has marked their track." 31

Perhaps the type of people to which Clark referred were such as the founders of Modern Times. Begun originally in 1851 by Josiah Warren, the Modern Times community was located on Long Island. Warren, a former Owenite, was interested in putting to the test his theory of "Equitable Commerce." It was his conviction that the only just basis for determining the price of an object was its cost of production coupled with the time consumed in its assembly and sale. Before moving to New York he had operated a "Time Store" in Cincinnati where he sold goods at cost plus a charge for his time spent operating the store. At Modern Times he hoped to move a step further by replacing hard money with notes which would indicate a certain number of time spent on some type of useful labor. Such notes would be used to buy goods valued at an equal amount of time-cost. Warren was joined by Stephen Pearl Andrews, a brilliant Texas lawyer who had endorsed abolitionism and moved to New York several years earlier. Andrews, like Warren a practicing spiritualist, believed that his own theory of individual sovereignty could be banded together

with Warren's commercial system to produce "a veritable Eden."32

Reasoning from his premise that man must be made as
free as possible to live as he might choose, Andrews
determined that the existing marriage institution infringed
upon that right. His thinking on the subject was readily
accepted by the fifty to one hundred residents of Modern
Times. Members did not practice free love in the sense of
staging group sexual encounters or exchanging partners for
purely sexual reasons, but they did insist that there was no
reason to hesitate in dissolving an unfruitful relationship
in order to form another which might result in a more per­
fect union. Many couples at Modern Times did not bother
with legal marriages, and at one point participants merely
wore a red string around a finger if they considered them­selves married. Among the community's more renowned
residents were Thomas Lake and Mary Gove Nichols, free­
thinking abolitionists and spiritualists who intended to
form a progressive school. By 1857, however, Modern Times
was besieged by a wide range of fanatics and faddists.
When its originators abandoned it, the community deteriorated

32 John B. Ellis, Free Love and Its Votaries (San
Francisco, 1870), pp. 381-388; Podmore, Modern Spiritualism,
I, p. 210; Madelaine Stearns, The Pantarch: A Biography of
Stephen Pearl Andrews (Austin, Texas, 1968), pp. 72-76.
and by 1860 it had disappeared altogether.\textsuperscript{33}

The Modern Times community, of course, constituted one of the more radical attacks upon marriage by individuals associated with the spiritualist movement, and it was roundly condemned by leading spiritualists and spiritualist journals. And yet the type of philosophy which had been expressed by Andrew Jackson Davis had paved the way for such forms of behavior. Davis insisted that if a man and woman, legally married, found that they did not embody each other's ideal, then they were not truly married, and were perfectly justified in seeking further for a more satisfactory relationship. Davis argued, too, that if the law required the commission of a crime as grounds for divorce, both parties should declare themselves guilty of adultery by virtue of their having lived together even though not ideally suited for one another.\textsuperscript{34}

Although one might choose to dispute the charge that


\textsuperscript{34}Ellis, Free Love and Its Votaries, p. 412. For a comprehensive treatment of the philosophy of Davis see Delp, The Harmonial Philosopher: Andrew Jackson Davis and the Foundation of Modern Spiritualism.
spiritualism endorsed free love, it is obvious that its emphasis upon liberalization of divorce laws and upon reform of the institution of marriage constituted a serious threat to the traditional view of marriage vows. Nowhere was this more true than at Kiantone. Spear scoffed at the frequently expressed concern that spiritualism threatened the sacred institution of marriage. A sacred marriage, he reasoned, was one ordained by God, and no earthly force could destroy it. Rather, he contended, his own purpose was to see the end of "certain usages, certain customs, certain mockeries, certain so-called marriages which are but the hot beds of lust and lasciviousness." Such relationships, Spear thought, should be laid aside as mementoes of nineteenth-century civilization.35

Even in a prayer which Spear designed for use in a marriage ceremony, the matter of divorce was openly considered. The following statement was included:

Father, entering intelligently into this new relation, comprehending the Divine matehood, may they be faithful to each other in all the relations of life; and, should they, from any cause, come to feel that they are no longer husband and wife, amicably may they withdraw from one another.36

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Yet to overemphasize the willingness of Spear to sanction divorce would be to distort his broader attitude toward the responsibilities of marriage. He asked that marriage partners "strive to see who can be most ready to forgive," and advised that they never allow "low, lascivious thoughts" to occupy their minds. The organs of the human body, Spear believed, "are sacred, and are to be used only for lofty, pure, and worthy ends." In a paper on the same subject, Thaddeus Sheldon challenged marital partners to seek to build a relationship "which knows not of weariness, pain, or distrust."37 Certainly Spear never advocated anything like the complex marriage which was practiced at Oneida. He and his followers were strong defenders of monogamy, believing that marriage would be the cornerstone of the new social order, and that "the race cannot be regenerated, sanctified, or restructured without it."38

But while they adhered to the legitimacy of marriage as an institution, members of the Patriarchal Order, the name Spear now used for his organizational structure, staunchly supported the feminist demands of the day. The Order insisted that property should be held jointly and


that women be granted full equality before the law. The traditional role of the wife in the marital relationship was also attacked. "Woman is done an injustice," wrote Spear in a paper he claimed to have received from the spirit of Francis Wright, "when she is given directly or indirectly to understand that home is her appropriate sphere." He did not argue that home could not be one of her spheres, but simply that woman's interests extended into other areas as well.39

In the same vein, Spear contended that marriage should leave both husband and wife free to follow individual pursuits. Even if doing so meant temporary separation, each party should understand that the result would be the education, welfare, and permanent happiness of both. Both man and woman, he insisted, needed to pursue interests which extended beyond the mere domestic circle. It was in part this desire to free women from the drudgery and restrictive confines of motherhood which prompted Spear to advocate a nursery system which would provide boarding for even very small children during certain parts of the year.40


40Newton, ed., The Educator, pp. 610-611; Spear [untitled], April 12, 1856, Document 2, Sheldon Papers.
Judging from the philosophy which he propounded and the nature of the reforms he advocated, one can understand why Spear would be condemned in the conservative secular journals and press. By mid-twentieth century standards his theories and proposals seem relatively commonplace, but in the mid-nineteenth century neither the woman's reform movement nor the cause of marital reform received widespread public support. More difficult to understand is why, after 1858, Spear virtually became persona non grata in the leading spiritualist journals.

Certainly Spear's comments regarding the institution of marriage were no more radical in 1858 than they had been in 1854. Furthermore, the general pattern of Spear's criticism of marriage and his defense of women's rights differed little from that which was expressed by a number of leading spiritualists in a variety of spiritualist periodicals. Somehow, nevertheless, the events of 1858 left Spear's image within the spiritualist community permanently tarnished. In part the repudiation stemmed from his association with Caroline Hinckley. Living with one woman while married to another was offensive to spiritualists as well as to the public at large. Many other leading spiritualists had taken new mates who shared their beliefs, but most had taken the time to secure a legal divorce in order to do so.41

41Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, I, 294.
It seems, too, that Spear's rejection related to eccentricities at Kiantone which extended beyond the Spear-Hinckley affair and the pregnancy of unacknowledged origin. Certain of the papers he and Caroline recorded at Kiantone claimed the existence of some very questionable biological laws. One of the more striking of these was contained in a paper entitled "Human Chemistry: What Is It?." The theory presented in this discourse dealt with the biological process by which human characteristics are determined. Spear's spirit sources claimed that it would be possible for a women to produce a superior offspring by systematically absorbing into her womb the great thoughts and traits of the mind and character of eminent spirits. The biological characteristics of the earthly father in such a case would be irrelevant. "Let her cohabit with whom she will, that offspring is legitimately and naturally hers, and no human being is the author, or can hold the relation of father to it in any true sense," stated the communication.  

Like other of Spear's scientific theories this idea did not receive widespread acceptance. He may well have used it to explain the pregnancy of Caroline Hinckley, an explanation which certainly would have been seized upon

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by the public press in order to condemn spiritualism and likewise would have caused image-conscious spiritualist editors to shudder.

While there is no written record that the women in Spear's group were "cohabiting" with whomever they chose, it is possible that there was systematic experimentation along these lines. One mysterious piece of evidence which may pertain to the pattern of behavior at Kiantone, although vague and inclusive, cannot be overlooked. Sometime late in 1858 Spear's conduct was challenged from within his own organization, the Patriarchal Order. Charges were levied against him by Eliza Kenny, the Massachusetts antislavery activist and champion of woman's rights. The precise nature of her charges is not known, but the Order held a trial in which Spear was the defendant. Daniel Gano, who by now held an important position within the Order, was a close observer of the proceedings and reported that Spear's defense was conducted by Carrie Lewis, of Cleveland, and John Allen, the former Brook Farm lecturer. Eliza Kenny had asked Gano for his advice and instruction in writing, and he had informed her of her obligations to the Order, obligations which Gano said later she neglected to abide by during the course of the trial. Gano was also critical of the acting judge, William H. Bayless, who he believed had prejudiced the case against Spear by allowing irrelevant testimony to
be admitted on behalf of the plaintiff and by conducting the entire proceeding without requiring testimony under oath.\textsuperscript{43}

Having been associated with court proceedings for more than forty years in his position as clerk of courts in Cincinnati, Gano's opinion was that the prosecution had been allowed to make "declarations, statements, and insinuations ... which no legal tribunal would have permitted." Gano personally protested this course, but with no success, and the decision of the court went against Spear. Nevertheless, Gano wrote, "the facts elicited by this trial have not changed my favourable opinion of Bro. J.M. Spear."\textsuperscript{44}

An unexpected participant in the case was Thomas Richmond, the wealthy Chicago businessman whose support Spear had solicited earlier. Richmond was not an active member of the order, and appeared at the trial as counsel for Eliza Kenny. Nevertheless, he later agreed with Gano that the charges were unwarranted, and that the judgment against Spear reflected the bias of the presiding officer. "I am gratified," Gano concluded to Sheldon, "to observe that the association of high spirit intelligences who have solicited and employed Br. Spear as their medium and agent continue in full confidence to use him to further their

\textsuperscript{43} Gano to Sheldon, December 29, 1858, Document 14, Sheldon Papers.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
methodic and systematic purpose for God and humanity."\textsuperscript{45}

Although Gano did not mention the specific charges brought against Spear, it is apparent that Spear's character and behavior were key issues, and it is quite possible that Eliza Kenny may have charged Spear with improper behavior toward her. In any case, Gano complained that the matter had been made "improperly, very public."\textsuperscript{46} If, as implied, the nature of the charges were made known throughout spiritual circles, they were not printed in spiritualist journals. The journals would not publish evidence they would judge to be detrimental to the movement. Rather, they would simply disassociate themselves from Spear.

The fact that Spear survived the attack and that his following remained for the most part intact (even Eliza Kenny did not immediately leave the Order) testifies again to the magnet power Spear held over his associates. Neither the failure of his various enterprises nor the repudiation of the major spiritualist journals was sufficient to erode the loyalty of Spear's close band of "true believers."

Certainly the high point of the year 1858 for Spear and the members of the Patriarchal Order was the spiritualist convention which they staged at Kiantone Springs. The convention was advertised in the \textit{Spiritual Age} as a "Grove

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
Meeting," and was scheduled to run on September 17, 18, and 19. Doctor O.W. Wellington (the operator of the progressive school) was listed as arranging accommodations for those who desired them in nearby Jamestown, and transportation back and forth from Jamestown to Spiritual Springs was to be provided for a fee.\footnote{Spiritual Age, Sept. 11, 1858.}

Probably because Spear and Kiantone had already been in the news, the convention received the direct attention of the public press. Both the New York Times and New York Tribune sent reporters to the scene. This was somewhat ironic because of the three major spiritualist journals, only one, the Spiritual Age, sent a correspondent. The Boston-based Banner of Light studiously avoided any mention of the convention whatever. In the Spiritual Telegraph, editor S.B. Brittan told readers it had been his "earnest desire to attend," but that "other pressing duties" prevented him from doing so. In lieu of attending personally Brittan had planned, he said, to reprint A. E. Newton's report from the Age. But instead, he neglected the convention and wrote at length on the questionable behavior of Spear and Hinckley.\footnote{Spiritual Telegraph, Nov. 20, 1858.} Objective analysis of the Kiantone Convention is made extremely difficult because no copy of
the issue of the *Spiritual Age* in which Newton gave his report has been found. Having to rely upon the reporting of a hostile public press necessitates attempting to determine the points at which such reports are biased. At the same time, however, the use of such sources sheds considerable light upon the attitude of public media toward spiritualism in general.

On the first day of the convention, Friday, September 17, the weather was unseasonably cold, and the crowd small. Carrie Lewis, whom the New York *Times* characterized as "a lady well-known among spiritualists and free lovers as a speaker at their gatherings," was chosen to be the president of the meetings. The assembly adopted a series of statements reflecting the more general tenets of spiritualism, and also called upon men and women of "moral courage" to join the Kiantone Community in developing a model society, "free from every evil work, in which may be born and reared a better generation." On Saturday the weather was warmer and a larger, more enthusiastic group, described by the neighboring Jamestown *Journal* as a "motley crowd," appeared.

49 The attitude of the New York *Tribune* toward Mrs. Lewis was established prior to the convention. Early in the year the *Tribune* reprinted an article from the Cleveland *Herald* which charged that she "had sat for an artist ... with no covering save her chemise." It is "needless to say," the Herald claimed, "that she is clearly of the Free Love Order" (cited in the New York *Tribune*, Jan. 23, 1858).
at the Springs to hear a full slate of speakers. Like reformers in general, spiritualists often paid scant attention to the mundane details of organization. In this case, the committee in charge neglected to name a keynote speaker. After some confusion Carrie Lewis was afforded the honor. Her speech consisted primarily of reading several of the spiritual communications of Spear, who personally remained in the background throughout the convention. Spear's communications were frequently obtuse to the point of being unintelligible and as such served mainly as a testimony to the advanced state of the minds of the spirits in question. To a reporter unfamiliar with such manifestations of spirit power the communications appeared merely as "ranting mysticism."

Most of the speeches of the day dealt with the "harmonial philosophy" and its capability of lifting the human race out of ignorance and superstition. A Mr. Codding was reported to have told the convention that the marriage institution was slavery and should be abolished; that people trapped by the chains of matrimony should be at once freed and left to bestow their affection when and on whom they pleased.

50Jamestown Journal, Sept. 24, 1858.
51New York Tribune, Sept. 27, 1858.
Whether the speaker actually favored abolishing marriage completely, as the report implied, is not clear. As a general rule the opponents of marital reform were inclined to identify any opposition to the traditional concept of marriage as support for free love. In any case, it appears that sexual liberation was the theme of the following speaker (not a well-known spiritualist), who was identified only as "a young woman from Cattaraugus." The New York Tribune described her performance in a manner which could be calculated to reap a maximum of reader interest, to elicit scorn for spiritualism in general, and to evoke opposition to the practice of allowing women to speak publicly. The woman was reported to have entered a trance state, and at the outset her speech was "distorted and spasmodic." As she rocked back and forth, "her bosom rose and receded like the swell of an ocean." Then her voice "waxed strong and clear, and rang through the woods and reverberated between hill and hill." Her countenance, at first flushed with excitement, "became as white as procelain and almost as translucent as the morning vapor, and her whole frame quivered with intense emotion." At the peak of her utterance the young woman screamed, "Free love! Free love! It is God's law, it is heaven's command; let no man presume to chain and imprison the heart, lead captive the young affections, and quench the divine
scintillations of holy love." Several tugs on the speaker's dress by Carrie Lewis were required to return her to her normal state of consciousness.

Again, whether or not the speaker actually used the words which were attributed to her may be questioned. Certainly if she was capable of speaking as eloquently in a trance state as the quotation implies, the reporter ought to have given the phenomenon of trance-speaking more serious consideration. What seemed to the reporter to be merely a series of humorous contortions and an amusing change of appearance was precisely the kind of behavior which spiritualists took seriously as an expression of the work of powerful spirit agents.

In the afternoon sessions the major themes continued to be the abolition of the existing marital institution and family structure, the elevation of women to perfect freedom, and the restructuring of society into a visionary state of perfection and order. Elements of Spear's agricultural revelations were introduced and it was proclaimed that in the new era the strawberry would "balloon itself to an infinite extent."53

Another of the Saturday speakers was S.C. Hewitt, the former editor of the defunct New Era. His speech was one of several which were reported as "made up of the

52 Ibid.
53 Jamestown Journal, Sept. 24, 1858.
meaning words familiar to Spiritual parlance, and ... consequently, without form and void." Hewitt's purpose was to explain the intent of the Kiantone Community, but the only reported intelligible point which he made was that the octagonal huts at Kiantone represented the "germinal beginning" of a great and masterly perfection to come.54

Sunday, the final day of the convention, dawned clear and cloudless. Throughout the day a "soft, vitalizing breeze from the southwest" stirred the forest leaves, continuously refreshing the secluded Kiantone retreat. The crowd had begun to assemble by nine o'clock, and by eleven o'clock at least five thousand people were in attendance.55 The program began at an early hour, and the course of events soon verified the existence of a conflict which had surfaced the day before. The convention was split into three factions: Spokesmen for the conservative and moderate factions of the spiritualist movement, Spear and his more radical band of followers, and thirdly, a sizable segment of individuals whose main concern quite obviously was sexual liberation.

The first speakers of the day generally fell into the first and second categories, to the open displeasure of

54Ibid.

55New York Tribune, Sept. 27, 1858.
others who were anxious to give the spirits an opportunity to speak through them on topics of a liberating nature. A.E. Newton, for example, made a dispassionate and moderate appeal on behalf of the aims of spiritualism—the elevation of mankind through individual and societal reform. Newton had from 1854 through 1857 been closely associated with Spear, but in editing the Spiritual Age, he assumed a much more moderate posture.

Another of the early speakers, whose "undoubted sincerity" was noted in the public press, was Thaddeus Sheldon. Sheldon expressed with absolute certainty his belief that "a new power . . . is now undertaking to . . . revolutionize modern society," and that "a crisis in human affairs is at our doors." The humanitarian reform movement which the nation was experiencing was a part of the process, Sheldon insisted, and it was entirely possible that an internal war might need to be waged in order to complete the process of reform—specifically to free the slave and to break up the existing system of commerce and banking. The entire process represented the continuing efforts of forces in the spirit world to restructure earthly existence.56

In the course of his speech Sheldon openly referred to the ridicule which had been heaped upon him as a result of

56Ibid; T.S. Sheldon [Untitled speech given at the Kiantone Convention], Document 22b, Sheldon Papers.
his association with Spear. Addressing himself to those in attendance from the Kiantone area, most of whom, he said knew him as a businessman and some of whom he had met at railroad conventions, he acknowledged that "It has been said of me that I am demented, hallucinated, and that I have squandered my prosperity in various ways." Yet, he testified, "Today I feel that I am a wealthier man than in any preceding year in my life." Once he had "stood behind the counter" and gathered in this world's wealth." Now, through the aid of the spirit world he intended to develop "a system of exchange by which the producer and consumer are mutually advantaged." A model exchange was being planned for a site near Jamestown. Such a system, Sheldon claimed, would "break up monopolies" and "drive tricksters completely out of the market." He testified, too, to his confidence in the reform efforts of John Murray Spear, and extended an invitation to any who might wish to pursue the matter of the spiritual role of the Kiantone Community to meet with him there in his office for discussion.57

Following Sheldon's speech Carrie Lewis again took the rostrum, this time speaking on the subject "generation." Apparently her remarks touched upon the subjects of sexual intercourse and human reproduction, thus offending a

57 Ibid.
conservative reporter who wrote that this "flippant, blushing Cleopatra" discoursed "on a subject sacred to the library of the physician or the holy of holies of the family." However offensive her remarks may have been to representatives of the public press, they seemed not to be what the sexual liberation element at Kiantone on that day wanted to hear. At the conclusion of her speech a woman identified only as a Mrs. Tantram, "a pale haggard-looking woman from Pennsylvania," jumped to her feet and prepared to address the crowd. Mrs. Lewis attempted to restrain her but was sent "reeling across the platform" by Mrs. Tantram's strong right arm.⁵⁸

In the disorder which followed, the self-appointed speaker seized the podium and announced that she feared not "man, woman, God, or the devil." About five hundred "rowdies" quickly crowded about her, "shouting and yelling, cheering and swinging their hats like madmen fresh from the regions of discord." When others on the platform attempted physically to prevent her from speaking, Mrs. Tantram jumped into the crowd and was borne by her admirers to a nearby buggy from which she continued to speak. She declared that all that had been said thus far during the day was trash, and that she was sick of such nonsense. Her own remarks championed what was reported as "the most abominable Free-Lovism," and her style of speech was heavily weighted with

⁵⁸New York Tribune, Sept. 27, 1858. No mention of Mrs. Tantram has been found in any other record of the spiritualist movement.
"disgusting, obscene language," and "vulgar and filthy expressions." Order was restored only when the woman's husband and sons carried her away.59

In the afternoon, Doctor O.W. Wellington addressed the convention, declaring his unwavering adherence to spiritualism but at the same time strongly condemning the practice of free love. John M. Sterling, wealthy Cleveland supporter, was to appear next, but as he began to speak "a clear ringing voice" was heard from another part of the grounds and the attention of the crowd was drawn toward that direction. The speaker was Mrs. A.M. Britt, a spiritualist orator of some note from St. Louis. Although she was scheduled to speak later on, she chose to speak at that moment, and from a wagon rather than from the platform as a protest against earlier speeches, particularly those calling for the development of a "Harmonial City" there at Kiantone, a project in which she had absolutely no faith, and those advocating free love, which she utterly repudiated.60

Mrs. Britt, like the other speakers, declared herself to be an avowed spiritualist. She was certain that the "statesmen, sages, and philosophers" of the spirit world were undertaking to inaugurate a new and better world for

60Ibid.
groveling mortal beings. In order to implement the spirit world's plan for world improvement she declared it essential to "spurn the tyrannical thought and customs that shackle our very thoughts and aspirations, and follow the impulses prompted by God and nature." Although taken out of context, the suggestion to follow "impulses prompted by God and nature" might indicate support for sexual license, Mrs. Britt's address was rather a plea for the transformation of a cold, harsh, society into an affectionate and harmonious family in which the criminal, the drunkard, and the outcast would be rehabilitated through compassionate, brotherly concern.61

Quite obviously the speaker said nothing particularly new or profound. Her remarks were essentially a restatement of the more innocuous elements of the "harmonial philosophy" as expressed by A.J. Davis, J.M. Spear, and numerous editors of spiritual journals. But Mrs. Britt was an exceptionally compelling speaker, "an orator of rare power and accomplishment," far more eloquent, wrote the reporter for the New York Tribune, than any feminine speaker he had ever heard. The effect of her speech at Kiantone was to turn the sentiment of the convention on a reverse course from that suggested by earlier advocates of free love. Although at the outset

of her address she was ridiculed by several hundred of the "rowdies" who seemed intent upon preventing her from speaking, she assured them that they were simply giving vent to their youthful freedom. Appealing to their sense of tolerance, she addressed the entire convention for nearly an hour, during which time there was almost complete silence.62

Following Mrs. Britt's speech, the followers of John M. Spear and participants in the Kiantone Community, who had sponsored the convention, managed to gain for themselves the final word. Reading a statement regarding the future of the Kiantone communal experiment, they told of plans for a costly temple, of a university to be erected, and of the construction of additional dwellings. Their intent, as reported, was "to develop a populous, wealthy, prosperous, magnificent, and harmonial city."63

The apparent purpose of the organizers of the convention had been to rally support and to obtain members for the community, but although some in attendance returned later to spend some time at Kiantone, the general effect of the convention was decidedly negative. This was due to the failure of the conservative and moderate spiritualists (A.E. Newton was a notable exception), as well as the public

62Ibid.
63Ibid.
press, to distinguish between Spear and his supporters and the sizable body of free love enthusiasts which appeared at the convention. In her conservative plea Mrs. Britt tended to equate the Kiantone experiment with the doctrine of free love. The fact that Caroline Lewis had physically attempted to restrain the two most unrestrained advocates of free love was overlooked. This melding of the Kiantone project with free love can be clearly observed in the coverage of the New York Times:

This Chautuque [sic] affair is but another manifestation of the spirit which prompts a certain class of fanatics to release themselves from all the restraints which virtuous society imposes. In their specious generalities are contained a design to adopt practices at which the taste and conscience of the community revolt. They have selected for their association one of the most secluded localities in the state, where it is manifestly the purpose to repeat the experiment of Berlin Heights. The courage of which they boast is simply the effrontery of impudent men and shameless women; and their vaunted self-development consists in the unlimited gratification of passion and appetite. 64

John Sterling's letter to the Spiritual Telegraph was an expression of his anger over the treatment which the convention had received in the New York Tribune and the New York Times. At the same time it was a plaintive appeal for

64 New York Times, October 14, 1858. The reference to Berlin Heights is to the well-known free love colony near Cleveland. For a detailed but negatively biased account of the Berlin Heights community see Ellis, Free Love and Its Votaries. Ellis devoted an entire chapter to the subject.
more objective treatment in the spiritualist journals. Kiantone, he argued, could not be fairly identified as a community where "self-development consists in the unlimited gratification of passion and appetite." And yet, "many intelligent spiritualists" were coming to believe that this was the case. Other than Horace Fenton, who with his family cultivated the farm, only five or six persons resided there, and some of them only temporarily. Life at Kiantone, Sterling explained, consisted in general of clearing and cultivating the land, writing and corresponding, and "other duties properly and legitimately incident to a moral, humanitarian, and religious enterprise." All of the participants, he insisted, were individuals "whose past lives have been characterized by integrity and purity." How was it then, that when such individuals "attempt to actualize something in accordance with high spiritual instruction for the benefit of humanity, not only the opposers, but the friends of spiritualism, Herod and Pilot-like, are ready to join hands in condemnation?"^5

It was a culmination of the events of 1858 which brought about the disrepute of John Murray Spear within the main body of American spiritualism. Since 1854 the unorthodox behavior of Spear had rendered spiritualism liable to public scorn and ridicule. In 1858 the apparent

^5Spiritual Telegraph, November 20, 1858.
absurdity of searching for buried treasure, the unfortunate Caroline Hinckley affair, the charges levied by Eliza Kenny, and finally the development of a community which seemed entirely too closely linked with the practice of free love, led the very influential Spiritualist Telegraph, the Banner of Light and the Spiritual Age to totally disassociate themselves from Spear and his spiritualist endeavors.

In his final word on the subject, the editor of the Spiritual Telegraph wrote: "We trust that no one will accuse us of any other intention in our premises, than to protect a noble cause from the liability of being thought, by the public, to sanction theories and practices which it utterly discards and repudiates." After 1858 Spear expressed his bitterness over his treatment in the spiritualist press by becoming increasingly secretive. So far as one could tell from reading the eastern journals, Spear and his Kiantone movement had ceased to exist. Although the community survived for another four years, it was totally ignored in the spiritualist press.

66 Ibid.
Although by 1859 John M. Spear was considered persona non grata to much of the eastern spiritualist press, he retained close ties with a number of spiritualists in that part of the country, particularly in New England. In January of that year he abandoned the winter cold of Kiantone and returned to Boston, in part to solicit support from spiritualist friends, and quite probably to spend some time with his wife and children.

While in Boston he met with an associate of several years earlier, a Boston medium who was in all likelihood the woman involved in the attempt to transmit life to Spear's electrical machine in 1854. The medium, identified only as Mrs. Peabody, conducted a seance in her home in the presence of Spear, John Orvis, Caroline Hinckley, and Thomas Richmond, who was at this time still struggling over the extent to which he should commit himself to the Spear movement. The communication Mrs. Peabody received from the spirit world lauded Spear for continuing his work in spite of opposition from bigots, and called attention to his accomplishments in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. "Think not thy work is nearly done," the spirits exhorted
through Mrs. Peabody; "Thou shalt put upon millions a
raiment whiter than snow."  

Such endorsements were always helpful to Spear in his
contacts around the country. This one in particular was
recorded by his amanuensis, Caroline Hinckley, and a copy
placed in Spear's collection of communications.

In the summer of 1859 Spear returned once again to
Kiantone to observe the development of the "Celestial City."
Judging from his behavior during the ensuing months, he
apparently determined that a more strictly defined approach
to communal living was needed in order for the community to
operate smoothly and productively. At least Spear recognized
that the residents of Kiantone were not yet capable as
individuals of governing themselves.

It was for this reason that Spear, in August, 1859,
began working with several close associates to formulate
what was called a "basis of temporary union" for the com-
munity, which they now identified as the "homeville Domain."
According to this document, all rights and title to the
Domain were placed in the "care and temporary keeping" of the
"leading mind," Thaddeus Sheldon, and the "earthly
agent" of the Association of Governmentizers, Caroline Lewis.
Those two persons were named to constitute a monarchy, and
it was stated that "their united word shall be counted law

\[1\][Mrs. Peabody], [untitled address to J. M. Spear],
and their directions cheerfully regarded and heartily obeyed."

Sheldon and Lewis were directed to form a cabinet which would serve as an advisory board and whose advice they could accept or reject, whichever they saw fit. All children in the community between the ages of seven and fourteen were to be placed in the "home department," which was also under the direction of Sheldon, who was empowered to make all decisions regarding their education and employment. All residents of the community were to be required to sign the "basis" papers or to leave the premises.

The distinct impression is given that some of what was described as the "rowdy" element which appeared at the convention in September, 1858, stayed on at Kiantone or came back the following spring on a more permanent basis. The August directive, for example, called for an end to "all profane, boisterous, obscene, or indecent language," declaring that such usage must be avoided "both in public and in private whether addressed to persons, children or

2 [Given through Spear], "Basis of Temporary Union, Homeville Domain," August 20, 1859, Sheldon Papers, Document 19. Note that Eliza J. Kenny, the original head of the Association of Governmentizers (see Spear, The Educator, 393) no longer held that position. It was Kenny who had filed some sort of charge against Spear in late 1858, (Document 14, Sheldon Papers). The charge was heard before a court of members of the Patriarchal Order, and Spear was acquitted. Kenny ceased to be closely associated with the movement (see chapter VIII, p. 313).

3 Ibid.
animals." Profane language had not posed a problem prior to this time.

The question of labor and wages was also considered deserving of specific attention. The agent for the Association of Agriculturalizers was placed in charge of all matters pertaining to the assignment of labor. Although the standard work day was set at eight hours, the agent was permitted to require longer work hours during the busiest seasons. No person was to be denied labor on the basis of "sex, clime, or complexion," and compensation was to be made on a daily, monthly, or weekly basis as the worker desired. The agent was also responsible for seeing that residents of the community were properly fed, housed, and clothed, and for caring for the animals owned by the community. In order to perform these tasks he was to use the products produced on the Domain or if necessary to exchange such products for manufactured goods through the commercial agent, Thaddeus Sheldon.

Judging from its "basis" papers, the Homeville Domain was not at this time a communistic society in any sense, but rather was loosely structured along Fourierist socialist lines. The land was not owned by a joint stock company, however, as was the case with most Fourierist communities, but remained in the hands of a small group of Spear's close

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
associates. As noted above, the temporary arrangement of August, 1859, placed the title in the hands of Sheldon and Lewis. This was undoubtedly done to insure against the possibility of a conspiracy within the membership of Spear's Patriarchal Order to sell the land and disband the community, as had happened five years earlier at Adin Ballou's Hope-dale.

Part of the reason for making the "basis" papers temporary was that by late summer of 1859 Spear was planning to broaden his sphere of influence, and he wanted to leave himself the opportunity to enlarge, restructure, or disband the community on short notice. In September he received papers which he claimed were from Benjamin Franklin, advising him to look into the feasibility of copper mining. In order to finance such an operation, Franklin suggested looking for a "prominent capitalist" who was also a spiritualist.

Not only did the idea of a spiritualist-socialist mining operation enter Spear's mind, but also the possibility of establishing additional communities on the pattern of the

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7 [Given through Spear], "Questions to Be Answered by the Educationist," September 12, 1859, Document 21, Sheldon Papers.
Homeville Domain at Kiantone. It may appear preposterous that Spear should have been thinking of more communities when the one which he was operating was in no way solvent, but he and his spirit advisors never allowed realistic appraisals of existing situations to interfere with their grandiose plans for the future.

And yet, viewed in the context of the larger body of mid-nineteenth century communitarian reformers, Spear's behavior in this regard is not atypical. Communitarians generally possessed an amazing resiliency which reflects the perfectionist strain within the movement. Convinced that communitarianism offered the key to the perfection of society, the believers in the communal alternative were inclined to accept the demise of specific communal attempts as indicative of human failure, not of ideological error.

The most ardent champions of the communal alternative were frequently individuals who were personally associated at one time or another with several unsuccessful communal experiments. As Robert Owen's New Harmony was failing dismally, numerous of its participants and supporters began to lay the groundwork for other communities based upon Owenist principles. Few of these communities survived for more than a few years. 8

8Bestor's Backwoods Utopias remains the most authoritative account of Owenism in America for the period it covers. Both Bestor (pp. 202-216) and Noyes (History of (cont.)
One of those who was a participant at New Harmony was Josiah Warren, son of a distinguished Revolutionary War figure, Josiah Warren. Warren left New Harmony even more convinced than before of man's intelligence and perfectibility, and he subsequently postulated a wholly anarchist doctrine which he called "individual sovereignty." In order to implement his theories he formed communities first at Tuscarawas County, Ohio (1835-1837), and later at Clarmont, Ohio (1847-1851). While the Clarmont community, "Utopia," was struggling to survive, Warren abandoned it to join Stephen Pearl Andrews in the formation of the "Modern Times" community at Brentwood, Long Island.  

In much the same manner, Fourierist socialists Albert Brisbane, Parke Godwin, and Horace Greeley, all of whom were instrumental in transforming Brook Farm into a Fourierist phalanx, abandoned the enterprise in its hour of

(cont'd) American Socialisms, pp. 73-80) included material on a number of small Owenite communities which followed in the wake of New Harmony.

9Eunice M. Schuster, Native American Anarchism: A Study of Left-Wing American Individualism (Northampton, Mass., 1932), pp. 92-95, 98; George Woodcock, Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements (Cleveland and New York, 1962), pp. 456-459. Noyes (see footnote 8) points out that Warren's Clarmont community was formed on land previously used by a Flourierist phalanx. Many of the members of that association simply remained and joined Warren (pp. 373-375). The only biography of Warren to date is William Bailie, Josiah Warren: The First American Anarchist (Boston, 1906). It is brief and based upon very limited documentary material.
greatest need in order to devote their full attention to the North American phalanx at Red Bank, New Jersey.\textsuperscript{10}

The pattern of the Fourierist movement in the United States clearly indicates a tendency to ignore failure. The average duration of the forty to fifty Fourierist phalanxes, most of which sprang into existence in the 1840's, was two years.\textsuperscript{11} As John Humphrey Noyes observed various Fourierist groups, he found that they comforted themselves by reasoning that "They must succeed; they will succeed; they are succeeding!" As their debts increased and misery and despair haunted them, he found, they would hold on still, insisting always that they were on the verge of success. Even when acknowledging temporary failure, they "offer themselves to other associations" and "turn again, and re-organize, refusing to surrender."\textsuperscript{12}

This kind of fervent dedication is generally linked to religious belief, and the appeal of Fourierism in the United States had a distinctly religious tone. And, as was the case with spiritualist reform, Fourierist theology emphasized

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{10}Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 183-184, 218; Redelia Brisbane, Albert Brisbane: A Mental Biography, with a Character Study by His Wife (Boston, 1893), p. 218.
\bibitem{11}The computation of an average of two years was made by Tyler, who noted that the average is pulled up by the record of the North American Phalanx, which lasted twelve years (Freedom's Ferment, p. 218).
\bibitem{12}Quoted in Mark Holloway, Heavens on Earth, 2nd ed. (New York, 1966) pp. 147-148.
\end{thebibliography}
the coming millennium and the advent of human perfection. "An important branch of the divine mission of our Savior Jesus Christ was to establish the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth," Parke Godwin told the National Convention of Associationists in 1844. Moreover, he called to the attention of his listeners a description of the triumph of universal association from the pen of Fourier himself: "These are the days of mercy promised in the words of the Redeemer, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Godwin concluded that "It is verily in harmony, in Associative unity, that God will manifest to us the immensity of his providence, and that the Savior will come according to his word, in 'all the glory of his Father:' it is the reign of Christ that comes to us in this terrestrial world; he has conquered evil."13

The zealous perseverance of true believers in the face of perpetual and almost total failure is a testimony to the power of the perfectionist millennial outlook in the communitarian movement.

To understand the manner in which Spear's visionary schemes were juxtaposed with the reality of perpetual failure is to understand how, in the fall of 1859, he could conceive of initiating a boat trip down the Allegheny, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers in order to enlarge the scope of his

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support and to hasten the fulfillment of spirit world plans for a new world order. October found him on the road soliciting support for the proposed river voyage. On the twelfth of that month he appeared at Berlin Heights, Ohio, where his contacts were members of the notorious Berlin Heights free love community. Then he moved on to Cleveland where he met with several of that city's prominent spiritualists. As he traveled, Spear invariably received papers which were directed to important spiritualists he encountered. The message was always roughly the same: Benevolent spirits were attempting to advance the human race through the instrumentality of Spear. It appears to have been an appeal which gained considerable financial support for the proposed expedition.

Returning to Kiantone, Spear appeared at nearby Farmington, Pennsylvania, on November 6. There he addressed two new supporters who are identifiable only by the names he bestowed upon them, "North Star" and "Peacemaker." Explaining to them the purpose of the river voyage, Spear emphasized

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14 [Spear], "Communications Received on the River Expedition, November 30, 1958-February 23, 1859," Document 32, Sheldon Papers. The document is in the form of a diary which begins not in November as the cover suggests, but on October 12, 1859. For a critical account of the Berlin Heights community and its quarrels with its neighbors see John B. Ellis, Free Love and Its Votaries, pp. 359-380.

15 Document 32, Sheldon Papers, entries made at Cleveland on October 21, 23, and 26, 1859.
his desire to search out new and desirable land for a community "along the beautiful Ohio," specifically a tract of land about fifty miles below Cincinnati. Also, in what was a period of rapid polarization of North and South over the slavery issue, Spear deemed it his responsibility to seek "to end chattelism through the message of the spirit world." 

By the end of November Spear had added another purpose to the voyage. Succumbing again to the lure of buried treasure, he announced that he had received a spirit message from a Monsieur De La Champ in which the communicant stated that as a refugee during the French Revolution he had come to the United States and hidden a large quantity of gold in the vicinity of New Orleans. The Arbitress (again, more precise identification has not been found) was instructed to locate the gold under a rock. In order to prepare herself for the mission she was to eat boiled beef and beets, and drink strong coffee. When the entourage reached New Orleans she would be directed by the spirits to a certain mule which she was to ride in her quest for the gold. 

There is no

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16 Ibid., entry of November 6, 1859.

17 Ibid., entry made at Farmington, November 20, 1859. The idea of uncovering mineral wealth through spirit assistance was not unique with Spear. During the 1860's a medium, Abraham James, was reported to have had remarkable success in locating both artesian wells and oil deposits in Warren County, Pennsylvania. James claimed that he received his directions from spirit sources (James M. Peebles, The Practical of Spiritualism [Chicago, 1868], pp. 26-27, 36-37).
record of the Arbitress being directed to a mule, much less any gold. One is inclined to think that even Spear came to realize that practical jokers in the spiritual realm were jesting with him. Whatever the reason, Monsieur De La Champ was not heard from again.

The means by which Spear and his party of perhaps six to eight individuals made their way south is quite intriguing. The voyagers began their travels at Oil City, Pennsylvania, boarding a flat boat, or barge, upon which they had constructed sleeping quarters. The boat was owned by a close friend of Thaddeus Sheldon, a man who had obviously come to believe in the benevolent activities of the spirit world. This man had "wide experience as a guide," according to Spear, and for this reason was selected not only to provide his flat boat, but to serve as the "Pilot."\(^\text{18}\)

Being a part of the group, the Pilot was, of course, given a commission by Spear, in this case in the presence of the North Star, Aggregationist, Discerneress, Constructor, and Recorderess. "This voyage is unlike any other you have ever undertaken," Spear informed the Pilot. "Your previous employers you have seen, and with them negotiated; but starting on this trip your employers are invisible. Though you cannot behold them, they are capable of beholding you."\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\)[Given through Spear], "To the Pilot," December 2, 1859, Document 25, Sheldon Papers.

\(^{19}\)Ibid.
Since the spirits made their will known through Spear, his will tended to be accepted as law. A frequent occurrence during the first days of the voyage was the transmission of assignments for specific people within the group. As the Cleopatra (the name which the group gave to their vessel) neared Kittanning, Pennsylvania, for example, Spear reported on the labors of the Aggregationist. One of this individual's chief responsibilities was to pursue the possibility of developing an enterprise involving the refining of various mineral ores. He was to collect samples of ores from along the Allegheny and compare them with the ores of Lake Superior. In accord with this directive, another of the crew, the Constructor, was advised to look into the possibility of "covering the whole of the craft," in order that there might be ample room for storage of such items as the Aggregationist might collect.  

When the voyagers reached Pittsburgh, Spear's advisors explained through him that the Constructor was to critically inspect various types of constructions, and "absorb into yourself the things you inspect." Having done so, he was

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20 [Given through Spear], "Of the Labors of the Aggregationist," December 4, 1859, Document 26, Sheldon Papers. No specific details pertaining to the Cleopatra have been found. An investigation of shipping records in the National Archives reveals no records for a Cleopatra which could have been the vessel in question. Apparently the name Cleopatra was neither an official nor permanent name by which the boat could be identified.
then to engage in a "good share of meditation and repose," so that what he had observed could be "appropriated and packed away" in his being.\footnote{[Given through Spear], "To the Constructor," December 9, 1859, Document 27, Sheldon Papers. The "Constructor," was almost certainly Horace Fenton, although the Sheldon Papers do not link him directly with that title. Fenton was described in the New York Tribune as the "Big Builder man" of the Spear movement ("Fanaticism and Sensuality," January 23, 1858, p. 3) and was credited with the construction of the unusual buildings at Kiantone.}

Another of the crew aboard the Cleopatra was the Provisionist. Quite naturally one of her tasks was to try to obtain sustenance for the voyagers along the way. But she was also instructed to concern herself with "all that relates to freedom." It was her "love of truth, reverence for the right, and sympathy for the poor," the spirit agencies explained, which qualified her for this labor. She was specifically assigned to acquaint herself with slavery. In a reference to the spirit of John Brown she was told, "And when the hero of '59 shall approach you,... you will be let into his secrets, and...it will be seen that there was method in his madness, that he had deliberately concocted a scheme, which lives." That scheme, the communication observed, might yet be implemented by those who fully understand what "he in his earnestness and fidelity commenced."\footnote{[Given through Spear], "To the Provisionist," December 22, 1859, Document 28, Sheldon Papers.}
Other papers, too, contained references to the possibility of directly interfering with the institution of slavery. The Pilot was instructed to be prepared to take additional persons on board. The Constructor was told to look into the matter of arranging accommodations which would enable people to travel aboard the Cleopatra in secret.  

Whatever his intentions may have been, however, there is no evidence that Spear's organization or anyone connected with it physically assisted any slaves during the course of the river voyage, and one cannot escape the conclusion that Spear's theoretical goals far outstripped his capacity to accomplish them.

Another important figure aboard the Cleopatra was Carrie Lewis, who was given the title "leaderess." Her primary responsibility was "to see that everyone performs his task harmoniously." As a consequence of her important role, Mrs. Lewis was given the honor of eating at the head of the table. Nevertheless she was not to flaunt her authority, but rather to "encourage each in her or his work and suggest lovingly where neglect or weakness is perceived." As Leaderess, Mrs. Lewis was also told that she should feel

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23 [Given through Spear], "To the Pilot," and "To the Constructor," December 2 and 8, 1859, Documents 25 and 27, Sheldon Papers.

at liberty to furnish her apartment aboard the vessel some-
what in harmony with her official position, since quite
naturally persons who came on board would seek her acquaint-
ance.^[25]

As would be expected, Spear's companion and amanuensis,
Caroline Hinckley, made the trip, and her position was that
of "Recorderess." As suggested by the title, her task was
to be near to Spear whenever he descended into a trance
state so that she could transcribe his words as he received
them from his spirit sources.[^26] Apparently her own skills
as a medium were becoming finely honed, for in the latter
days of the voyage some of the communications bore only her
name and made no mention of Spear.

Incredible as the nature of the voyage may appear, one
cannot help but admire the heartiness and courage of the
participants. In view of the vague nature of the schemes
Spear proposed, their diligence can only be attributed to
a deeply rooted conviction that a new and glorious day was
dawning for humanity and that they were in the vanguard of
the awakening. Certainly Spear's advisors failed to take
some very important earthly factors into consideration. If
one intends to take a flatboat from Oil City, Pennsylvania
to New Orleans, the appropriate time to begin the voyage is

[^25]: Ibid.
[^26]: Ibid.
not in December. Particularly on the first leg of the voyage the Cleopatra was racked by inclement weather. This was one of the reasons why the Constructor was asked to look into the possibility of covering more of the boat. By the time the group reached Cincinnati, a cold wave had virtually shut down navigation of the Ohio River. A Cincinnati newspaper reported that boats passing from Cincinnati to the Kentucky side of the river were having considerable difficulty due to floating ice. A second item noted that navigation had been suspended, and was likely to remain so for several days.

Added to these difficulties was the fact that Caroline Hinckley had several months earlier given birth to the baby who in his prenatal condition had caused such a stir in 1858. The child made the voyage with the others, and Carrie Lewis was assigned the task of assisting the mother in caring for it so that there would be no interference "with the labors that are to be."

Conditions such as abnormally cold weather and the lack of comfortable living quarters would naturally be trying. Perhaps even more of a threat to the morale of the group was

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27 [Given through Spear], "To the Constructor," December 9, 1859, Document 27, Sheldon Papers.


the rather authoritarian posture which Spear began to assume. Many of his communications began to sound somewhat like petty military directives. The "Rules to Be Observed While on the River Expedition" offer a good example of this tendency. It was ordered that no strangers were to be admitted to the "more private room" of the mediums without first obtaining the consent of the leading communicative mind. When a paper was in transmission all persons not directly connected were to leave the room. When ordered to appear in the medium's quarters at a certain time for the transmission of papers members of the group were expected not only to be on time but to appear five minutes early. At a time when the main concern must have been to keep warm, Spear directed that all garments and shoes should be loose fitting so as to facilitate the "elemental flowings." Finally, all differences between individuals which might affect the interest of the expedition were to be left "to the judgment and final decision of the leading... minds."\(^{30}\)

But if on occasion tensions rose, if discouragement set in and loneliness caused enthusiasm to wane, and if the vagueness of the spirit direction eroded the voyagers' sense of purpose, Spear was more than capable, like a skilled

\(^{30}\text{[Given through Spear], "Rules to be Observed on the River Expedition," (undated), Document 28b, Sheldon Papers.}\)
general on the battlefield, of rekindling the spirits of his troops. On December 27, 1859, as the *Cleopatra* plied its way down the icy waters to within six miles of Cincinnati, Spear assembled the voyagers in the apartment of the Leaderess and transmitted from his spirit sources a message ringing with optimism. "How strong is that faith which could prompt persons to launch upon this bark, and how happily and safely have they been guided to this spot!" the spirit guides enthusiastically communicated. "Let him who doubts the Divine existence call this chance; but let those who have faith in God [and] trust in an intelligent spirit world, recognize the hand of a beneficient father."31

Spear's own eloquence in defense of the voyage rivaled that of his spirit advisors. On the same occasion he delivered the following invocation:

> Oh thou who didst by thy power guide thine ancient people over the sea, through the wilderness to the land of promise; up to thee would the voyagers look in gratitude for the blessings which have attended them while on this expedition. Help them to see and to feel that there are unseen hands guiding and directing them on their way. Approaching the neighboring city may they lend all their energies to the facilitating labors broad and unitary which will there open before them. May they study unity, harmony, industry, simplicity of life, purity of thought, loftiness of feeling, that they may be suitable instruments in thy hands to do the work unto which they have

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31[Given through Spear, on board the *Cleopatra*, in the apartment of the Leaderess], Sheldon Papers, December 27, 1859.
been called. Oh Father: Up to thee would thy children look for wisdom, feeling that from thee and thee alone it must flow, else their labors be in vain... As the voyagers shall think of their homes, their companions, their children left behind, may they feel that they are engaged in labors universal, which include the welfare of their nearer, dearer, and more dependent ones. Help them to feel that as the old state of things, like the ice upon the flowing stream, is decaying, so must there be preparation for a new and divine order of things. Called to this labor, may they be of one heart, one soul, and may they study to promote a common wealth. [sic]--Thus forming a little nucleus around which others may gather. Help them to be true to their divinist promptings—and may their speech ever be seasoned with salt, and may they act together not only among themselves, but seek cooperation with associated bodies in the spirit life. And may they be so refined, become so unselfish, that treasures abundant may be safely placed in their hands to be used for the upbuilding of a common humanity in this mundane sphere.32

Such words clearly illustrate Spear's ability to verbalize both his own aspirations and those of his followers. They suggest, too, that charges that his movement was atheistic were totally unfounded. A more accurate description of his activity must acknowledge that it was highly religious in nature and contained many elements of the revivalistic approach of the more fundamental sects of the period.

Not only did Spear rally his forces by emphasizing a

32[Given through Spear, including remarks made in normal state of mind], "To the Pilot," (second of three documents bearing the same title), December 27, 1859, Document 30, Sheldon Papers.
high sense of calling, he continually whetted their spiritualist appetites by offering a prophetic vision of a world regenerated by the agencies at work. He hinted, for example, that the country would soon be at war with itself, and that the "once-glorious union" would be "dissevered forever." In such a condition, a "new confederation" would be called for, and, Spear informed the voyagers, "a handful of persons are being educated for the labors of the next twenty-five years, and the teachings which are being inflowed into a few minds will be adopted to the wants of the coming hour." The word from the spirit world was that "soil must be had in favorable, temperate regions, and the social drum must be sounded, calling the people together....The banks of the Ohio and the waters of the Mississippi are looked to for this purpose with deep interest."33

Another technique which proved valuable as a means of encouraging the travelers was the use of direct communications to the participants from acquaintances in the spirit world. Early in January Spear's daughter Saphronia communicated a message for Carrie Lewis. Mrs. Lewis had apparently become despondent over her separation from her husband and three children, ages sixteen, ten, and seven. "I know the grief which has encompassed you," Saphronia comforted her;

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33 [Given through Spear, on board the Cleopatra] December 27, 1859, Document 31, Sheldon Papers.
"I watch you with a sister's love." But the spirit comforter also exhorted her to keep the faith: "Never has a great work been done which did not call for labor untiring and devotion strong." Mrs. Lewis was advised to "Go with father...about the streets of this murky city [Cincinnati]..., see persons as you may, and then at night quietly return and you shall feel that you have gathered something to aid this young effort."34

Cincinnati was the first major stopover on the expedition route. This was logical because the spiritualist movement was flourishing there and also because Daniel Gano, by now a major contributor to Spear's program, resided there. The most important purpose of the stay in Cincinnati was to solicit support for the formation of a new philanthropic spiritualist organization which was to be known as the Sacred Order of Unionists. It was while in that city that Spear received most of the papers pertaining to that subject.

As was the case earlier with the Patriarchal Order and its seven spirit associations, the Sacred Order of Unionists was the product of a broad range of prominent individuals in the spirit world. The spirits of John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and Patrick Henry purportedly pooled their talents to form a committee on revolutions. Benjamin Franklin,

34[Given through Spear], "From Fidelity to the Leaderess," January 7, 1860, Sheldon Papers, Document 34; Louisiana newsletter of the Lewis family, XVI, p. 209.
Emanuel Swedenborg, and Robert Fulton comprised the committee on projects. Emancipation was the special concern of Ellis Gray Loring, William Wilberforce, and Granville Sharp. Monetary concerns fell within the province of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams. There was a total of one hundred forty-seven members in what Spear called "The General Assembly in the Spirit Life," all seeking to improve the human condition through the Sacred Order of Unionists.35

The purposes for which the Sacred Order was created were unquestionably philanthropic. At the same time they reflected the limitless horizons of the perfectionist reform impulse which so totally captivated Spear's mind. The Sacred Order intended to "unite man to man, nation to nation, planet to planet." It would abolish war, provide universal education, and institute new religious forms and observances in harmony with the nature of man. In short, the goal of the Sacred Order was to "bring heaven down to earth," while at the same time lifting "earth up to heaven."36

Spear's Sacred Order of Unionists followed the pattern of his earlier spiritualist reform endeavors in that it was largely without form and substance. And yet, there was in

36 Ibid.
this case an attempt to define the structure of the order. It was to have major centers in three cities within the United States—Boston, Cincinnati, and New Orleans—and sub-centers in a number of others. Initially these centers were to provide converts to the Sacred Order with a base of operations and a place where they might exchange ideas and feelings. Employing mid-twentieth century terminology one might say that they were designed to give interested individuals a sense of identity with the movement and to heighten their sensitivity both with regard to the movement and toward each other.37 Quite certainly these urban enclaves of spiritualists were intended as an expansion of an idea which Spear, Dr. D. F. Gardner and other Boston spiritualists had originated in that city in 1855. At that time Gardner operated a combination boarding house and hotel, the purpose of which was to provide a sense of community for mediums and lecturers in support of the spiritualist philosophy who were temporarily residing in Boston.38

The question of whether or not spiritualists should engage in communal ventures of any sort was an issue which was debated somewhat emotionally at the time the Fountain

37Ibid.

38Spiritual Telegraph, III, 37, January 13, 1855. The justification for the Fountain House was first expressed in the New Era (II, 46, September 13, 1854). At that time proponents cited the need for a common home, a center of social interests "where associations can always be enjoyed."
House was established. Spear's perennial philosophical adversary, Dr. J. H. Robinson, used the *Spiritual Telegraph* at that time to contend that the associative home idea was not an integral part of the progressive spiritualist philosophy, but rather "an attempt to engraft an experimental branch on the main trunk of a great tree." Such associations would cause spiritualists to become clannish, he believed, thus detracting from the primary cause of societal reform. Furthermore, because "the human organism is yet so imperfectly fitted to receive unmixed truth from the heavenly world" it was altogether unlikely that any body of spiritualists could exist as an associative body with true harmony for any appreciable length of time.³⁹ The *Spiritual Telegraph* offered Robinson the entire front page of that journal to air his views, implying editorial support for his position, and indicating in the process the ideological split between the prominent New York faction of spiritualists led by S. C. Brittan, and the more radical Boston remnant which gravitated toward Spear.⁴⁰

After the consciousness of spiritualists was elevated through participation in urban communes, the second phase of

³⁹ Ibid., III, 24, October 14, 1854.
⁴⁰ Spear himself had spent several weeks at the Fountain House in the late summer of 1857 on one of his frequent trips from Kiantone to the Northeast (*New England Spiritualist*, III, 19, August 8, 1857).
the process of world reorganization as outlined in the plans for the Sacred Order was to focus upon the acquisition of tillable land at a variety of locations where members of the Order could live and labor without fear of want. Having established themselves on the land, members of the communities would then begin the manufacture and sale of useful goods and implements. Ultimately, it was foreseen, the attraction of a life where labor was afforded its proper dignity and which stressed brotherhood, equality, and individual worth would bring whole societies and even the entire planet into the Sacred Order. Thus would be accomplished the earthly transformation which Spear's consultants in the spirit world endeavored to promote and direct. 41

In the formation of the Sacred Order of Unionists there is once again abundant evidence that reformers like Spear, believing steadfastly in the ability of human beings to converse with spirits and at the same time holding tenaciously to the transcendentalist cosmology which stressed intuitive sources of truth, became totally unable to distinguish between ideas born of their own personal experience and those which reflected intuitive or extrasensory sources of knowledge. The Sacred Order was an idea which could quite logically have grown out of Spear's own involvement in the

communitarian movement. He had personally visited Oneida, as had S. C. Hewitt, his close friend and associate, and in all likelihood the success of that community in developing profitable manufacturing made a strong impression upon him. He had also had considerable contact with Shaker communities, and from the experience could not have failed to appreciate the manner in which a systematic communitarian life provided both physical and mental stability and security for practitioners. Spear had for three years worked closely with John Orvis, whose affiliation with Brook Farm and whose sympathy for Fourierist ideals, particularly the dignity of labor, have already been stressed. And, of course, his own Kiantone enterprise continued to serve as a testing ground for the various hypotheses concerning communitarian living which permeated his mind.

At the time of its founding, Spear's Sacred Order of Unionists acknowledged that it could undertake the gigantic scheme only on a very limited scale. Its goal, however, was to establish at least a branch of the Order in every country in the United States and to begin to extend its "benign influence" into other parts of the world by the end of a

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42 Spear said a few weeks later that Shakerism was to be lauded as "preparative" to the work of the Sacred Order ([Spear], "Communications Received on the River Expedition," February 10, 1860, Patriot, Indiana, Document 32, Sheldon Papers), and at least two Shakers were associated with Spear between 1860 and 1861 (Spear to Sheldon, July 30, 1861, Document 99, Sheldon Papers).
period of seven years. At that juncture a world convocation was anticipated which would enable the representatives of the Sacred Order to assemble with "the ablest sociologists of the nineteenth century."\footnote{[Given through Spear], "Announcement of the Sacred Order," (undated), Document 27b, Sheldon Papers.}

The head of the Order, quite predictably, was to be one who was able to receive suggestions "from the heavens above" as well as from the earthly sources. This could be none other than Spear. The role of this communicant was not clearly defined, but it did not really need to be since the entire program was to be implemented by spiritual edict. This explains in part why Spear sometimes behaved like a divine right monarch and why he tended to assume an attitude of superiority. He took the fullest liberty in employing his spiritual advisors both in formulating policy and in resolving differences within the order.

In the winter of 1859-1860, when the Sacred Order was established in Cincinnati, Spear and his supporters believed that the national temper would be conducive to an enthusiastic reception of the organization. The current tension, they theorized, was causing many to search for "a better state of things." People were coming to realize, too, that capitalism entailed a much higher cost of living for the individual than would true socialism.\footnote{Ibid.} They felt also that the growing
interest in spiritualism would motivate many individual believers in the spiritualist philosophy to search for a closer association with persons of like mind.45

The Spear entourage spent the first two months of 1860 in Cincinnati, attempting to arouse enthusiasm for their fledgling movement. But while the sizable body of spiritualists there probably gave Spear a hearing, his visionary spiritualist reform movement failed to evoke the ground swell of support that he had anticipated. Indeed, when the first list of members were recorded in late February there were only ten names upon it. Of these, at least eight had identified themselves with Spear prior to the expedition. The eight were Rebecca Gano, Daniel Gano, Thaddeus S. Sheldon, John M. Spear, Caroline Hinckley, John Orvis, Carrie S. Lewis, and Alpheus Cowles.46 Cowles was a man of about

45Ibid. Spear's appeal had thus far been unsuccessful in attracting dedicated support from large numbers of spiritualists. Citing the Cleveland Herald as its source, the New York Tribune ("Fanaticism and Sensuality," January 23, 1858, 3) reported that there were not more than five or six spiritualists in the city of Cleveland who did not publicly repudiate Spear. Such evidence lends itself to the conclusion that most spiritualists were not interested in radical reform programs based upon spiritualist philosophy. The only report of Spear's travels aboard the Cleopatra which appeared in the spiritualist press was a brief note in the Spiritual Clarion (Auburn, New York), (III, 1, January 14, 1860, p. 6), stating merely that the faith of Spear and his followers was "as strong as ever."

46"Pledge of Secrecy," February 23, 1860, Document 42, Sheldon Papers. Spear was actually working against his own stated aims. His mistrust of the spiritualist press led him to stress secrecy within the Sacred Order. That (cont'd)
seventy years of age and a resident of Geneva, Ohio, which lies northeast of Cleveland. He had been attracted to Spear's philosophy when Spear visited Geneva on one of his trips to Cleveland. Following his appearance in Cincinnati there is no record of any further association between Cowles and Spear. The same was true of two others, William E. Nevin and Henry Burnard. Both were introduced to the Sacred Order in Cincinnati, but neither remained close associates of Spear or active participants in the Sacred Order.

Later on as the band of believers continued their voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers toward New Orleans, small numbers of people joined the Sacred Order at the various stopovers. The interest of such individuals was invariably transitory, a reflection of Spear's magnetic personal appeal rather than of any deep attraction to his program for reform. Certainly the manner in which he presented his spiritualist philosophy, by combining forces of personality with the aura of revealed religion in an emotionally charged atmosphere, closely resembles the pattern established by more orthodox, evangelical protestantism in

(cont'd) secrecy, however contributed to the failure of the Order to become a major influence within the spiritualist movement.

47MSS., Official Census Schedule, 1850 (microfilm), National Archives.
the third and fourth decades of the century. 48

Throughout January and February of 1860, while the nation as a whole was in the midst of the fearful rumblings which preceded disunion, Spear continued to receive and issue optimistic pronouncements regarding the Sacred Order. He was told that the impending national chaos would pave the way for a new and better social structure. Lands, houses, places of storage, ferries, and even railroads, his spirit guides assured him, would come into the hands of the Order, and these would be wisely and productively managed. The wise management which the Order was to provide was linked to the extraordinary types of assistance which progressive spirits intended to offer. They would tell the Sacred Order when seasons of abundance and seasons of scarcity were to appear. They would provide new and better means of preserving perishable fruits and vegetables and would afford the genius needed to develop new labor saving machines. But beyond the monetary aspect of assistance, the counselors in the spiritual General Assembly told of their intention to "enrich the members [of the Sacred Order] in love, truth, and wisdom, which are the true wealth of a people." 49

48 A number of studies of nineteenth century evangelical protestantism are available. Among the most useful are Cross, The Burned-Over District, Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War (New York, 1957), and Weisburger, They Gathered at the River.

49 [Given through Caroline Hinckley], "Sources of (cont'd)
Spiritual messages were useful not only in outlining the broad program of the Sacred Order but also in dealing with very specific matters. While the group was in Cincinnati it was determined by Spear's sources that a "central depot" in the city was needed, a place "where the voyagers can go, be at home, meet with parties who may be temporarily or permanently interested in these labors." The responsibility for finding such a home was given to the Pilot, who the spirits said would "find himself attracted to the vicinity of Arch Street." The house which was desired on Arch Street was never acquired because its owner refused to accept the premise that benevolent spirits wished him to provide it. The Sacred Order did manage, however, to obtain the use of the estate of Daniel Gano, whom Spear began to refer to as the "Grand Sire." Gano was also named the "Omniarch" of the Sacred Order, a position second in


50 [Given through Spear], "To the Pilot," January 7, 1860, Document 33, Sheldon Papers.

51 N. B. Wolfe, Startling Facts in Modern Spiritualism (Cincinnati, 1874) p. 80. Wolfe was actually approached by some of Spear's people and was later consecrated by Spear as the "Projector." His first task, (p. 80) was to have been to provide the house on Arch Street for the use of the Sacred Order, but he dropped out immediately and became a strong critic of Spear.
power only to Spear himself.\textsuperscript{52}

Even prior to the beginning of the voyage, as noted earlier, Spear's mind had been directed toward the possibility of establishing a second spiritualist community somewhere in a warmer climate, or at least a climate which would offer better prospects than Kiantone for profitable agricultural production. While in Cincinnati he became particularly interested in the possibility of acquiring a number of acres in that vicinity to start a vineyard. One of the messages which he received early in the year advised that the mind of the Aggregationist "must be guided to the wine establishments." That individual was further ordered to gather whatever information he could regarding the subject.\textsuperscript{53}

There had been considerable interest in wine producing in the Cincinnati area for several years. Daniel Gano had experimented with the raising of Catawba grapes for wine, but had given up because of the inconsistency in the crops.\textsuperscript{54} In 1857 the \textit{Western Farm Journal} reported that

\textsuperscript{52}"Pledge of Secrecy," February 23, 1860, Document 42, Sheldon Papers; [Given through Spear], (untitled), January 22, 1860, Document 37, Sheldon Papers. In the January 22 document the Omniarch is described as the "all controlling and all permeating mind."

\textsuperscript{53}[Given through Spear], "To the Pilot," January 7, 1860, Document 33, Sheldon Papers.

\textsuperscript{54}Diary of Daniel Gano, Gano Papers.
approximately two thousand acres of Catawba grapes were being raised within fifteen to twenty miles of Cincinnati. The article in that journal pointed up the inconsistency of the crops but noted that one grower who had kept careful records over a period of nine years had an average income of three hundred dollars per acre per year.\textsuperscript{55}

The plan to acquire land for the purpose of beginning an agricultural enterprise involved moving into the second stage of the development of the Order, as outlined by Spear and his spirit sources. Flexibility was one of his dominant characteristics though, and so bypassing the urban development phase caused no major difficulty for Spear. Furthermore, he was making little headway in his attempt to establish a unitary home in Cincinnati, and certain of his associates, notably John Orvis, were becoming discouraged. In a message directly intended for Orvis, Spear commented that until Orvis had put the Sacred Order into such "a form that it can be presented to the public eye" one could not expect people to leave other causes and join the effort. It was his hope that the work of Orvis coupled with the acquisition of land at a favorable spot where a community could become self-sustaining would draw people to the Order.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} *Spiritual Telegraph*, April 11, 1858, citing the *Western Farm Journal*.

\textsuperscript{56} [Spear], "Communications Received on the River Expedition," entry made on February 13, 1860, Document 32, Sheldon Papers.
The desire of the Order for additional land reached fulfillment in February, 1860, while Spear and his friends were still, for the most part, living aboard the barge which had carried them from Oil City, Pennsylvania. Alpheus Cowles, Spear's Geneva, Ohio, benefactor, was persuaded to purchase a ninety-acre tract of land to be used by the Sacred Order. The tract was located along the Ohio River southwest of Cincinnati, and just below the town of Patriot, Indiana, in Switzerland County. A part of the land had been leased to a Swiss immigrant, Albert Amiet, in 1851, for a period of twenty years, and the lease was transferred along with the purchase. The cost of the land was twelve thousand dollars, or more than one hundred thirty dollars per acre. Although Spear and others of the Sacred Order were celebrating the purchase and dedicated the land in mid-February, the actual sale and transfer of title did not take place until April 10, by which time most of the group had sailed on to New Orleans.  

The acquisition of a sizable tract of land was cause for considerable rejoicing, and it evoked from Spear a series of predictions regarding the transformation of society which it portended. On one occasion he spoke of his movement

57 Transfer of deed, George Mordecai to Alpheus Cowles, April 10, 1860, Document 47, Sheldon Papers.
ultimately achieving a "divine socialism." Several days later in a paper entitled "Of Socialism," spirit sources explained that "Precisely where individualism dies, there socialism begins; precisely where the cooperative associations terminate, there the Assembly [Sacred Order] begins."59

Despite the ambiguities inherent in such statements, both clearly restate Spear's millennarian ideology. In this sense Spear resembled Robert Owen, who, significantly, ended his life a confirmed spiritualist. Both Spear and Owen were inclined to make frequent pronouncements hailing their movements as forerunners of a millenial age. As early as 1818 Owen claimed to be able to discern the signs of the "last days of misery on earth" and he confidently proclaimed that "THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS AWAY UNTIL ALL SHALL BE FULFILLED." His earliest Owenite journal, Mirror of Truth, was thoroughly millenialist in its outlook and repeatedly proclaimed the imminent demise of commercial civilization.60

In addressing the United States Congress in 1825 Owen

58[Given through Spear], (untitled), January 22, 1860, Document 37, Sheldon Papers.

59[Spear], "Communications Received on the River Expedition," discourse on socialism entered at Patriot, Indiana, February 10, 1860, Document 32, Sheldon Papers.

announced to his audience, "The time is now come when the
principle of good is about to predominate and reign trium-
phant over the principle of evil....Old things shall pass
away and all shall become new." Speaking at his recently
formed New Harmony community along the Ohio River in
Indiana, Owen claimed for his new system that it "may not
improperly be termed the beginning of the millennium." Soon
thereafter he assured participants at New Harmony, "The day
of your deliverance is come, and let us join heart and hand
in extending that deliverance, first to those who are near,
then to those who are more and more remote, until it shall
pass to all people, even unto the uttermost parts of the
earth." Spear and Owen also shared an inability to pursue any
specific reform endeavor for an extended length of time.
Both were more comfortable proselytizing on behalf of
schemes of world regeneration than they were in being an
active part of that process. What the Kiantone Community
needed above all else was permanent leadership. Whether

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61 Ibid., p. 106, citing Robert Owen, Two Discourses
on A New System of Society; as delivered in the Hall of

62 Ibid., p. 107, citing New Harmony Gazette, August 2,
1826. For a most lucid description of the process by which
a supposed atheist (Owen) came to describe the future of
the world in millennialist phraseology see Harrison's
chapter, "Millennialism," in Quest for the New Moral World,
(pp. 92-139).
Spear was capable of offering the type of leadership which was provided other communities by individuals such as George Rapp or John Humphrey Noyes is uncertain. What is certain is that he never stayed with his enterprise long enough to find out. Owen, too, committed the grievous mistake of abandoning New Harmony at the point when his leadership in the fledgling community was absolutely vital. In both cases one must conclude that the millennialist zeal, the compelling urge to spread the gospel of a new day dawning, predominated over the will to participate in the physical realization of the millennium.\textsuperscript{63}

Spear reacted to the good fortune of a new land acquisition in a typically irresponsible way. Leaving Cincinnati aboard the \textit{Cleopatra}, he sailed with a handful of his supporters to the tract about fifty miles on down the Ohio River. On February 13, 1860, the dedication took place, and the land was christened Mount Alpheus, in honor of Alpheus Cowles. "To secure the advantages which are deemed important to spirit growth and improvement this spot has been obtained and dedicated to humanity," Spear intoned

\textsuperscript{63}To compare the weak leadership of individuals such as Spear and Owen with that of strong personalities like Rapp or Noyes, see sources already cited for Spear and Owen. For Noyes, see Cross, \textit{The Burned-Over District}, (pp. 334-340), or Robert A. Parker, \textit{A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community} (New York, 1937). The most authoritative treatment of the Harmonists is Karl J. R. Arndt, \textit{George Rapp's Harmony Society, 1785-1847}, rev. ed. (Rutherford, N. J., 1972).
to those assembled. He then commenced to list a number of rules none of which bore directly on the major task of making Mount Alpheus a self-sustaining agricultural enterprise. Residents of the community (there were as yet none) were instructed to establish regular hours of sleep and partake of the ordinary meals. They were advised to be cheerful in performing acts of kindness for members of the family and neighbors as well. They were told "to avoid all unnecessary interference with the business of the associates," and to show proper respect for the elder participants. Strangers were to be received cordially. There was to be no mistreatment of dumb animals. Frugality and industry were to be "everywhere observed." Having laid down a set of high-sounding principles for the operation of a community which was as yet non-existent, Spear and his followers then turned to focus attention on other unrelated matters.

On this occasion, as had happened earlier, a disparity appeared between Spear's ideals and his behavior in the real world. One would expect that by this point the benefits of the spiritualist philosophy which was to pave the way for a new world order in which each individual would

64 [Spear], "Communications Received on the River Expedition," entry made at Mount Alpheus, February 13, 1860, Document 32, Sheldon Papers.
live in harmony with the universe and his fellow man would have had enough influence on Spear's followers that elementary rules pertaining to their behavior would have been unnecessary. For all his emphasis on the mind-expanding, harmonizing characteristics of the philosophy he preached, Spear seemed to become increasingly skeptical of the capability of his associates to conduct themselves properly without specific directives. His growing concern over independent thought and behavior is seen, too, in the fact that he outlined to his closest associates plans for a "secret body within a secret body," a secret police cabinet within the Sacred Order to investigate questionable behavior. Such an agency, while it would act primarily as a "paternal" agency, would have the power to expel members. Whether Spear actually employed this plan is doubtful, but the fact that he considered it is evidence of his growing uneasiness with regard to discipline within his ranks.

Having dedicated Mount Alpheus, the group returned to Cincinnati to prepare for the continuation of the voyage to New Orleans. Daniel Gano's estate on Vine Hill continued to serve as the central meeting place, and it was here that Spear wrestled with the financial dilemma which threatened to cut short the expedition. There appears to have been a

65 [Spear], [Address aboard the Cleopatra], January 23, 1860, Document 38, Sheldon Papers.
general unwillingness to take the Cleopatra any farther. As early as December 27, while the Cleopatra was plying its way through the ice above Cincinnati, Spear had instructed the pilot to look for a vessel with a "little propeller" which could serve to carry the group down the Mississippi. At the same time he suggested that the pilot should consider working with a more experienced individual who was familiar with the Mississippi. Those plans proved unworkable, however, and in the end the group secured passage aboard a steamer. The problem which still remained was that the only money they possessed beyond the money required for passage was "a trifle" which remained in the private purse of Caroline Hinckley. "The faith element," Spear wrote later, "was again taxed." Nevertheless, he remembered, "We commenced our labors" without knowing what the reception along the way would be.

One helpful item which the travellers carried with them was a letter of endorsement from Daniel Gano, who, being a prominent figure in Cincinnati, undoubtedly had many acquaintances along the course. The endorsement described Spear as a "recognized, accredited, communicating, mediumistic mind" and said that the voyagers "go South...with...best wishes of the members of the Order." It referred also to what was to

67 Spear to My Brother and Colatorer [John Orvis], July 1, 1860, Document 49, Sheldon Papers.
become one of the major undertakings of this phase of the trip—"establishing a just and equitable system of commercial exchanges." It was this aspect of the movement that most interested Thaddeus Sheldon. He was certain that a system of commerce could be developed in which supply could be directly tied to demand, and that the effort could be coordinated by benevolent spirits. In this way Sheldon hoped to remove what he considered the basic fault of the capitalist system, financial speculation. But although he met with a number of spiritualist businessmen at various stops en route to New Orleans, there is no evidence that he received any serious expression of interest in his scheme. From New Orleans Spear wrote to Gano, "All has been done that could be reasonably expected in view of the present state of the American nation and the slight means that have been at the command of the expedition." This lack of success came in spite of the fact that the trip was organized by the spirit of a most able woman, Francis Wright.

It was because Spear and Sheldon saw their work as part of a millennial stream of history, and because they were

68 Daniel Gano, [letter of endorsement], March 5, 1860, Document 44, Sheldon Papers.

69 Spear to the Omniarch [Gano], May 7, 1860, Document 44, Sheldon Papers. Prior to this time, it will be recalled, Spear had insisted that the national mood would be beneficial to his cause.
utterly convinced that their actions were in tune with a grand, cosmic plan which was to culminate in a reign of universal peace and harmony, that they refused to acknowledge failure when it occurred. Temporary setbacks there might be. Ridicule might be the typical response to the spiritual pronouncements. Given their certainty of righteousness of their cause, and their image of themselves as a saving remnant of humanity, opposition only served as proof that they were right. Prophets are invariably ahead of their own time. Thus, Spear announced on May 5, 1860, at the conclusion of a most uneventful pilgrimage in search of support, that plans were being made to extend the Sacred Order of Unionists into Cuba for the purpose of linking the commerce of the West Indies with the Unitary Commerce which the Sacred Order was commencing in the United States. Spear intended that he, Sheldon, and Caroline Hinckley, should continue on to Cuba from New Orleans in order to learn of the people, their "customs, habits, and manners," and to study "all that relates to the commerce of the West Indies." Sheldon, specifically, was to "review all that has been said of American commerce...while in Cuba that he may...write out

70 Spear to My Brother and Colaborer [John Orvis], July 1, 1860, Document 49, Sheldon Papers.

his central thoughts and see where to strike the first blow." Funds for the trip were never forthcoming, and the Sacred Order was never introduced into the West Indies, although Spear spoke on numerous occasions of the importance of such a step.72

These were particularly difficult times for Thaddeus Sheldon. His health was deteriorating as the result of a prolonged battle with consumption.73 Furthermore, his wife, Agnes, had never been attracted to Spear and was unsympathetic to Sheldon's involvement with him, particularly, it seems, when he was required to absent from his home for long periods. In January, 1860, John M. Sterling, who was at this time at his home in Cleveland, wrote directly to Agnes Sheldon concerning her attitude toward her husband:

I know it is painful to him to have to be... separated from you, and I know to [sic] that if you love him, as I know you do, you can do nothing which will please him more and be of more value to him in every respect than a cheerful acquiescence in his absence and


73 In Caroline Hinckley's paper, "Of Things to Be Done at Cuba and Its Adjuncts" (Document 46, Sheldon Papers) the writer lists one of the goals of the trips as the improvement of Sheldon's health. Daniel Gano also referred to desirability of the warmer climate for Sheldon (Gano, March 5, 1860, Document 44, Sheldon Papers). An acquaintance of Sheldon's in Cincinnati described him as being "in the last stages of pulmonary disease." (N. B. Wolfe, Startling Facts in Modern Spiritualism, p. 81).
a hearty "God Bless You" in his efforts to help others. I think you will, for the time [will come] when you will fully appreciate him for his self-denial and unselfishness in trying to aid poor humanity.74

There is no evidence that Mrs. Sheldon, who was attempting to raise three children, including a baby born in 1859, ever became reconciled to her husband's efforts on behalf of "poor humanity."

The summer of 1860 was for Spear a period of introspective analysis and appraisal of conditions within the Sacred Order and the nation as a whole. He had attempted to organize a retreat for all his supporters at Mount Alpheus, but this did not work out. Instead, he returned to the estate of Daniel Gano, and most of his allies visited there at one time or another during the summer.75

It must be remembered that not only Sheldon, but John Sterling, John Orvis, Carrie Lewis, Horace Fenton, and Mary Gardner had families with growing children, and none was as free to follow Spear about the country as he might have wished. With the exception of the Fentons, none of the

74 [Received through Spear, signed "Benj. Franklin"], "Of the Center and Sub-Centers," January 29, 1960, Document 40, Sheldon Papers. This document and many others were sent from Spear to John M. Sterling, who after giving them his perusal sent them to Thaddeus Sheldon's home in Randolph, New York for filing. It was on the bottom of the above cited document that Sterling addressed himself to Agnes Sheldon.

75 Spear to the Omniarch [Gano], May 7, 1860, Document 45, Sheldon Papers.
above named resided with their families at Kiantone for any appreciable length of time, an indication that the families were as a rule seriously divided by Spear's influence upon individual members.

It is ironic that Spear chose the warm summer months of 1860 as the appropriate time to engage in a philosophical assessment of his reform efforts. His physical assistance at either Mount Alpheus or Kiantone at that season would have been valuable. True to form, he was more concerned with laying the master plans for reform than with the more difficult task of working out those plans.

Philosophizing on the inauspicious beginnings of the Sacred Order, Spear wrote to John Orvis, "Spiritualism is a power. Practicalism as elaborated by spiritualism is but an infant. Not much is expected of a child under seven years of age." What had been experienced up to this point, he felt certain, was a period of preparation, which "must ere long lead persons into the wide field of actualism." That "actualism" would occur as faith in the plausibility of the spiritual reform philosophy developed. Spear believed that faith equal to a grain of mustard seed could move mountains, but as yet he saw faith in his movement as "hardly equal to the point of a musquite's [sic] bill." This lack of faith stemmed not from any inherent weakness in the philosophy, but from the "narrow mindedness" of mankind. Certain of the faculties of man still remained in "folds unused,"
Spear concluded, and not until those faculties are realized will man be able "to take in and hold thoughts which a higher world desires to communicate." 76

Although his lengthy letter to Orvis does indicate a certain frustration, Spear did not allow himself to dwell upon unpleasant subjects, particularly with Orvis, who was by this time somewhat skeptical about the ability of the public to comprehend the grand designs of the spiritualist reform philosophy. In his correspondence with Thaddeus Sheldon, his most trusted friend and supporter, Spear could more openly express his own doubt. Writing to Sheldon from Kiantone in mid-October he reminisced over the events of the preceding decade: "Truly have persons been developed who connected themselves with the Patriarchal Order. But it is dead now and can do no more to curse or bless mankind. We are yet to see what the Sacred Order will do. I hope it may do more to help mankind than its predecessor." 77

He also mentioned to Sheldon an elderly woman who lived with the John Chase family near Kiantone. Chase had reported to Spear that the woman was insisting that she would die if she were not allowed to live at Kiantone. And yet Spear was hesitant to allow her to come, pointing out that "We have

76 Spear to My Brother and Colaborer [John Orvis], July 1, 1860, Document 49, Sheldon Papers.
77 Spear to Sheldon, October 17, 1860, Document 55, Sheldon Papers.
no comfortable shelter, neither have we food for her."

His inability to care for the woman obviously troubled him deeply. "I shall pray to be guided right in respect to her," he promised; "being poor, I know how to feel for the homeless." Clearly, too, he perceived the irony implicit in the fact that as a universal reformer, proclaiming the dawn of an era of harmony and freedom from want, he could not command the wherewithal to sustain one old lady in need. "I trust," he concluded, "the day is not far distant when we shall pass this phase of life and that we shall be in a position to aid the poor, and shelter the outcast."

In coming months Spear's usual sense of buoyant optimism returned, and he sought with renewed dedication to usher into existence the new world order which he envisioned.

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78 Ibid. This letter is written in Spear's own hand, rather than that of Caroline Hinckley as was usually the case. When penmanship is his own, it is certain that Spear was not in a trance state. Often, in such cases, there is an uncharacteristic openness and simplicity in his writings.
CHAPTER X

THE FAILURE OF SPIRITUALIST REFORM

John Murray Spear's most distinguishing characteristic was his ability to look squarely into the face of disaster and forecast success. By 1861, he had devoted nearly ten years of his life to carrying out what he perceived to be the benevolent schemes of sensitive celestial souls for the universal improvement of humanity. His ten-year record of implementing spirit directives had been dismal. The electric motor had proven incapable of generating any significant current, and a costly search for buried treasure at Kiantone had made him the subject of scorn and ridicule in the public media and in much of the spiritualist press as well. The Kiantone Community, which was to have functioned as a modelic form for the new world order, had by 1860 dwindled to a permanent population of about eight.¹ What he had envisioned as a messianic trip down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in which the Sacred Order of Unionists was to commence its regenerative

¹MSS., Kiantone, N.Y., Official Census Schedule, 1860 (microfilm), National Archives.
mission resulted in little more than the impoverishment of the participants.

And yet, almost as if to drive out the doubts which periodically crept into his mind, Spear responded to the succession of failures by asserting that the work of the Sacred Order of Unionists was on the verge of success. In response to a suggestion from the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, Spear arranged an unprecedented winter retreat at Kiantone for his circle of followers. There they gathered, probably between ten and twenty of the faithful, on January 1, 1861, to be administered an injection of spiritual adrenaline by the "Leading Communicator." Spear reminded them that their efforts were destined to result in "the regeneration, sanctification, and redemption of the inhabitants of this planet." He acknowledged that "like all other great movements it has been misunderstood, and a strong prejudice has been brought to bear upon it." But he was also certain that "the hour is at hand when the oppositions of the past are to be removed."²

The events of that day indicate clearly that Spear was not about to let himself lapse into the easy life of an armchair philosopher. He continued to set specific goals

pertaining to the advancement of the new order which he envisioned. He insisted that Kiantone should be more than a seasonal retreat—that it could become a self-supporting economic and social unit. He also wanted it to be a place where discrimination against women would cease. In a move to further both these ends, he announced that members of the General Assembly in the spirit world had selected Mary Gardner to be the "Matron" of the community. A resident, with her husband Stephen, on a farm outside of nearby Farmington, Pennsylvania, Mary Gardner was thirty-nine or forty years old when she agreed to take up permanent residence at Kiantone. Her husband was also an admirer of Spear, but he did not follow expected practice and sell his farm (which was valued at $3,300) or turn it over to the Sacred Order. Rather, it appears, he assisted in the agricultural endeavors of the community while maintaining his own independent farm work. The Gardners had four daughters, ranging in age from five to nineteen years, all of whom lived at Kiantone for a number of months. The eldest, Calista, who had developed a talent for mediumist drawing


4MSS., Farmington, Pa., Official Census Schedule, 1860 and 1870 (microfilm), National Archives.
in 1854, also spent a number of months at the Mount Alpheus community.5

Spear was well aware of the significance of bestowing upon Mrs. Gardner a position of considerable authority. "Little is known," he commented, "of the capabilities of woman to manage an estate. Seldom has she aided in commerce, and she has not yet had opportunities in government." It was certain that she would encounter problems because of her inexperience. And yet, it was considered vital that her experience and responsibility be expanded. Spear's understanding of human growth placed strong emphasis upon the development of all the aptitudes. This was of particular importance to a mother, since only the aptitudes which she developed would be passed on to her children. "Certain it is," Spear asserted with reference to Mary Gardner, "that she cannot be a true and intelligent mother until every department of her being is called into activity."6

The suggestions made to Mary Gardner as she accepted the position indicate some of the problems which plagued the Kiantone community since 1858, when it became identified


with the idea of free love. The community was dedicated to
the task of freeing womankind from the bonds with which
society had traditionally shackled her. Often, however, a
woman who demanded such freedom was misunderstood, and
"classed with the prostitute of the day." To such a
woman, Spear warned, "lecherous man will come expecting
to find gratification of his unholy desires." If indi-
viduals of that type appeared at Kiantone, Mrs. Gardner
was to "rebuke them with longsuffering and meekness and
love, else this soil will be little better than a den of
thieves, or a cargo of unclean birds."7

Kiantone also continued to be challenged by the
contradiction between the ideal of individual sovereignty
and the necessity of maintaining some semblance of order.
Mrs. Gardner was advised not to limit "liberty of speech,"
but she was also instructed to maintain her right to
"expose falsehood, crime and error." A special attempt
was to be made to see that each person who came to the
community, with the exception of the very old and the
very young, performed "a just share of the work."8

The decision to grant extensive authority to Mary
Gardner also resulted from increasing dissatisfaction with

7Spear, "Address, My Sister," Jan. 1, 1861, Document
58, Sheldon Papers.

8Ibid.
Horace Fenton, who, with his family had resided at Kiantone from its beginning. Fenton, like Sterling, Carrie Lewis, and Dr. Abel Underhill, had been drawn to Spear during one of his visits to Cleveland in the early 1850s, and was one of those who contributed to the purchase of the Kiantone tract in 1854. The land appears originally to have been owned jointly by Fenton, Sheldon, Underhill, Sterling, and several others who invested in its purchase. The arrangement was probably handled in this way because Spear's Patriarchal Order, for whose purposes the land was purchased, was not incorporated. Spear always assumed that the land was his, at least in the sense that he was chief representative of the spirit intelligences who were to determine exactly how it was to be used. It will be recalled that in 1859 Spear had ordered that the title to the land be placed in the "care and temporary keeping" of the Leading Mind of the General Assembly, Thaddeus Sheldon, whom he most certainly could trust. In the United States census for 1860, however, Fenton is credited with real estate valued at $4,300, a clear indication that he believed himself the owner of at least a sizable part of the tract.9

Designated by Spear to be the "Constructor," Fenton had been instrumental in building the dwellings at Kiantone, and had traveled with Spear on the Cleopatra in 1859—but only as far as Cincinnati. He returned to Kiantone in early 1860, and by the end of the year his relations with Spear and others associated with the community had become strained. In an agreement made with Fenton at the beginning of 1861, Thaddeus Sheldon acknowledged Fenton's personal claim to the land. On behalf of the Sacred Order Sheldon leased the land from Fenton for an unspecified sum, for a period of one year. Fenton, in turn, gave the Sacred Order an option to buy the land whenever it was prepared to do so.\(^\text{10}\) It was a very strange sort of arrangement, and yet it is understandable. By leasing the land, Sheldon obtained for the Sacred Order of Unionists the right to use the land as it chose, presumably without opposition from Fenton. For the year during which the land was leased, Mary Gardner was authorized to take in boarders, to sublease land, to sublease buildings, to compensate workers as she wished from the proceeds of the estate, even to build an infirmary on the grounds if she could produce the means to do so. This last possibility was included, quite logically, because Spear still

\(^{10}\)Spear, compact between Horace Fenton and Thaddeus Sheldon, Jan. 1, 1861, Document 62, Sheldon Papers.
thought of the tract as a place where the sick and infirm could come and benefit from the healing waters of the Kiantone Creek. According to the terms of the agreement Fenton and his family were to be allowed to "have and enjoy a home on the Domain until it shall be convenient to remove therefrom." Fenton agreed to "insure the property from all harm" while it remained in his hands, while Sheldon agreed to defend Fenton in any contest over the deed to the land.  

Being in a position to drive a hard bargain, Fenton included in the agreement a final clause stating that at the conclusion of the period of the lease Sheldon would have to assume the cost of depreciation of the tools and stock which residents of the community used. Fenton, apparently, had been the original provider of both. Judging from the nature of the agreement and events of the following summer, one must conclude that Fenton, industrious, stable and hard-working, had over a period of years lost his enthusiasm for associative schemes, particularly the type practiced at Kiantone. One can well understand that as a permanent resident, he must have resented the part-time summer residents who came anticipating an atmosphere of free love or the leisurely pace of a health camp. It

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11Ibid.
is quite probable, too, that he became increasingly dis-satisfied with Spear's practice of dropping in for a few weeks, delivering a few pretentious directives, and then abruptly leaving. ¹²

Whatever the exact reasons for the seething under-current of ill will at Kiantone, the dispute broke into the open in the summer of 1861. Mary Gardner was in charge of the agricultural operation at that time, and Spear and Caroline Hinckley had as usual taken up temporary residence. An attempt was made to bring in some revenue for the Sacred Order by marketing the berries which the community had begun to raise several years earlier. As Spear described the situation, "a most violent storm commenced on the part of the Constructor and his wife." The Fentons were determined to "eat, pick, and can all they pleased." The issue, in Spear's mind at least, was clear: "It was a question of the right of the association to use the products grown upon a farm of which it had a lease." Most of the Fentons' wrath was meted out against Spear and Hinckley, one of whom "received some blows in the contest," the other, "oaths and threats and curses." ¹³

¹²Ibid.

¹³Spear [to unidentified correspondent], July 30, 1861, Kiantone, Document 100, Sheldon Papers.
Spear, Hinckley, Gardner, and the handful of workers whose interest lay with the Sacred Order managed to save some of the berries and get them to market, but law and order had clearly broken down at Kiantone. The storage area for the products of the farm was repeatedly broken into, "and the fruits were taken and carried away in triumph." As other products ripened the battle enlarged. The horses, harness, and wagon were needed for harvesting, but the Constructor insisted on using them for his own purposes as he chose. The Matron, Mrs. Gardner, forbade him their use, but to no avail. She then directed that the harness be put under lock and key, whereupon Fenton got another harness, "took the horse and wagon and drove off in triumph." The power of the community's "moral police" was limited only to persuasion, and in such a situation was of no value. "There the matter stands," Spear lamented, "and now the depredators declare in the boldest manner they will take whatever they please, laws or no laws. We wait now the arrival of the Apostle of Harmony [Sheldon]." 14

Spear's analysis of the affair indicates how far he had traveled in his own thinking from the period in the mid-1850s when he first articulated his philosophy of

14 Ibid.
communal life. At that time he had stressed openness and self-discipline. Now he had much less faith in human nature and was becoming increasingly secretive, almost paranoid, regarding the Sacred Order and its plans. In addition he was depressed by the failures of his experiment in placing Mrs. Gardner in a position of major authority. He was still certain that women could succeed in positions of authority, but he conceded that they needed men to enforce that authority. "It is quite clear in my mind," he wrote, "that the Constructor would not have dared to act as he has, had there been a firm, resolute businessman at the helm. Now he sees only woman, and he scorns to admit to her dominion." Clearly more stringent measures were needed to regain control of the Order's operations. The time had come "to bind the more ignorant people with most rigid rules," and to "keep our plans to ourselves." In order to restore discipline, it would be necessary "to sift out the persons who are about us that we don't want, and collect the persons who are wanted."¹⁵

Fenton and the Sacred Order came to a final parting of the ways in November of 1861. The Sacred Order bought the land to which he had a clear title, probably a tract

¹⁵Ibid.
amounting to slightly more than 200 acres. The sale price of the land is not known, but Fenton apparently believed that he had received a fair price, for he felt disposed to leave to the community a variety of farm implements including a harrow, a cultivator, several rakes and pitchforks, and in addition, two horses. The Sacred Order's major source of revenue in making the purchase was probably John M. Sterling, for later records show the property listed in his name.\textsuperscript{16}

Wresting the title to the land at Kiantone away from Horace Fenton may have been a victory for the Sacred Order, but it was not of lasting consequence, for Spear was becoming increasingly attracted to what seemed the more desirable land at Mount Alpheus, a ninety-acre tract along the Ohio River at Patriot, Indiana. The bleak winters made life at Kiantone difficult, and furthermore, the locale of Mount Alpheus, from a commercial standpoint, was clearly superior. Nevertheless, Spear's decision to make Mount Alpheus the center of communal activity represents a tendency toward escapism on his part, a tendency which in this case merely compounded the task of survival for the Sacred Order:

\textsuperscript{16}List of property, Nov. 8, 1861, Document 109, Sheldon Papers; Agreement between Horace Fenton and the Sacred Order of Unionists, Nov. 19, 1861, Document 110, Sheldon Papers; photostatic copy of Kiantone area property titles, from the Ernest Miller collection in the Sheldon Papers.
Starting a community at Mount Alpheus simply meant spreading out even more thinly the Order's small number of individuals who were capable of and willing to supply leadership. The Kiantone community had been from the beginning almost void of leaders who would dedicate themselves wholly to its success. Spear considered himself primarily a missionary. He had intended that Kiantone should become "an infant republic" where the "persecuted and downtrodden" could find shelter and could labor in dignity; but he also spoke of the community as a provider of financial support, so that from it a missionary "may go forth without the fear of starvation before his eyes." Of course, a community without a sizable number of participants could never sustain any sort of missionary outreach. Thaddeus Sheldon spent considerable time at Kiantone, but both he and John Orvis were more interested in Spear's various commercial schemes, and this required that they direct their efforts toward the major commercial centers. John M. Sterling was quite sympathetic to Spear's work, and later attempted to advance Spear's commercial activities on the east coast and in Europe, but he was at no time between 1853 and 1865 willing to abandon his elegant estate in Cleveland in order to pursue a spartan style at Kiantone.17

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Sterling, Orvis, and Sheldon all made substantial contributions to the Sacred Order, but the money was spread out over too many enterprises, so none was adequately financed. This explains why, five years after the community was begun, Kiantone still consisted of only six or eight "simple shelters." Like a large number of Owenist and Fourierist communities, it suffered continuously from a lack of capital. Nevertheless, at the beginning of 1861, enthusiasm had run high, and the certainty was expressed that with the aid and support of an "intelligent, immediate," body of spirit advisors, "efforts to build a divine kingdom on the earth" would culminate in success.\(^\text{18}\)

And yet a year later, at the time when the Kiantone operation was falling into utter disorder, Spear described the structure of the community which he envisioned at Mount Alpheus. He intended to infuse into the new community "all the chief good of Shakerism." Among those living at Mount Alpheus, he reported, were a Shakeress, "a most excellent woman," and a Shaker who was "a valuable farmer." Spear planned to divide the Sacred Order of Unionists into two

\(^{18}\)Spear, "Thanksgiving and Prayer," Jan. 1, 1861, Document 60, Sheldon Papers. The first hand account of A.J. McDonald, who visited a large number of Fourierist communities, is incorporated into Noye's History of American Socialisms, passim. McDonald paid particular attention to the cost and type of property which such communities held.
groups. In one, the "Gathering Family," the sexes would be separated. In the other, the "Sacred Family," marriage would be practiced in the traditional manner. Spear could not resist comparing what he considered his own noble work—"this moral war"—with the Civil War in which the United States government was engaged. "We take no part in external battles," he maintained: "It is ours to 'fight the fight of faith,' with the weapons of Love, Wisdom, [and] Truth." Totally confident of the righteousness of his course, he asserted that "We have the most indubitable evidence each day that the work unto which we have dedicated ourselves is of God, and we have his blessing in a thousand ways."19

The records which were kept on the community at Mount Alpheus were much more detailed than those on the Kiantone community. They reveal a pattern of small, shifting population and meager agricultural output which suggests that both communities shared these characteristics. Caroline Hinckley (along with her baby son, the "Mathematician") and an individual referred to as the "Liberator" moved to Mount Alpheus in December, 1861, by which time an earlier participant, the "Bestower," and the Shaker and Shakeress, of whom Spear had spoken so enthusiastically, had departed.

19Spear to Sheldon, Kiantone, July 30, 1861, Document 99, Sheldon Papers.
In fact Hinckley reported that by the end of 1861 the only earlier residents who remained were Charles Davis and Benjamin Koons. Davis left in early March, 1862, and Koons was ordered off the land later in the same month. Koons appears to have held a lease on part of the land, for the remaining residents had to pay forty dollars which he extracted from them on the basis of "some illegality in the form of notice served on him to leave." By May, 1862, the residents of the farm included Hinckley, "the Liberator," Calista Gardner, and Chileon Frank Doane, a conscientious individual who soon assumed the responsibility of keeping the farm's financial records. In addition, six persons were employed by the farm as workers in its vineyards. Other members of the Sacred Order, among them the Omniarch and Omniarchess, Promulgator, Harmonizer and Conductoress, periodically visited the farm. Spear himself appeared frequently to observe and to engage in "mediumistic work." 20

In her account of the Mount Alpheus financial situation for the period from December 17, 1861 through May 1, 1862, Hinckley reported receipts of $241.56 and expenditures of $233.02. Such figures would indicate that the community was both frugal and solvent. But the report also admitted debts of about one hundred fifty dollars which were not

20[Caroline Hinckley], Mount Alpheus report, Dec. 17, 1861 to May 1, 1862, Document 114, Sheldon Papers.
included with the other expenditures: Forty dollars which had been borrowed to pay off Benjamin Koons, a total of $68.85 owed to the hired laborers on the farm, sixteen dollars borrowed from Wilbert Northrup, who had recently joined the community, ten dollars owed for wine casks, and fifteen for feed for the horses. Hinckley complained to Sheldon that the Omniarch had promised to underwrite the Mount Alpheus operation but had failed to do so, and she commented somewhat caustically, "Having horses implied that they must be fed, and vineyards that there must be laborers." If the debts had not been contracted, she claimed in self defense, "the place might as well have been vacated." She hoped for the sake of the laborers, who were "clamorous" for their wages, that the debt would be speedily eliminated.21

The difficulties regarding procedures and expenditures were probably linked with changes which were occurring within the Sacred Order of Unionists. In the first place, Daniel and Rebecca Gano resigned as the Omniarch and Omniarchess on September 18, 1861, for "reasons satisfactory" to themselves. There was no outward sign of disenchantment in their written resignation. They wished "every prosperity and blessing earth affords or heaven can send to attend the society and its officers." Because they were "personally devoted to the best interest and success of the Order," they appointed

21Ibid.
as their successors two individuals they regarded most highly, John Orvis and Carrie Lewis. In accepting the appointment, Orvis and Lewis state that "a sense of duty alone prompts us to accept these sacred trusts. We trust it will be our highest pleasure to contribute to the success of the Order and unitedly [sic] to work for the rebuilding of the temple of living humanity upon this earth."22

In a second development which bore directly upon affairs at Mount Alpheus, Alpheus Cowles either lost his enthusiasm for the Order or ran into a shortage of money. On October 8, 1861, the property which bore his name was transferred to John Orvis, who paid Cowles two thousand dollars in order to assume the original mortgage, on which a debt of ten thousand dollars remained. No more is heard of Cowles within the records of the Order, and the most obvious explanation is that he became skeptical of the wisdom of the spirit counselors. The fact that Orvis picked up the mortgage on the property is a further indication of his growing influence within the Order, and also helps to explain the lack of continuity in regard to the financing of the agricultural enterprise at Mount Alpheus.23


23Mortgage of Mount Alpheus, Oct. 8, 1861, Document 106, Sheldon Papers.
C.F. Doane took up the task of keeping the Mount Alpheus accounts in May, 1862, and for several months meticulously recorded every receipt and expenditure at the farm. For the month of May he reported an income of $246.47, but of that sum only a meager fifty cents obtained from the sale of some wheat could be linked to the productivity of the farm. Contributions from Thaddeus Sheldon accounted for two hundred thirty-five dollars. On the expense side of the ledger was $106.10 paid out for labor in the vineyards, forty dollars to pay back the loan taken out to dispose of Benjamin Koons, $12.50 spent for casks and $9.80 for corn for the horses. In other words, most of the expenses involved paying off existing debts. The cost of food for the residents was less than ten dollars. Doane also reported that some strawberries had been canned and that good crops of peaches and apples were expected. He inquired whether Sheldon could purchase a used cultivator for the farm.²⁴

During the month of June there was considerable agricultural activity at Mount Alpheus. The financial report showed expenditures for the purchase of hoes, a cultivator, scythe, and a rake, as well as hayforks and a supply of wood which was to be used to build a hayrack. The report indicated

²⁴C.F. Doane to T.S. Sheldon, June 1 and 5, 1862, Documents 117 and 123, Sheldon Papers.
that most of what was being grown on the farm was being used for the sustenance of the residents. The only income derived from the farm products was a pittance of twenty cents for the sale of a few potatoes. The remainder of the income came from contributions from Thaddeus Sheldon totalling one hundred fifteen dollars. Doane paid out $55.14 in wages to the five hired laborers, but reported that the farm owed its hired help an additional $95.56 which he promised to pay them as soon as possible. In a post script to the June report, Doane added, "We are in want of something to destroy the flies which are very plentiful here." He suggested that some of "Dr. Mohr's German fly paper" would be desirable, and that "if you can procure some of it and send it to us it would be more comfortable here."  

In July the farm's finances were again bolstered by a fifty dollar contribution from Sheldon, but the community also produced some income of its own. Its residents earned $4.50 by cutting wheat for Albert Amiet, the Swiss immigrant who held a twenty-year lease on twelve acres of the tract. The farm also took in eight dollars on the sale of hay and another $1.10 from the sale of apples. Still, however, any real hope of self-sufficiency hinged upon the success of the vineyard, where the grapes were just beginning to ripen.

25Ibid., Document 123.
Doane reported that residents of the farm (probably just five or six adults) and five hired hands were at work hoeing the vineyard, and that three barrels were needed in order to keep the wine from "working" too rapidly.26

From August through November, 1862, the Mount Alpheus farm earned small sums of money through the sale of potatoes, peaches, apples, grapes, cider, wine, and brandy. The monthly income from such sales, however, never surpassed fifteen dollars, and the cost of paying the hired laborers was generally about four times that amount. Invariably it was the generosity of Thaddeus Sheldon which enabled the operation to avert a total collapse. It might be noted that approximately thirty dollars was spent on wine barrels, which suggests that much of the potential income from the grape harvest was tied up in wines which required a number of months to ferment properly. But although this might appear logically to have been the case, there is no evidence of substantial profits later which would support such a conclusion.

C.F. Doane, who emerges as one of the most systematic, conscientious, and hard-working residents of Mount Alpheus, was aware as early as August that it was absurd and unreasonable to try to survive the winter at Mount Alpheus, since

to do so would have meant a continued appeal to Sheldon's sense of compassion. In a poignant note which accompanied his monthly report to Sheldon, Doane wrote:

Wilbert [Northrup] tells me that when you were here you spoke to him of a situation that you thought you could obtain for me. I should like to have talked to you about the matter but you seemed to be busy thinking and so I did not say anything about it. I begin to feel a little in a hurry about getting a situation; it is almost fall and time is pressing away swiftly. I shall be very thankful if you can assist me to get a place.

The employment to which Sheldon had referred apparently did not materialize, but Doane was fortunate enough to secure employment on his own. In November he reported to Sheldon, "I have got a school for forty-seven days at one dollar per day if I am liked. If I am not, they stop me immediately." It is also clear that Doane intended to continue to farm part-time (the school where he was to teach was probably nearby), because he requested ten dollars for seed wheat.27

While Doane was trying to bring some sort of financial order to the operation at Mount Alpheus, Caroline Hinckley kept an account of expenses of the Sacred Order's communicative and educational department. Her accounts for the year 1862 included contributions of ninety-three dollars from John Orvis and $104.50 from Sheldon. Her list of expenditures indicates $20.90 spent on the Kiantone

27Ibid.
property and $150.58 for travel, board, food, and lodging. A subsequent report of "incidental expenses" for the year showed a total of $102.82 paid for expenses related to the travels of various members of the Order to and from Mount Alpheus, Kiantone, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Boston. Sheldon was reported to have paid out a total of $348.94 for horses, a plow, a wagon, wheat, potatoes, and freight for the Mount Alpheus property. He also paid out $163.84 to Spear and Hinckley. The total paid to the Liberator for expenses at Mount Alpheus was six hundred eighty dollars, most of which also came from Sheldon. The inescapable conclusion is that Sheldon's personal resources were being seriously drained by the Sacred Order. In order to continue his support of the Order's activities, he was forced to liquidate investments he had made years earlier when he was a prominent businessman in Randolph, New York. As early as the summer of 1861 he had written to John Orvis:

I am getting along comfortably here with my business matters—sold a railroad bond of $1,000 last week for $950 and reduced a claim on my wife's house [by] that amount. I have one more bond to sell and if I could sell for the same amount it would clear out my indebtedness entirely and leave me free as a bird—it will come in due time.  

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29 Thaddeus Sheldon to "Brother Arranger" [John Orvis], August 26, 1861, Document 104, Sheldon Papers.
Sheldon's correspondence shows no bitterness whatever over the fact that his investment in the work at Mount Alpheus had failed to make the farm economically viable. The reports of 1862 did convince him, however, that he would be most unwise to attempt the continuation of such support. To Orvis, who now held the deed to the land, Sheldon suggested attempting to lease the tract. Such a suggestion indicates his own conviction that the land could be profitable if properly administered. The Sacred Order, because it failed to provide enough of its own members to farm the land, had been too dependent upon hired labor. Orvis apparently took Sheldon's advice and sold or leased the property. After 1863 it was no longer cited as an element in the Sacred Order's overall program of universal improvement. Mount Alpheus became merely one more testimony to the untenability of the philosophy of spiritualist reform.\(^{30}\)

Sheldon's magnanimity in bearing the financial brunt of the failure at Mount Alpheus is magnified when one realizes that throughout the period from the middle of 1861 through 1863 he was also deeply involved in bringing the Sacred Order into the realm of commerce. The idea of employing spirit agencies for the purpose of

\(^{30}\)Sheldon to Orvis, April 1, 1863, Document 169, Sheldon Papers.
developing a commercial system which would aid, rather than exploit, humanity had been expressed as an element of Spear's spiritualist philosophy from its beginnings in the early 1850's. In "An appeal to the Intelligently Humane," he had contended that the injustice in the existing commercial structure could be traced to "intermediates," whom he characterized as "mere traders [who were] tricksters, crafty, [and] intriguing." These middle men contributed nothing to the production or manufacture of the products involved, but earned exorbitant sums by speculating on the public demand for the products. Such individuals disadvantaged both the producer and the consumer because they paid the producer the lowest possible price while charging the consumer the highest possible price. Spear blamed speculators in general for the instability of the American economy. "These schemers," he insisted, "are little better than ordinary gamblers; they run for luck, and exert themselves to defeat one another; and hence the inflations, the crises, the monetary crashes, which so often occur."31

Two organizations, the New England Association of Philanthropic Commercialists and the Boston House of Equity, were established by Spear, Orvis, and Sheldon with the intention of employing spirit intelligences in eliminating

the speculative aspect of production and sale. Both were short-lived, though in the typical analysis provided by Spear supporters it was determined that the ventures confirmed the validity of the principles upon which they were based.32

Just as one can observe Spear's ideal of a community of self-governed individuals giving way in reality to an order which was characterized by petty and authoritarian rules, so there appears a divergence between the pure idealism of his early commercial ventures and his profit-oriented approach to commerce after 1860. Certainly the ends which he sought did not vary, but the techniques which he employed in pursuit of those ends did. In the first years of his campaign on behalf of spiritualist reform he had insisted that the only practical means of bringing about the millennial transformation of humanity was through the establishment of a community or communities which would be "separated from unfavorable influences."33 It was considered essential that those individuals involved in such a communal structure be able to produce on their own land the staples needed for survival. Having once proven its ability to survive without participating in the

32Ibid.
33Ibid.
existing system of trade, the community would be in an ideal position to pursue the development of a system of exchange in which purchase price would be determined solely by cost of production rather than by speculative profiteering.34

In the papers relating to commercial activity which Spear produced after 1860, there is less emphasis upon the link between communal independence and commercial ventures. According to the directives which he attributed to the spirit founders of the Sacred Order of Unionists, commercial activity conducted under the auspices of spirit directors would emerge not from self-sustaining agriculturally oriented communities but from commercial centers in the major cities. Furthermore, in the commercial ventures of the post-1861 period the goal was no longer to challenge the existing capitalist order by operating on a non-profit basis. Instead of criticizing the speculative opportunity which capitalism provided, the Sacred Order came to view spirit guidance in speculative matters as a road to wealth. This does not necessarily indicate that Spear and his followers had succumbed to the temptation of avarice, but it does suggest that they had come to realize that in order to accomplish their long range beneficent goals a steady

34Ibid., 600-604.
supply of capital was necessary. Since agricultural communities obviously were not supplying the needed capital, attention focused increasingly upon the possibility of using spirit agencies to direct capitalist ventures, the purpose of which was to accumulate the financial resources needed to organize an alternative to the capitalist system.³⁵

Spear's tendency after 1860 to moderate his criticism of the existing economic order can be observed in a paper reported as given by spirits in March, 1861, for the consideration of the Implementist. Although the competitive market generated certain evils, he noted that it also accounted for the inventiveness of the American mind. While man remained in a primitive state, that inventiveness had produced primarily such undesirable devices as weapons of destruction. But as man reached a higher level of development inventiveness would find expression in the development of products which would serve to improve the quality of life. Such a product which Spear intended for the Implementist to perfect was a small sewing machine which would be operated by a clock-type spring mechanism.³⁶ He insisted


³⁶Spear, [untitled], March 9, 1861, and "Of Concentration and Construction," March 28, 1861, Documents 66 and 70, Sheldon Papers.
that this attempt to impart motion "to what is now an inert machine," must be entered upon not to promote selfish ends, but universal good. The Associated Spirit World was seeking to send its inventions down to earth "for the good of the human race," and in this case specifically "to relieve woman from much labor and to give her time for mental culture."

In a thinly veiled reference to the magnates of the sewing machine industry Spear insisted that "man should not monopolize inventions for his own selfish ends, but should share them with his fellow man." 37

In the writings of Thaddeus Sheldon, too, it becomes apparent that the focus of criticism ceased to be the existing system of commerce and became rather the dominance of that system by a few powerful individuals. Just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War Sheldon wrote, "We look forward to the time when commerce shall no more be paralyzed as with an electric shock at the beck of a Rothschild . . . , when merchants shall not quake and tremble for fear that a discussion of principles in the heart of this nation will lead to non-intercourse between the North and the South." Sheldon lamented the lack of heroes in the modern commercial world. The wealthy men of the day, he believed, neglected "to use their money in the best ways

to help mankind." J.J. Astor and others like him did not represent models of what a merchant should be, but were merely part of the "materialistic age." Sheldon did not call for the elimination of private property or the immediate dismantling of the capitalist system. Instead, he envisioned one of the functions of the Sacred Order to be the introduction of an enlightened form of capitalism which would place public welfare above private profit.\(^{38}\)

It was in the design, manufacture and sale of a sewing machine that the Sacred Order intended to introduce its "unitary commerce" to the world. The process by which the spirit world was expected to impart to the Sacred Order the plans for the sewing machine involved an application of the cosmic philosophy which Spear produced in the 1850s. Inherent in the universe, as Spear viewed it, was a dualism in which every part of the universe could be delineated as masculine or feminine, according to observable positive or negative characteristics. Copulative activity involving complementary masculine and feminine phenomena was thought to produce increasingly complex forms, a process which would logically culminate in the perfection of the universe. In constructing his "electric" motor, Spear had paid particular

\(^{38}\)Thaddeus Sheldon, "The Merchant," [1860], and "What a Merchant Should Be," [1861], Documents 29b and 34b, Sheldon Papers.
attention to the importance of impregnating the machine with elements representing both masculine and feminine humanity. In his attempt to improve the sewing machine, it was determined that a variation of this earlier approach was required. Since the machine would by the law of inherency contain positive and negative (or male and female) characteristics, Spear's spirit advisors suggested that human inventiveness could be heightened if the inventor possessed elements of both male and female. Since he viewed copulation as the universal force of creativity, it followed that sexual intercourse in which the participants concentrated upon imparting to one another their 'understanding in regard to the proposed invention should produce an increase in the inventive capability of both participants. "Neither the male or female alone can construct a perfect machine," Spear contended; "Hence, salvation to man can come in true order by sexual as well as planetary conjunctions." The Implementist was advised to invite into his apartment a woman of his own choosing in order to carry on this work, and lest there be some question in regard to the propriety of such behavior, Spear explained that the individuals involved would be married "implementively." In something of an understatement Spear cautioned members of the Sacred Order that it would be "unwise to publish to man-
kind" the details of the "proposed" conjunctive sexual labor."39

In Spear's plan for constructing and marketing a sewing machine, as in virtually every phase of his spiritualist activity, there exists what appears to the outside observer a strange juxtaposition of certain directives involving the attempted implementation of an incredible philosophical construct with others which appear so natural and logical that their statement seems unnecessary. For example, a discourse on the preparations necessary for the "constructive labors" suggested that the amanuensis should "eat fine sugar, drink lemonade, moisten the body with lemon juice, and sleep much." Shortly thereafter the Implementist was told that he should acquire a workshop where he might keep his tools.40 A week later he was advised to "make a diagram of the two sexes standing side by side," and in his leisure time, to make carvings of the various limbs of the human body "in such a way as they can be easily assembled."41

39Spear, "Of the Electric Motor," June 2, 1860, and [untitled document], March 9, 1861, Documents 48 and 61, Sheldon Papers.

40Spear, "Personal Preparations for Constructive Labors, no. 2" and "Preliminaries," April 1, 1861, Documents 72 and 73, Sheldon Papers.

41Spear, "Of Miniatures," April 9, 1861, Document 87, Sheldon Papers.
These measures were supposed to aid greatly in the development of the machine.

This juxtaposition of very strange and very obvious directives seems not to have been apparent to Spear. Given his certainty that his elaborate philosophical system was based upon immutable principles inherent in the universe, all the directives he claimed to receive from the spirit agencies—which had given him the principles of inherency to begin with—were accepted by him as natural and rational. Such being the case, instructions to bathe in lemon juice were taken, in the same way as were more obvious directives, as measures to be carried out in furtherance of the goal of human perfection.

Spear did not concern himself with what would have appeared to those outside his circle as indefensibly eccentric behavior. He preferred, rather, to emphasize the moral and ethical considerations which he felt distinguished the work of the Sacred Order. The primary goal in its inventive efforts was "the universal good of man," a sharp contrast to the general run of sewing machine manufacturers whose interest was purely monetary. "Mark now the selfishness of man," he advised; "He uses [the sewing machine] to fill his own pockets. The patent is secured and now the patentee may ride in his coach, sleep on his
bed of down, [and] live in luxury." As a general rule Spear looked upon patents as devices associated with greed, and in considering the anticipated invention of the Implementist he was confronted by the dilemma of whether or not to apply for a patent. In time he determined that a patent was both necessary and justifiable if its purpose was the advancement of humanitarian goals. If the invention were not patented, the "outside world" would "seize upon [the machine] to promote its selfish ends." Talk of patenting the Union Family Sewing Machine, as the invention was to be called, was premature. The combined efforts of Spear, the Implementist, the Integralist, and whatever other individuals may have been involved in the scheme of inventive copulation during the spring and summer months of 1861 produced nothing which could be patented. Nevertheless, the Sacred Order determined by the end of the year to plunge into the already saturated sewing machine industry by organizing the firm of Williams and Orvis, a Boston-based company in which the new Omniarch of the Sacred Order, John Orvis, became a copartner. The machine they sold had been designed and patented by Williams several years

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42 Spear, "Of Power," April 5, 1861, Document 81, Sheldon Papers.

43 Ibid.

44 Spear, "Of Repulsion XI," April 7, 1861, Document 84, Sheldon Papers.
Thaddeus Sheldon assumed the position of commercial agent for the Order in January, 1862, agreeing "to devote all my time and my commercial ability to the upbuilding of a unitary commerce." The arrangement was made with the approval of Orvis, who then joined with Sheldon in April, forming a copartnership for the "Unitary Commercial Business" of selling Williams and Orvis sewing machines, or "any other machines, inventions, goods, manufactures, property, products, or wares." Orvis was to be the senior partner, presumably because he was an owner in the parent firm.45

Orvis and Sheldon wrote into the agreement their intention to sell interest in their business to at least ten other individuals in the Sacred Order. Those involved were supposed to take a pledge of secrecy regarding the purposes, plans, methods and persons whom the company might from time to time employ. Participants agreed that all disputes should be settled within the Sacred Order, and one percent of the company were to be turned over to the Sacred Order.46

The record of the Sheldon-Orvis copartnership suggests little in the way of humanitarian endeavor. What emerges

45Contract with the Commercial Agent, January 1, 1862, and Orvis-Sheldon agreement, April 1, 1862, Documents 111 and 113, Sheldon Papers.

46Ibid.
is instead a difficult, and ultimately futile, struggle for survival in an extremely competitive business. Orvis, who had always been—and would again become—an enthusiastic supporter of programs which placed control of commerce in the hands of laborers, was at this time most concerned with saving himself financially. Soon after forming his copartnership with Sheldon, Orvis sold his stock in the parent operation, which subsequently became Williams and Company. This indication of his personal lack of confidence in the ability of the company to survive was disconcerting to Sheldon, who had been given to believe that Orvis intended to buy out Williams. Somewhat caustically Sheldon wrote to Orvis that he had not felt it necessary to be as closely involved in Orvis's affairs "as under present circumstances [it appears] I ought to have been."

For his part, Sheldon worked conscientiously to sell the Williams machine in Cincinnati, which had been designated one of the Sacred Order's main commercial centers. During the first three months of the business, he clearly lost money. Williams and Company sold him its basic machine for fifteen dollars, and Sheldon, as the wholesaler, sold it for eighteen dollars to retail agents who marketed it for twenty-five dollars. Between March and June of 1862

\[47\] Sheldon to Orvis, June 3, 1862, Document 116, Sheldon Papers.
Sheldon sold sixty-two machines; thirty-five of the basic models and twenty-seven others ranging in price from thirty to sixty-five dollars. Fourteen of the machines had been sold at the retail price, the rest wholesale. During that time a Mrs. Grimes, a member of the Sacred Order, was paid seventy-eight dollars for thirteen weeks of secretarial work, and Sheldon paid himself one hundred fifty-six dollars. Other expenses included $66.68 for two months rent on the office and warehouse, $50.05 in freight costs, and the cost of advertising in seven newspapers and journals. In reporting to Orvis, Sheldon listed total expenses of $1757.75 and total income of $1754.64, leaving a balance of $3.11 indebtedness. His feelings in regard to continuing were ambivalent. On one hand he favored circulating a large stock of machines with the hope of picking up the business through increased sales. But he did not have the resources to do so. On the other hand, he commented that he expected to be introduced to a "New Machine," one he was certain he could sell. "To pay Ch. Williams and Co. $15 for $25 machines and sell them for $18 to agents and pay freight and ... advertising, etc.," he admitted, "is too much of a losing business to work at many months."
Sheldon faced not only the problem of a small margin of profit, but more important, the combined strength of the major sewing machine manufacturers. In 1856, I.M. Singer and Company joined with the Grover and Baker Company, Wheeler, Wilson and Company and Elias Howe in forming what became known as the Sewing Machine Combination. Between them, these four owned most of the important sewing machine patents, and by pooling their patents avoided what seemed to them needless competition. Furthermore, the patent pool allowed them to establish a system for licensing smaller companies which wished access to the patents. After 1860 the fee for such licensing was seven dollars per machine. The Williams and Orvis Company apparently was not licensed by the Combination, since it sold its machines wholesale for fifteen dollars and retail for twenty-five, while most of the models using the Combination's patents sold at retail prices between fifty and sixty dollars.\(^{50}\)

In spite of this disadvantage Sheldon advertised the Williams product as a "magical sewing machine" which "astonishes the citizens of Cincinnati," claiming that this double thread machine was "warrented superior to any high-priced

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\(^{50}\)Grace Rogers Cooper, The Invention of the Sewing Machine (Washington D.C., 1968), pp. 41-42.
machines in the city."\textsuperscript{51} Williams might have been one of
the numerous independents who infringed upon certain of the
Combination's patents, but it is unlikely that Sheldon
would have associated himself with that type of operation.
It seems more likely that the most attractive feature of the
Williams machine was that it served Sheldon's desire for a
machine which could be sold "at a cheap cost, so the poor
can buy it."\textsuperscript{52}

For the remainder of the year 1862 Sheldon worked
to produce success in the sewing machine business while
simultaneously shouldering the major share of financial
responsibility for the ongoing economic misfortune at
Mount Alpheus. In spite of his best efforts, wholesaling
the Williams and Company sewing machine in Cincinnati could
not have been financially rewarding. At the beginning of
1863 John Orvis withdrew from the copartnership with Sheldon,
just as he had earlier left Williams. In spite of his seem­
ing lack of loyalty to the financial operations of the
Sacred Order, Spear lauded Orvis for his contribution to
the development of the sewing machine and to the organization
of a manufacturing company (Williams and Orvis). Following
the release of Orvis from the copartnership, Sheldon was

\textsuperscript{51}Cincinnati Daily Gazette, May 2, 1862, p. 4;
Cincinnati Daily Times, April 7, 1862, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{52}Thaddeus Sheldon, "Of the Twelve Apostles of the
General Assembly," March 8, 1861, Document 64, Sheldon
Papers.
made responsible for selling the Williams machine not merely in Cincinnati, but on the eastern seaboard as well.\(^{53}\)

In a series of instructions which Spear claimed originated with the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, Sheldon was reminded that the Sacred Order was a "Peace Association" and that he was to avoid business wars and litigation.\(^{54}\) That was certainly sound advise, for given Sheldon's lack of financial resources either possibility would have been economically fatal.

While Spear was given to transmitting papers which were either so vaguely theoretical or else so painfully obvious as to be of no value, and while Sheldon appeared willing to plod along losing money and consoling himself that it was all for the betterment of humanity, Orvis became increasingly determined to establish a sound and profitable business operation. He began by announcing (in his official capacity as Omniarch) the dissolution of the Sacred Order of Unionists as a corporate body. By this action he intended to clear up all claims against the Order, claims which threatened to damage individual members like himself. Any individual who had a claim against


any property belonging to the Order was requested to state such a claim within thirty days or consider it forfeited. Orvis specifically ordered Sheldon to report on the location and condition of all property belonging to the Order, and to estimate its "present and prospective" value. An assessment of holdings remaining in the hands of the Order after a period of three months was also to be forwarded to Orvis by Sheldon. After dissolving the Sacred Order as a corporation and thus absolving its members from any future litigation against the Order, Orvis, describing himself as a friend of the human race, invited those who were interested to join with him in forming a new association in pursuance of commercial success.55

In the early months of 1863 the leading members of the Sacred Order, Spear, Sheldon, Orvis, and Sterling, became almost obsessed by their quest for commercial success. A movement which had begun as an attempt to implement a millennium of peace and harmony was transformed into a basic search for economic survival.

55John Orvis, papers relating to the dissolution of the Sacred Order of Unionists, Feb. 2-4, 1863, Documents 130-133, Sheldon Papers.
CHAPTER XI

SPIRITUAL EXPATRIATES

The involvement of various members of the Sacred Order of Unionists in the manufacture and sale of sewing machines undermined the idealistic principles upon which the Order was based and at the same time led to serious divisions within that supposedly harmonious body of spiritualists. After withdrawing from his association with Thaddeus Sheldon, John Orvis joined with Amos H. Boyd in forming Orvis, Boyd, and Company. The design of Boyd's sewing machine was patented in 1858, 1859, and 1861, and Orvis apparently felt that his product was superior to that of the Williams Company, with which he had earlier been associated. Operating primarily in New England with their main office in Boston, Orvis and Boyd were joined in 1863 by John Sterling.¹

Sterling, however, also maintained a residence in New York City, where he was associated commercially with Thaddeus Sheldon. Unable to sell the Williams machine profitably in Cincinnati, Sheldon relocated in New York in the spring of 1863. He, Sterling, a man named Cobb, and several others

¹Entries for Boyd, Orvis, and Sterling in Adams Simpson (publisher), Boston Directory (1863).
who were attune to the possibilities of spirit-directed commerce, formed the American Sewing and Embroidering Machine Company. John Spear never had the financial resources to control large amounts of stock in either company, but as spokesman for the Associated Spirit World, he attempted to wield considerable influence upon both.

The directives which Spear received indicate a continual conflict between the principles of humanitarian concern and the more pressing desire for economic survival. In a paper which clearly contradicted his earlier defense of innate human virtue, he commented bluntly that "people act from one of the following incentives: honor, pleasure or profit." The incentive of the members of the Sacred Order at this juncture was profit. But while this might seem to imply an endorsement of a harsh form of capitalism, such was not the case. Spear and his spirit advisors were aware that the profit earned by a manufacturer could be increased by appealing to workers on the basis of incentives. Spear encouraged both the Boston and New York firms to appeal to worker incentive through profit sharing plans, sick pay, health insurance, and pensions. Whether or not such plans

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2 Spear [Untitled paper attributed to the spirit of Benjamin Franklin], Aug. 12, 1863, Sheldon Papers, Document 213.

were put into effect is not known.

Spear's continued concern for the poor is indicated in his desire that the sewing machine be kept inexpensive so that low income families could buy it. He also suggested, in March, 1863, that shares in the operation be kept small, so that "the poor can afford to buy." Whether the poor were prepared to buy stock at any price is doubtful, but more important is the fact that here again Spear's desire to eradicate poverty was overcome by his desire to succeed commercially. Almost simultaneous with his expressions of concern for the poor he announced plans to open a salesroom in the Hotel Astor in New York, asserting that "it should be the aim of the Agent [Sheldon] to enlist the interest of the most cultivated and wealthy classes in the city [New York] in the machine,...[and that] the poorer classes cannot much aid the work at this hour." 4

In like manner the questions of monetary speculation and accumulation of wealth continued to force Spear into incongruous positions. Caroline Hinckley was instructed to spend considerable amounts of time handling gold, thinking of it, even visiting the Philadelphia mint, in order to

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4 Spear, "Counsel to the Agent" and "Plan of Action," March 10, 1863, Sheldon Papers, Documents 148 and 150. One of the purposes for which Sheldon was to locate in the Astor was to establish rapport with the spirit of Astor which would supposedly impart some of his business genius (Spear [from Benjamin Franklin], "Business Action," March 7, 1863, Sheldon Papers, Document 143).
sharpen her "acquisitive" mental power. The copulative act, earlier employed as an aid to invention, was now to be employed for another purpose: "If the copulation be agreeable, and the mind be...upon...the accumulation of wealth, the power to get it will be thereby increased." Spear was told that "the Associated Spirit World is seeking to cultivate a few persons so that they will be prepared to receive great wealth." But again the conflict between pursuit of wealth and humanitarian aims was resolved; this time by the claim that such persons will be "so meek, so quiet, so gentle that the possession of wealth will not create and foment discord." Their use of wealth would signify "a full recognition of the greatness of that love embodied in Him who declared that he came not to be ministered to, but to minister."  

The members and friends of the Sacred Order who involved themselves in the sewing machine industry seem to have lacked the meekness and gentleness which was to characterize the recipients of great wealth. Sheldon's American Sewing and Embroidering Machine Company sought to market its product not only in New York, but in Philadelphia and Boston as well. Such a practice placed Sheldon in direct competition with

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Orvis and Boyd, who were primarily active in Boston. Spear appeared to favor selling the American Company and encouraging Sheldon to join with Orvis, mainly because the machine Sheldon was selling was not comparable to the Orvis and Boyd model. This proved impossible, however, because no reasonable offer for the American stock was forthcoming. Furthermore, it is doubtful that Sheldon would have been willing to go to Boston and accept a junior position beneath Orvis, who had earlier dissolved the Orvis-Sheldon partnership.

Even within the two companies there were serious differences. Sometime in the spring of 1863 Thaddeus Sheldon had, by spirit direction, taken on a "business companion," a woman identified only as Kate, and by the name Spear bestowed upon her, the Conductress. Sheldon's wife and family were living in Randolph, and his association with another woman, whether illicit or purely professional, aroused the wrath of at least one major shareholder in the American Company. As Spear described the case, "One of the company on whom there was reliance for funds begins to be uneasy, rudely assails persons—interferes with domestic arrangements." A few days later, Spear reminded Sheldon

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that he (Sheldon) was the agent not only of the American Company, but of the Associated Spirit World, and that as such he would have to make it clear to the other owners that if he was to stay on as general manager, his companion would remain.  

Spear's solution to the problem of disunity involved the formation of a company which would combine Orvis and Boyd and the American Sewing and Embroidering Machine Company as affiliates under the parent corporation. The New York, Philadelphia and Boston Sewing and Embroidering Machine Company was formed, according to plan, but it constituted merely a reorganization of the Orvis and Boyd firm because the owners of the American Company refused to affiliate with it and the Orvis and Boyd stockholders were unable to buy out their stock. As a result, disputes continued, and at one point, Spear was forced to bring in an outside party, Boston medium Alan Putnam, to arbitrate the differences. For his part, Spear announced that the Associated Spirit World wished to move on to more important matters and


threatened that its support might be withdrawn unless the direct owners of the firms settled their differences.  

The fact that the participants in a movement which had been considered the forerunner of an era of harmony and human regeneration lapsed into petty monetary quarrels can be attributed to a number of influences. As noted earlier, Spear and his supporters had experienced a series of total failures, and succumbed, quite naturally, to the desire for financial success. Their commercial ventures, however, were not founded upon any realistic appraisal of American commerce and industry. Spear's spirit agencies led them into an industry in which survival was extremely difficult. Added to this difficulty was the fact that Spear's commercial programs had virtually no hierarchy of authority. In a vague way the sewing machine enterprise was to be operated by spirit directive, a practice which would appear to have rested total authority in Spear's hands. But the record of commercial affairs after the spring of 1863 shows that outside of Sheldon, Spear's spirit-directed counsel was not regarded as binding. At one point Spear predicted bitterly, "When they see the business falling apart,...they will ask for the mediator [Spear], and he will again submit arbitra-  

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9 Spear, "Plan of Action of the Part of the Agent," May 7, 1863 and "Of Agreements and Disagreements," June 18, 1863, Sheldon Papers, Documents 189 and 200.
tion." The businesses certainly did fall apart, but Spear was never requested to submit arbitration. Recognizing his infallibility as spirit spokesman meant accepting authoritarian rule; rejecting it created a power vacuum.

On another level, it appears that the idealistic, millennial tone of the movement gradually evaporated as Spear's opposition to the Civil War increased. In the first months of 1861 he had expressed the belief that the South should be allowed to leave the Union without resistance. Arguing a point which William Lloyd Garrison had made in the 1830s, Spear maintained that there could be no true union between slave and free states, hence Northerners should "let...the Union slide, without anxiety--without a tear." Under no circumstances should the North "drench the American soil with blood." Rather the secession would enable the North to provide sanctuary to slaves without fear of violating federal law. Spear also saw in secession an opportunity to form a new "Northern Republic," whose basic papers would omit the words "white" and "male." Neither Negroes or women, he intended, would any longer "submit to laws they don't help to frame; neither will they consent to pay taxes while shut off from the ballot box."11


When the war began, however, Spear attempted to fit it into his optimistic world view and his concept of human progress:

At this present time the American people are engaged in a most sad Civil War. An old institution has been assailed. It is now defended by the unsheathed sword. It must be a most bloody contest but in the order of a sacred Providence the progressive thoughts must be in the ascendent. Man must pass beyond the age of brute force, and reach a condition when the lash will pass away and the stimulus of wages will take its place. The spirit world looks upon contests of this sort with much composure because it knows that the day is now dawning when might is to give way to the rule of the external right. All true progress must be preceded by change, sorrow, pain, discord, war. The highest Spiritual philosophers will not be moved when these sights appear. They will know that the redemption of the human race cannot come without them.\(^2\)

A year later, in August, 1862, Spear's advisors suggested that residence in Europe might be preferable because members of the Order "cannot be destructive." It was noted, too, that the attack on free speech which accompanied the war inhibited the work of spirit-directed reform. Shortly thereafter Spear spoke of the need to leave a "decaying" America and to found the new social order abroad. The Emancipation Proclamation offered little to mitigate his growing despondency. "If woman as a class is not able to act . . . with advantage and profit, what

\(^2\)Spear [from Benjamin Franklin], "To the Divinationist," July 28, 1861, Document 98, Sheldon Papers.
can reasonably be expected of the Negro?" he asked. In answer to his own question Spear asserted, "The Proclamation is a dead failure. There is no welcome for the colored people, [and] they are rather permitted than invited to participate in the direct struggle." He concluded that "the conflict is not, nor will it ever be an effort to redeem the lower classes. The white people do not want this, neither will they labor to promote it."\textsuperscript{13}

In late spring, 1863, Spear attributed to his spirit sources an angry communication which compared the American nation to a whore. Just as a whore is one "who prostitutes . . . her person to acts forbidden by the laws of God or of nature," so a nation becomes a whore "when it pledges itself to one set of ideals and practices another." The American nation "had avowed herself to be married to liberty and equality," but "does not practice either." As a consequence, the nation was being "brought to judgment."\textsuperscript{14}

Spear's despondency was heightened by the conscription riot which took place in New York City in June, 1863. The underlying cause of the riot, he perceived, was not conscription, but immigrant hatred of the Negro. He foresaw the

\textsuperscript{13}Spear "Prognosis," March 22, 1863, Document 161, Sheldon Papers.

\textsuperscript{14}Spear, "Of the Whore," June 11, 1863, Document 198, Sheldon Papers.
good, and that spiritualism would usher in a millennium of peace, prosperity, and happiness. Prior to the war it was felt that the movement could succeed by appealing directly to the minds of men. But the war destroyed any hope of an imminent millennium, and it became apparent that society had not progressed to a point where it could be transformed by an appeal to reason. In view of that fact, Spear and his followers sought to establish the new order by using the techniques of the old order. If financial strength was required to undermine the capitalist system, Spear's forces would use their spirit aides to defeat the capitalists at their own game. "Spear seems never to have realized that his growing disillusion produced a change in his approach to spiritualist reform—a change which stripped the reform program of its genuinely radical nature. To be fair to Spear one must acknowledge that he always intended that the great wealth which he expected to acquire would be used to promote universal reform. But one can also say quite fairly that during 1862 and 1863 the Sacred Order's interest in reform ranked a distant second behind its desire to win in the game of economic capitalism. In May, 1863, Spear even went so far as to suggest that Orvis and Sheldon negotiate with Elias Howe and the sewing machine Combination for the right to incorporate certain patents of the major manufacturers into their own machines.
beginnings of a problem which would be accentuated in the post war period as Negroes fled the South and incurred the wrath of the poor northern worker by forcing down the cost of labor. Furthermore, although slavery has supposedly ended, the freedmen would be confronted by the "black laws" of such states as Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. It seemed clear to Spear that the future held the prospect of bloody rioting in a number of northern cities.15

The failure of Spear's radical spiritual reform program and his disenchantment with the American nation were closely related. To a degree he used the war as a scapegoat for his own failure. Between 1861 and 1864 he repeatedly stated that the climate in the United States was detrimental to his efforts, particularly in that the war had produced commercial uncertainty.16 His record of business failure, however, predated the war by about eight years; thus it seems apparent that blaming his failures on the war served as a convenient means of escaping personal responsibility.

But in another sense the war did undermine Spear's spiritual reform program. All of his efforts prior to 1861 had been based upon the assumption that man was inherently


Such a course would have meant increasing the price of their machines considerably in order to pay the royalty which the Combination demanded on each sale. That procedure might have represented a sound business practice, but it did not square with Spear's earlier insistence on a low priced machine nor with his opposition to the use of patents to gain exorbitant profits.  

In the spring of 1863 Spear began to lay plans to spread abroad the gospel of spirit-inspired reform. Although his spirit guides had failed to bring him tangible success either as reformer or capitalist in the United States, he believed that the ground in Europe would prove more fertile. The plans called for Spear and Caroline Hinckley to locate in London at a place where they could entertain guests. They would then use letters of introduction to meet key British spiritualists and would set up a salesroom to exhibit the sewing machine. After three months, Orvis and Sheldon, and hopefully others, were to come to Europe to promote the sale of the machine in both England and France. The sale of the machine was to be looked upon as "a means to promote the

17Spear, "Questions to be Considered," April 2, 1863, "thoughts for the Consideration of the Agent," April 10 and 19, 1863, and "things to be Thought of by the Agent," May 15, 1863, Documents 172, 173, 177, and 188, Sheldon Papers.
educative work . . .--a means to a sacred end."¹⁸

Before leaving American soil, however, Spear determined
to complete some unfinished business. He called on Alan
Putnam and Thaddeus Sheldon to meet with him and Mrs. Spear
to work out the terms of a final separation, "settling for
such sum as she may be willing to accept, whether annually
or all at one time." The settlement which emerged, Spear
commented, could serve "as a basis of action for other
persons in similar situations."¹⁹

In a poignant statement defending his desire for
divorce, Spear contended that "a thing, agreement, or act,
which is right today may be wrong tomorrow." When he and
others close to him had married, they "were children of the
old dispensation." Marriage was to be a vital part of the
new age, but was "to be entered into for holy purposes and
to subserve sacred ends." Because his companion would not
assist in the "sacred labors," it became a duty of the high-
est sort to seek "separation, divorce, or secession." But
Spear did not deny certain obligations to his first wife. He
acknowledged her need for support and asked that the

¹⁸Spear, "Scheme of Action on the British Mind," March
28, 1863, and "Arrival in the Old World," June 30, 1863,
Documents 162 and 203, Sheldon Papers.

¹⁹Spear, "Things to be Thought of by the Agent, May
15, 1863, and "Arrival in the Old World," June 30, 1863,
Documents 162 and 203, Sheldon Papers.
settlement be "completely fair." 20

At the same time that he sought to complete the legalities of separating from his first wife, Spear determined to marry Caroline Hinckley. Departing from his earlier contempt for "legal" as opposed to "spiritual" marriage, he cited a number of reasons for "open and public marriage." Again, it is apparent that Spear was by this time willing to compromise certain elements of his radical spiritual philosophy. In 1858 he had felt that his relationship with Caroline Hinckley was wholly in order. Now, as he and Miss Hinckley's son approached the age of five, Spear considered it important "that innocent children not be bothered by questions of a paternal character." He hoped, too, that by legally marrying he would be able "to commingle [sic] more freely with persons whose good will it is desirable to secure." 21

In a message directed to Sheldon in October, 1863, Spear restated his contention that in the "New World" it was "not possible at this hour to act in a social and orderly way." In view of the chaotic conditions in America he would move on to London, and cast his bread upon the


waters there. But he no longer anticipated receiving immediate support abroad. "Forerunners," he reminded Sheldon, "do but open the way and smooth the path for others."22

His admission that immediate success in London would not be forthcoming reflects something of a contradiction of his earlier position as well as an accurate reading of European spiritualism. In both France and England the movement was characterized by a predominant emphasis upon phenomenalism—the observation of physical activity supposedly attributable to spirits. There was also, of course, considerable interest in seances, and mediumistic healing held measurable appeal. Enthusiasm for the millennial reform aspect of spiritualism, however, was minimal.23 One visionary, J.G.H. Brown, did form an organization based upon communications from Swedenborg, Oliver Cromwell, the angels Gabriel and Michael, and numerous others, which was dedicated to reform and the preparation of humanity for the millennium. Millennial reform was also the most attractive feature of spiritualism for Robert Owen, who in 1854 announced that:

God now commands all nations, through the new manifestations of Spirits from superior Spheres,

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23Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, II, pp. 3-46, passim.
to prepare for universal peace, that man may commence on earth a new existence, for which the late extraordinary progress in material, mental, and spiritual knowledge has been the forerunner. . . . The spirits of just men made perfect will accomplish this high task for humanity."

The general philosophy of spiritualism which Brown and Owen introduced, however, had captured the minds of not more than a handful of English spiritualists by the time John Murray Spear departed for London in November, 1863. In order to sustain himself, Spear began, upon his arrival, to operate as a private medium. His calling card read:

Guided and assisted by beneficent Spirit Intelligences, Mr. S[pear] will examine and prescribe for diseases of body, and mind; will delineate the character of persons when present, or by letter, and indicate their future as impressions are given him; will sketch the special capacities of young persons.

The fee for such services was listed as half a guinea, and the card also stated that Spear would welcome "applications to lecture, or hold conversations on spiritualism.

It was lecturing on the implications of spiritualism that Spear considered his true work. He formed a "Spirit Power Institute," in order to further British interests in the subject of spirit-directed reform but it was given little attention. By February, 1865, he admitted that although

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24Cited in ibid., pp. 18-19.
25Spear, calling card, Document 45b, Sheldon Papers.
26Ibid.
weekly meetings were held, the Institute "has not done much except to get out some brochures." Another enterprise, the Spiritual Lyceum, was no more successful.

Occasionally, Spear would meet someone who was captivated by his vision of a new and better world brought about by spirit direction. A factory manager, Thomas Etchells, wrote that he had a "soul feeling" that Spear was a "heavenly messenger," and "the instrument through which I am to be shown my mode of action." Etchells spoke of his personal desire "to remove human suffering by the removal of the fiendish competition of man against man." His goal was to organize a self-sustaining commune of one hundred families which would center around a textile mill. Although he lacked capital, Etchells was ready to adopt Spear's "holy advice." Spear had theory to offer, but no capital, and there is no further mention of Etchells or the commune.

27 Printed announcement of the formation of the Spirit Power Institute; Spear to Sheldon, Feb. 2, 1865, Documents 229 and 252, Sheldon Papers. On the bottom of the announcement Spear penned a note to Sheldon stating that he had received the idea for the institute from the spirit of Robert Owen.


29 Th. Etchells to Spear, Nov. 5, 1864, Document 239, Sheldon Papers.
More typical were the upper class individuals who sought Spear's services for the purpose of contacting departed spirits. A Mr. and Mrs. Beattie, for example, residents of "a fashionable suburb of Bristol," employed him to conduct a seance and agreed to pay traveling expenses both for him and Mrs. Spear. His records for the year 1864 indicate that he gave 130 private and public addresses, delineated the characters of more than 120 persons, examined and prescribed for 70 patients, made more than 200 visits, and answered more than 300 letters. It appears, however, that Spear did not find his work very rewarding, even though Mrs. Spear wrote that he was "very successful ... in his delineations and had received much praise." He commented in his correspondence with Sheldon that British spiritualists "know almost nothing of the radical questions that have agitated the American mind." John Sterling, who during this same period was in Paris, wrote to Sheldon, "I really pity the Communicator in his labors. There is no one there [in England] who can understand or appreciate him. Bad enough at home but far worse

30J. G. Davey to Spear, March 15, 1864, Document 230, Sheldon Papers.

31Spears to Sheldon, Feb. 2, 1865, and Specificator-ness to Sheldon, March 17, 1865, Documents 252 and 257, Sheldon Papers.
here." European spiritualists, Sterling concluded, were still in the "swaddling clothes."³²

The general impression which emerges is that both of the Spears quickly became bored with their British counterparts. They were invited, for example, to attend a service in the home of Dr. John Ashburner, who, along with Dr. John Elliotson (who was also in attendance) had pioneered in the study of mesmerism in England. Both had become firm believers in the physical power of spirits. Mrs. Spear reported that in the semi-darkness of the room "My chair and self were moved backwards and forwards and from side to side, and a heavy hand [was] laid twice upon my shoulder." British spiritualists, she commented, "never weary of seeing these movings and hearing raps--'tis strange to me that they sho [sic] so long interest them."³³

One of the major spiritualist developments in England which occurred while the Spears were there, involved the appearance of the Davenport brothers. This pair of Americans had developed a public act in which they escaped from tightly knotted ropes, played a variety of instruments, and then reappeared tightly bound. The explanation given for their

³²Spear to Sheldon, Feb. 2, 1865 and Sterling to Sheldon, March 26, 1865, Documents 252 and 258, Sheldon Papers.

³³Mrs. Caroline Spear to Sheldon, May 29, 1865, Document 264, Sheldon Papers.
feats was spirit assistance. The Davenports caused a great stir in Britain, as might be expected, but their act was exposed when a group of dockworkers in Liverpool bound them with a secret sailing knot which the brothers could not untie. 34

The chaplain of the Davenports, the Rev. J.B. Ferguson, traveled with them throughout England, speaking on behalf of the broader implications of spiritualism. Ferguson, a former Baptist minister in Tennessee, was a close acquaintance of Spear, and had been connected with the Sacred Order's business activities in the United States. Like Spear, he wished to use spiritualism as the basis for a new world order, and it was probably his public disclosure of that fact which precipitated his departure from the Davenport brothers' entourage. In March, 1865, he rejoined Spear and laid tentative plans for renewal of their work in the United States. 35


35 Ferguson to Spear, Jan. 19, 1865, and Orvis to Sheldon, May 7, 1865, Documents 247 and 261, Sheldon Papers; Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, p. 56. For Ferguson's earlier spiritualist activity see Podmore, I, pp. 206-208, Spiritual Telegraph, Oct. 7 and Dec. 9, 1854, or T. L. Nichols ed., Supra-Mundate Facts in the Life of the Rev. J. B. Ferguson (London, 1865). Ferguson's own account of his conversion to spiritualism is contained in his Spirit Communion: A Record of Communications from the Spirit Spheres, etc. (Nashville, Tenn., 1854).
As the Spears became adjusted to life in London they concerned themselves increasingly with activities and events which bore no relation to spiritualism. They participated in a course on the Old Testament which was offered by the Unitarian Church. Mrs. Spear wrote and published an article on women's rights which incorporated ideas her husband had expressed earlier. In her article no mention was made of the spirit source. Both Spears were deeply interested in the work of John Stuart Mill on behalf of "adult suffrage."36

While it might appear that their life in London was pleasant, if not rewarding, the Spears were plagued continuously by a shortage of money. Sometimes John Spear could view the matter philosophically. In November, 1864, he wrote to Sheldon, "at this moment we seem to be left ... again without income, but our hope is we shall not lack the things we need. Whatever comes to us we accept as for the best."37 Likewise, his wife would complain of a lack of money to pay the bills or purchase clothes, then conclude, "But I have never starved or slept in the


37Spear to Sheldon, Nov. 22, 1864, Document 240, Sheldon Papers.
streets."38 Occasionally, the lack of money created serious tensions. In one letter Spear complained openly of "the abominable extravagance of Mrs. Spear."39 Sterling, in Paris, was annoyed at being called upon to assist the Spears. Writing to Sheldon he asked Sheldon to pay the postage because of his own shortage of money. Sterling remarked that when coming to Europe he had not expected to be paying anything "to or for Mr. Spear." But he had since extended them $400. "I was opposed to his spending so much money," Sterling complained to Sheldon, "but he felt it a duty, no doubt, and was sure you would approve."40 He claimed that Mrs. Spear had promised that the money would be paid back and that he fully expected it to be paid. Sterling was not in a position to appreciate how much Caroline Spear disliked borrowing from him. When the Sterlings invited the Spears to come to Paris, in April, 1865, she was reluctant. "I hope and pray that we will not have to go there dependent upon them," she confided to Sheldon, "for the experience we have here is enough in that

38Mrs. Caroline Spear to Sheldon, March 17, 1865, Document 257, Sheldon Papers.


direction, it does seem to me." She preferred "not to go at all, than to go that way." 41

From somewhere the money for passage was obtained and the Spears' traveled on to Paris. Their stay with the Sterlings was pleasant, and they were delighted to find that their young son, for whom the Sterlings were temporarily caring, was enjoying school and learning French. Caroline Spear earned some money by caring for two women who were recovering from surgery and prolonged illness. The Sterlings contributed to the expenses of the Spears and agreed to be responsible for Thaddeus Spear for an additional five months. 42 On their return to London the Spears found that John Orvis had arrived with his companion of the past year or so, Carrie Lewis, and that they hoped to sell a model of the Orvis and Boyd sewing machine. 43

Establishing foreign markets for sewing machines had been one of the primary objectives of Spear's trip to Europe, but once there he showed only a minimum of interest in that endeavor. Orvis ran into problems because he had not convinced Boyd that his machine was worth patenting in

41Ibid; Mrs. Caroline Spear to Sheldon, March 17, 1865, Document 257, Sheldon Papers.

42Mrs. Caroline Spear to Sheldon, May 15, 1865, Document 263, Sheldon Papers.

43Spear to Sheldon, June 15, 1865, Document 266, Sheldon Papers.
England. The disagreements which had divided Orvis and Sterling in the United States continued. Sterling became bitter because Orvis was reluctant to support his plan to patent in England a machine which Sterling and the "Compressionist," a Mr. Avery, had been working on in Paris. Sterling was willing to cooperate with Orvis, but declared that he would not "be scolded or faulted anymore by him" merely for failing to comply with his wishes. "I have done all I could to get out the machines, and have labored like a dog," Sterling insisted. His labors notwithstanding, the sewing machine fared no better in Europe than it had in the United States.

In the last analysis, Europe had little to offer Spear and his associates. Sterling grew tired of Paris and wrote Sheldon in March, 1863, that were it not for the machine he would pack up and leave immediately. Orvis was in England only a few weeks before he became disenchanted. He lamented the fact that most of the British spiritualists were conservatives who had taken upon

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44Spear, "To the American Agent" [Sheldon], signed "A.S.W." [Associated Spirit World], Feb. 1, 1865, and Sterling to Sheldon [May, 1865, first two pages of letter missing], Documents 251 and 51b, Sheldon Papers.

45Sterling to Sheldon, March 26, 1865, Document 258, Sheldon Papers.
themselves "the task of keeping up the respectability of spiritualism." He was confident that "God will guide our feet to the true path;" nevertheless it was "a trial to be so far from our homeland, a stranger, and with an unwelcome gospel to teach." 46

Spear comforted himself with dreams of new fields of work in France and Spain, and at one point he announced that he felt compelled, like the Apostle Paul, to go to Rome. 47 At the same time, the messages from the Associated Spirit World acknowledged that the work would not be concluded in a single generation. Sheldon received through Spear the following communication:

Honored Sir: The Electric Motor, the Cavity, the inauguration of the several homes, the initiation of a unitive commerce, the selection and education of the numerous voyages and travels, the publication of books are each ... looked upon in the light of preparation for the establishment of a new, better, happier order of things. 48

The message also compared the work of the Sacred Order to the beginnings of Christianity and the theory was advanced that such efforts must, of necessity, experience

46 Orvis to Sheldon, June 15, 1865, Document 265, Sheldon Papers.


difficult beginnings.\textsuperscript{49}

Even Spear, however, was subject to periods of despondency and was racked by feelings of guilt in regard to his first wife. In November, 1864, he asked Sheldon whether a small sum might be placed "at her disposal" each month. Mrs. Spear was at the time supporting herself by caring for children (including the provision of room and board) in her home.\textsuperscript{50} "Our hearts bleed," Spear wrote, "when we think of the heavy affliction which has been her lot to bear because of this [his] work." He hoped that she would come to see that "all has been ordained in love and wisdom." Caroline Spear expressed her personal thanks to Sheldon upon receiving word that he had sent Mrs. Spear fifty dollars and intended to send more.\textsuperscript{51}

Several months later Spear wrote to Sheldon on the same subject: "I can hardly trust myself to speak of Mrs. Spear, or John or William [his sons by the marriage]. It would be a source of great comfort to me to be made acquainted somewhat as to where they are and how situated."\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50}Spear to Sheldon, Nov. 22, 1864, Document 240, Sheldon Papers; Entry for Mrs. John M. Spear, Adams Sampson (publisher) Boston Directory, 1863.

\textsuperscript{51}Specificatoress to Harmonizer, Jan. 31, 1865, and Spear to Sheldon, Feb. 2, 1865, Documents 250 and 252, Sheldon Papers.

\textsuperscript{52}Spear to Sheldon, June 15, 1865, Document 266, Sheldon Papers.
One of the most significant effects of the frustration and despondency which the Spears experienced in Europe is indicated in their growing skepticism in regard to spirit communication. In a communication identified as an opening of the "book of life," it is suggested to Spear for the first time that the Associated Spirit World made no claim of possessing absolute truth, but only an approximation of it. He was told, too, that in part the weaknesses of the movement were attributable to the fallibility of the Communicator, himself. In her correspondence with Sheldon, Caroline Spear shared her growing concern in regard to the subject:

Yes, it does seem that spirit friends make mistakes like friends in the body, and this will keep us secure from pinning our faith upon them. They come to us to enlarge our manhood and womanhood—not to reduce us to the level of machines. . . . I believe this is God's ultimate purpose. How much wisdom spirits possess and can communicate to us I am not at all decided upon in mind. I suppose their motives are varied as those of humans.53

Following the collapse of the European venture, the Sacred Order ceased to exist as a cohesive unit and its leading members went their various ways. Sheldon, whose health had deteriorated considerably while the Spears were in Europe, left both the New York City business and

the companion who had lived with him there. He chose to spend his last years back in Randolph, New York, reconciled to his wife and family. On Sept. 17, 1865, he noted in his diary that his older children, Charles and Rosa seemed on the verge of adulthood. They were by this time 16 and 14 years old. "They have had the eye of a watchful mother upon them," he wrote, "and to her must be given the acknowledgement of doing her duty at all times." He died on July 17, 1868, at the age of 50, of consumption.\(^5^4\)

John Orvis and Caroline Lewis, after spending time in Boston and in Europe as spiritual companions, each returned to their original marital partners.\(^5^4\) Orvis remained active in the field of labor reform until his death in 1897. After studying the Rochedale plan while in England he returned to help form the Sovereigns of Industry in the United States and was later a member and officer of a district assembly of the Knights of Labor. Orvis was attracted, by its emphasis on cooperative ownership, to the International Workingmen's Association, and in his last years, was active in Edward Bellamy's Nationalist Club in Boston.\(^5^5\)

\(^{5^4}\)Thaddeus Sheldon Diary, entry for Sept. 17, 1865, Sheldon Papers; Ernest Miller, private interview with Mrs. Margaret Fish, July 5, 1947, notes in Sheldon Papers.

\(^{5^5}\)Egbert and Persons, Socialism in American Life, I p. 208; Swift, Brook Farm, pp. 179-180; Montgomery, Beyond Equality, pp. 414-415.
Sterling became something of a maverick. While others were repairing old relationships, he separated from his wife, abandoned his Cleveland estate, and by 1870 was living back at Kiantone with a 28-year-old woman who had become involved with the Sacred Order in Paris. With an ample income from his earlier law practice and real estate successes in Cleveland he spent most of the remaining years of his life in Boston. At the time of his death he was residing in Philadelphia, and had reached the age of eighty.56

Although it would have appeared that Spear's career was at an end in 1865, when he was past 60, he remained active for most of the last twenty-two years of his life, traveling back and forth across the continent on behalf of spiritualism. Among his contacts were William and Mary Godbe, Mormons he met in Salt Lake City, and who had been dismissed from the church for practicing spiritualism.57 In 1872 he turned over the responsibility for the Sacred Order to a Mrs. Manley, of whom nothing more is known. There is no

56MSS., Official Census Schedule, 1870, Kiantone, N.Y. (microfilm), National Archives; Entry for Marianne B. Sterling, E. Cowles and Co., (publisher), Cleveland Leader City Directory (1865); entry for Sterling, Adams Sampson (publisher), Boston Directory, 1875; Yale University alumni information sheet, John M. Sterling, in Oberlin College Archives. The 1870 United States Census describes Sterling as a farmer owning $20,000 worth of real estate and $15,000 worth of personal property.

57Spear, Twenty Years on the Wing, pp. 39-40.
reason to believe that the activities of his last years were any more productive than were those which his spirit guides had directed earlier. He died in Philadelphia on October 8, 1887, at eighty-three years of age.58

58Ibid; Philadelphia Enquirer, Oct. 10, 1887.
CONCLUSION

Early in 1860, when John Spear and his followers were in Cincinnati attempting to arouse support for the Sacred Order of Unionists, a Dr. N.B. Wolfe expressed interest in the work and was consecrated as "the projector." Wolfe, it turned out, was only interested in investigating the work of spiritualism and spiritualists. He had viewed Spear's activities "as a joke," he wrote later, until he met Thaddeus Sheldon, whom he described as "broken in health—in the last stages of pulmonary disease, . . . tired, . . . [and needing] a place of comfort to rest and die." Realizing "how his [Sheldon's] confiding nature had been abused," Wolfe reported, "I became indignant at the outrage." In 1876 Wolfe still recalled his remarks to Sheldon:

This is a cruel joke on you. This man [Spear] has broken up your family, destroyed your home, and squandered your means. He will soon desert you, as you have nothing left to excite his cupidity, and leave you in broken health, mortified in spirit, a friendless man, a toy of poverty, and a victim of want. Why do you not see this man's true character? In holy phrases he transacts his villainies, and steals the livery of the court of heaven to serve his evil ends. . . . It is time you should quit the presence of this old, bad man.

1N.B. Wolfe, Startling Facts in Modern Spiritualism (Cincinnati, 1874), pp. 77-82.
In spite of such warnings, Sheldon's relationship with
Spear remained intact. While in London in 1864, Spear
wrote nostalgically to Sheldon of that relationship and
the Kiantone experience:

Your last letter told us of your recent visit to
the Domain. In an instant as we read it we were
there with the dear loved friends of whom we thought.
And now the thought comes to us, shall we ever again
be seated on the banks of that quiet stream? Shall
we ever enter the humble shelters? Shall we look
upon the cavity, and if we do, shall we see its
deep and mysterious significance? Who knows? We
do not, but we shall work here with that blessed
hope in our hearts.2

It is certainly understandable that someone like
Wolfe would consider Spear a clever fraud and Sheldon his
unknowing victim. At the same time, it is impossible
to study the whole of Spear's life without concluding that
he was totally, utterly sincere in his dedication to the
advancement of what he considered not so much his own
will as that of enlightened, benevolent, spirits whose
sole concern was the betterment of humanity. It is only
by considering the complex factors which shaped Spear's
social and religious thought that we gain useful insights
into his seemingly unorthodox behavior.

Spear entered the Universalist ministry in the 1820s,
at a time when that denomination was racked by a theological

2Spear to Sheldon, Nov. 22, 1864, Document 240, Sheldon Papers.
dispute over the nature of salvation. His own training came from Hosea Ballou II, who maintained that those who left the mortal life unsaved would achieve salvation as their souls experienced a full understanding and acceptance of Christ's atonement for human sin. This view of salvation emphasized the importance and worth of each human soul, and at the same time insisted that man would be held accountable to God for his behavior in the mortal life.

As an outgrowth of his belief in the worth and perfectibility of every human being, Spear addressed his attention to a number of reform activities, his purpose being to bring humanity close to the goal of perfection. Between 1835 and 1850, he was active on behalf of abolitionism, the peace movement, temperance reform, and the drive to abolish capital punishment. As a reformer Spear was intensely dedicated. Particularly during the prison reform phase of his work, between 1847 and 1851, he drove himself mercilessly. At this juncture he was introduced to the practice of spirit communication through the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis, Woodbury M. Fernald, R.P. Ambler, and Samuel B. Brittan. The spiritual philosophy which such individuals expounded viewed spirit intercourse, and related spiritual phenomena, as scientific proof of the existence of the human soul apart from the physical body, and as a verification of the Universalist conception of spirit progression in a post-mortal realm. Furthermore, the reputed power of spirit
agencies to diagnose and cure physical ills, to discern the trait of personalities, and to transport individuals and objects from one locale to another, was interpreted as evidence that advanced spirits were capable of employing scientific principles not yet discovered by mere mortals. The belief that such spirits were willing to employ their talents on behalf of humanity, and to share with humans their advanced insights into the nature of the universe, also implied to proponents of spiritualism that a millennium of peace and harmony was imminent.

Spear discovered spiritualism at a time when his faith in human perfectibility was being seriously taxed by the apparent inconsequence of his various reform activities. In spiritualism he found the means of transforming his efforts on behalf of individual reform into a broad movement in which the goals would be the complete restructuring of society, and the realization of the millennium.

During the period from 1852 through 1853, Spear became thoroughly convinced that the advanced spirits of a number of important individuals wished to use him as their earthly agent for reform. His willingness to accept such a premise is understandable because it was in accord with his theological conception of life after mortal death, and because he considered himself, a universal reformer, a logical choice for the position of liason between spirit benefactors and the human race on earth.
At the same time, however, one may reasonably conclude that Spear accepted the idea of spirit-directed reform with himself as the leading communicant because the idea originated in the subconscious recesses of his own mind. Within the framework of such a program he was able, unconsciously, to construct a world view in which his own radical alternative to the existing social order were set forth and attributed to spirit advisors.

A large number of reformers found in spiritualism a confirmation of liberal religious and social beliefs. As it supported belief in human progress and individual worth, spiritualism represented a significant and positive contribution to antebellum reform. Spear went beyond most reformers, however, in that he employed spiritualism as a basis for a plan of social reorganization which was so radical that it had not the slightest chance of gaining widespread endorsement. Such being the case, his effectiveness as a reformer was seriously diminished at the point when he constructed his assembly of spirit advisors.

It must, nevertheless, be remembered that Spear's spiritual philosophy was not intended to be mystical, other-worldly, or escapist. Rather, Spear believed that the world view which he attributed to spirit sources represented a wholly rational synthesis of practical science and liberal religion. The most distinguishing feature of the philosophy
lay in the fact that Spear reasoned from a series of grand scientific principles which he thought derived from advanced spirits, and beyond that, from God himself. His various attempts to impart human qualities to inanimate objects failed because the principles upon which they were based were in error. The limits of his scientific endeavors were, in reality, attributable to the limits of his own mind.

As his attempt to usher in a new and harmonious order failed to take root, Spear's leadership became increasingly authoritarian and his reform program degenerated to a point where it became little more than a disorganized struggle for survival. Always a master of self-deception, Spear blamed his failure on external factors such as the Civil War, and consoled himself with assurances that his efforts had laid a solid foundation upon which spirit-directed reform in future generations might expand.

In large measure, then, Spear's radical reform program failed because of weaknesses in the theory upon which it was based. But it is also reasonable to conclude that he and his supporters failed because they called for reforms which the society in which they operated was simply unprepared to consider seriously. They were unable, as were the Owenites and Fourierites before them, to mount a significant attack against economic capitalism. In regard
to reform of the institution of marriage, it was more than a century later before the larger American society began to appreciate the wisdom of liberalizing divorce laws so that unsuccessful marriage relationships might be terminated without the attachment of social stigma, and without placing unnecessary emotional strain upon the parties involved.

More than a century after Spear's Kiantone Community had collapsed, small numbers of Americans were again experimenting with communal alternatives to the traditional patterns of living, but there was no indication that the masses of Americans were aware, not to mention interested, in such a course. The demands which Spear made on behalf of women—equality before the law, equal pay for equal work, establishment of child care facilities, the right to bear or to refuse to bear children—were given serious attention not in the nineteenth, but finally in the mid-twentieth century. In a society which has never responded readily to demands for change, John Murray Spear's radical spiritual reform philosophy had no real chance of being implemented in his lifetime.
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illustrate the major issues which have concerned the denomination is Ernest Cassara, ed., Universalism in America: A Documentary History (Boston, 1971). Alan Seaburg, "Recent Scholarship in American Universalism: A Bibliographical Essay," Church History, XXXXI (Dec, 1972), 513-523, should be consulted as an aid to any research on the subject.

William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator contains periodic references to the reform activities of both John and Charles Spear, and the volumes of The Prisoner's Friend (which originated as The Hangman) are an invaluable source. Published jointly by the Spear brothers, this journal contains a wealth of information on their various reform activities, and is particularly valuable for its detailed coverage of the movement to abolish capital punishment. Its pages also contain pertinent material on the dispute in Massachusetts between supporters of the Auburn and Eastern Penitentiary systems of prison confinement. Samuel Gridley Howe and Charles Sumner used The Prisoner's Friend to defend the Eastern system while Louis Dwight, secretary of the Boston Prison Discipline Society championed the Auburn system in the Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, Vols. XXI-XXVII (Boston, 1846-1852). Howe and Sumner are both severely criticized by their biographers for their intemperate conduct in the matter: Harold Schwartz, Samuel Gridley
Howe: Social Reformer, 1801-1876 (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), David Donald, Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War (New York, 1960). Charles Spear wrote an articulate criticism of capital punishment, Essays on the Punishment, by Death (Boston, 1844) which was countered by the Rev. George B. Cheever, A Defence [sic] of Capital Punishment (New York, 1846) which relied primarily on the Old Testament practice of capital punishment as its basis. John Spear's record of independent prison reform is preserved in brief reports, Labors for the Prisoner (Boston, 1848-1851), which he published annually between 1848 and 1852. The Spears also published jointly a volume of poetry, Voices from Prison; being a Selection of Poetry from Various Prisoners, Written within the Cells (Boston, 1847). George Bungay, Crayon Sketches . . . (Boston, 1852) includes a brief, but highly descriptive, character sketch of John Spear as a prison reformer.

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of the period. John D. Davis, *Phrenology, Fad and Science: A Nineteenth Century Crusade*, establishes the legitimacy of phrenology as an expression of the quest for a more thorough understanding of human behavior.


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One of the most valuable and most neglected sources for the study of spiritualism is the various spiritualist journals which appeared between 1847 and 1865. The Univercoelum, (New York), which ran from 1847 through 1849, was dedicated to expounding the philosophy of A.J. Davis. It is noteworthy that this journal began before the Fox sisters announced their rapping discovery and that its editors paid little attention to the rappings even after they were afforded considerable publicity in the New York Tribune. The Univercoelum was more concerned with the millennial implications of spiritualism and in the record of the handful of Fourierist communities which were still in existence. The Spirit Messenger (Springfield, Mass.) ran from 1849 until 1852, edited by Universalist ministers R. P. Ambler and Apollos Munn. Like the Univercoelum it was closely attached to Davis and was dedicated to the advancement of a wide range of reform activities. S. B. Brittan, a Universalist minister who had been briefly associated with the Univercoelum, edited the Shekinah (1852-1853), a sober, scholarly monthly which treated spiritualism in its relation to transcendentalism. Brittan also edited the Spiritual Telegraph (New York, 1852-1860) from 1852 until 1857. The Telegraph had the longest run, and apparently the widest circulation, of any of the early
spiritualist journals, due perhaps to its consistent policy of defending spiritualism as progressive and reform-oriented while simultaneously playing down the importance of the more radical expressions of spiritualism. After 1860 it was superseded by the Herald of Progress (1860-1864) which was published by Andrew Jackson Davis. The Banner of Light originated in Boston in 1857 and ran until 1907. In its early years it reflected the most conservative wing of the movement, giving primary consideration to the documentation of physical spiritualist phenomena. The New Era (Boston, 1853-1855) was edited by close associates of Spear, S. Crosby Hewitt and Alonzo E. Newton. Hewitt had been a Universalist minister, and Newton was dismissed from a Congregationalist pulpit because of his universalist views. The New Era acted as the mouthpiece for Spear's philosophy and was in full support of the theory of using spiritualism as the basis for a radical alternative to the existing social order. Following the demise of the New Era, Newton edited the New England Spiritualist (Boston, 1855-1857), in which he conducted continuous debate with the opponents of spiritualism. Newton's radical approach to spiritualism was moderated during the mid-fifties, and in 1858 he joined S. C. Brittan in editing the Spiritual Age (New York, 1857-1859), a scholarly, well-written journal which sought to establish the social respectability of spiritualism.
Spirit Rappers, (New York, 1972) is obviously written to appeal to current interest in the occult.

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The single most valuable source for Spear's spiritualist activities, which any serious research on the man must consult, is the Sheldon Papers. This collection includes 322 manuscripts (totalling over 2000 pages) compiled by Thaddeus Sheldon, Spear's closest associate. The papers were kept in the attic of Sheldon's granddaughter in Randolph, New York, until they were discovered by two students of local history, William Bailey of Jamestown, New York and Ernest Miller, of Warren, Pennsylvania. Russell Duino subsequently organized a calendar of the papers, and in 1960, Miller turned the entire collection over to the University of Pittsburgh, where they are housed in the
Darlington Library. To the original collection, which contained Spear's and Sheldon's correspondence, philosophical treatises, spirit communications, and business schemes, Miller added a variety of notes and materials relative to Spear's activities which he had himself accumulated. Printed materials by Spear in the early phase of his spiritualist reform work are his Twelve Discourses on Government: Purporting to Have Been Delivered in Boston, Mass., 1852 by Thomas Jefferson of the Spirit World (Hopedale, Mass., 1853), and S. C. Hewitt, ed. Messages from the Superior State: Communicated by John Murray Through John M. Spear in the Summer of 1852 (Boston, 1852). Spear's philosophy is detailed in A. E. Newton, ed., The Educator: Suggestions . . . Comprised in a Series of Revealments . . . Through John Murray Spear (Boston, 1857). Charles Hammond, a Rochester, New York, Universalist minister, was the first American trance-writing medium and an early associate of Spear. His major published works, Light from the Spirit World (Rochester, 1852), and Philosophy of the Spirit World (New York, 1853), bear a close resemblance to The Educator. Spear's influence is apparent in the New England Spiritualists Association Constitution . . . (Boston, 1854). His thinking in regard to women's rights can be found in Caroline (Hinckley) Spear, A Brief Essay on the Position of Women (London, 1866).
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