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A MODERN MECCA OF PSYCHIC FORCES: THE PSYCHICAL SCIENCE CONGRESS AND
THE CULTURE OF PROGRESIVE OCCULTISM IN *FIN-DE-SIECLE* CHICAGO, 1885-1900

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The Psychical Science Congress (PSC), held from August 21-25, 1893, was a division of the Science and Philosophy congresses of the World's Congress Auxiliary held in conjunction with Chicago's World Columbian Exposition. The first international congress devoted solely to psychical research, the PSC was initially conceived by John Curtis Bundy, editor of Chicago's progressive spiritualist newspaper, the *Religio-Philosophical Journal (R-PJ)*. Upon Bundy's death in August 1892, organizational matters fell to Elliott Coues, an internationally famous natural scientist who became chairman of the PSC. The Congress drew into its fold a number of well-known figures of the *fin de siècle* including: Richard Hodgson and Frederic W. H. Myers of the London Society for Psychical Research; Benjamin Franklin Underwood, a noted freethinker who assumed editorship of the *R-PJ* following John Bundy's death and who established it as the official organ of the PSC; Frances Willard, the internationally acclaimed head of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and America's most beloved woman leader; Lyman J. Gage, a corporate officer of the Columbian Exposition, president of Chicago's First National Bank, and spiritualist who hosted séances in his Chicago home; and Lilian Whiting, a noted journalist and New Thought advocate whose uplifting address regarding the spiritual future to come was delivered on the final day of the PSC by her close friend, the actress Kate Field. These and other notable figures with interests in the occult who presented papers at the Psychical Science Congress drew large audiences in the Halls of Columbus and Washington at the Memorial Art Palace (now the Art Institute Building), making the Congress one of the most popular of all held under the auspices of World's Congress Auxiliary.

In the decade from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s Chicago was a center for American occult activity, boasting a number of spiritualist and theosophical organizations along with its own independent psychical research society, the Western Society for Psychical Research (WSPR). Organized in the summer of 1885, the WSPR was the largest urban psychical research society outside of Boston

and its officers and membership provided the corps of organizational leadership which would form the local Arrangements Committee for the Psychical Science Congress. Though modeled after the London SPR, the Western Society for Psychical Research could not match the London group's scientific standards and it practiced a 'wilder' variety of psychical research which betrayed its spiritualist leanings. As with the case of the American SPR which expired in 1889, becoming a branch of the London organization, the WSPR expired in 1890, ceasing all investigations of psychical and spiritual phenomena.

The Psychical Science Congress, along with the Theosophical Congress, held from September 15-17, 1893 as a divisional congress of the World's Parliament of Religions, elevated the public's awareness of spiritualism, psychical research, and theosophy as elements of a *progressive occultism* which promised not only to heighten mankind's spiritual and moral development but to accelerate societal reforms which would improve the human condition. As a profound evolutionary force, progressive occultism promised knowledge and understanding of hidden realities and the heightening of individual mental powers—telepathy, clairvoyance, astral travel, and spirit communication among other supernormal and supernatural psychical abilities. But Chicago's status as a world center for generating psychical forces and drawing leaders of occult doctrines to its environs was short-lived and the promises of progressive occultism were soon appropriated by New Thought commercial hucksters whose primary concern was money-making. The discoveries of the spiritual unknown which psychical science hoped to deliver remained disappointing as the forays into spiritualism and psychical research in Chicago from 1885-1895 appeared to be another variety of the 'romantic revival' in which romance, adventure, and philosophical speculation seemed more attractive than the difficult and time-consuming efforts of serious scientific investigation into an occluded unknown. The hope of the Chicago organizers of the PSC that psychical science would take its place among the newly forming social sciences of the late-nineteenth century failed to materialize. However, certain philosophical notions regarding the centrality of spirituality as a central element of reform survived throughout the Progressive Era.

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PROLOGUE: WILLIAM T. STEAD'S OCCULT CHICAGO OF 1893

No city was more poised in 1893 to stake the claim as being the occult capital of the Western world than Chicago. With national and international gatherings scheduled to take place in psychical research, theosophy, spiritualism, and Christian Science—most to be held under the auspices of the World's Congress Auxiliary in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition or Chicago World's Fair—Chicago would exhibit for the world's enjoyment and enlightenment the latest developments and trends in modern, progressive occultism. But the spotlight on the city and its drawing power for prominent Anglo-American figures in theosophy, spiritualism, and psychical research, though powerfully intensive, would be brief. Never again, after 1893, would the city stand as the world's premier showcase for the public display of the most recent advances in penetrating the spectacular and supernatural realms of the invisible worlds of occult science.

William T. Stead (1849-1912), the pioneering London journalist, editor, and reformer with enormous social and political prestige and whose occult and spiritualist proclivities had become evident during the 1880s, crossed the Atlantic to visit Chicago in the fall of 1893 to sample, among other things, the city's vibrant occult scene. Stead, along with his son Willie, departed from Southampton, England on October 21, 1893 aboard the Hamburg-American steamer *Columbia* and he barely had time to view the World's Fair and other offerings of the Exposition. In fact, he didn't arrive in Chicago until October 31, the last day of the Fair but he attended the funeral of Mayor Carter Harrison, who had been assassinated on October 28, the day the *Columbia* docked at New York. Stead had been featured to appear on the program at the World's Parliament of Religions the previous month but his paper "The Civic Church" was read on his behalf. Headquartered in Chicago throughout his stay in the United States, Stead visited Canada and other American cities until departing for home from New York on March 7, 1894.

To Stead, Chicago was nothing if not enchanting. In addition to the vibrant psychical culture he found throughout the city, the multi-tasking, ever-busy editor was particularly struck by the swarms of shoppers who packed crowded streets along Chicago's Loop and Lake Shore during the height of the 1893 Christmas season. Crowds jamming the sidewalks stood seemingly transfixed before endless rows of brightly lit window displays of lavishly stocked department stores, the brilliancy of the electrical lighting striking him as a visual scene more dramatic than anything he had ever before witnessed. Writing from his hotel room on Michigan Avenue, he shared with English readers back home his amazement how anyone could possibly "retain their eyesight in such a continuous blaze of illumination." A fascination with electricity and psychical research was a feature of the period's cultural consciousness and at the World's Congress Auxiliary Division of Science of Philosophy held from August 21-25, 1893, no congresses drew larger audiences than those of electricity and psychical science. Stead departed America for home on March 7, 1894 aboard the *New York*, travelling with Mark Twain and the author/diplomat Charles Francis Adams. Stead and Mark Twain discovered they shared an avid interest in psychic phenomena and during a storm on the voyage home, Stead entertained the passengers with ghost stories as Twain grasped a table to steady himself.¹

Stead's stay in Chicago, which ran intermittently from October 1893 to March 1894, is perhaps best remembered for the November 12 speech at Central Music Hall that helped launch the formation of the Chicago Civic Federation, and his similarly inspired exposé of the city's vice districts *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1894). But Stead at this time was also focused on exploring another of his favorite interests—the invisible world of the spiritual unknown, or the occult—and many Chicagoans he met shared with him a heightened interest in spiritually occluded matters. "Hardly a day passes," Stead wrote in *Borderland*, the psychical investigation periodical he launched in July 1893, "in which some

¹ William T. Stead, "From the New World to the Old," *Borderland* 1 (January 1894), 279; Grace Eckley, *Maiden Tribute: A Life of W. T. Stead* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corp., 2007), 168, 211; and Joseph O. Baylen, "Mark Twain, W. T. Stead, and 'The Tell-Tale Hands'," *American Quarterly* 16 (Winter 1964), 607.

thoughtful student of the mysteries which encompass the other world does not wait upon me at the hotel, anxious to ascertain what evidence has been secured as to the great problem of the hereafter.”² It appeared to Stead that it was “the more thoughtful clergy and laity” of Chicago who were most “open to the consideration of the new truth,” and who demonstrated, in his words, “a wonderful readiness to consider all well-attested instances of psychic phenomena.” Indeed, Chicago, from the mid-1880s through the mid-1890s, as this study will show, was a significant *fin-de-siècle* site for spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research—all of which flourished in a receptive climate of heterodox spiritual truth seeking, and which provided a corps of leading citizenry, many pastors of leading Protestant, inter-faith, and non-denominational churches, who would serve on the Arrangements Committee for the Psychical Science Congress.³ This congress, the first of its kind in the world, drew, during the summer of 1893, advocates of spiritualism and psychical research from all over the world, bringing together in Chicago numerous progressive men and women who saw in psychical science possible, if not likely, solutions to pressing social concerns. The hailing of psychical research and occultism as vehicles for reform were a potent reason for the wide-ranging appeal that occultism held for the city’s cultured and educated classes.

Stead chronicled in *Borderland*, his new magazine for the public discussion of occult topics, the “wonderful readiness” he found in Chicago “to consider all well-attested instances of psychic

² Stead, “From the New World to the Old,” 279. On Stead’s visit to Chicago and its impact on city reform, see Joseph O. Baylen, “A Victorian’s ‘Crusade’ in Chicago, 1893-1894,” *Journal of American History* 51 (December 1964): 418-434; Dennis B. Downey, “William Stead and Chicago: A Victorian Jeremiah in the Windy City,” *Mid-America* 68 (October 1986): 153-166; Gary Scott Smith, “When Stead Came to Chicago: ‘The Social Gospel Novel’ and the Chicago Civic Federation,” *American Presbyterians* 68 (1990): 193-205, reworked as Chapter 2, “When Stead Came to Chicago: Social Christianity and Political Reform,” in Gary Scott Smith, *The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880-1925* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000), 65-96; and Frederic Whyte, *The Life of W. T. Stead*, vol. 2, (New York and Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), 39-53.

³ Stead wrote that during his stay in Chicago there were “few subjects...more frequently discussed” than those pertaining to spiritualism and psychical research. “From the New World to the Old,” 279. For Stead’s occult periodical *Borderland*, see Joseph O. Baylen, “W. T. Stead’s *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index of Psychic Phenomena, 1893-1897*,” *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 2 (April 1969): 30-35; and Grace Eckley, “*Borderland: On the Edge of the ‘Immense Ocean of Truth’*,” *Publishing Research Quarterly* 9 (March 1993): 34-43.

phenomena” along with the “catholic open-mindedness in relation to the hypotheses on which it may seem possible to explain them.” Such was the widespread interest he found existing in Chicago regarding all matters of occultism that Stead predicted that *Borderland*, launched in July 1893, would be read and followed more closely in America and Canada than anywhere else in the world. Soon upon arriving in Chicago Stead met with the principal organizers of the Psychical Science Congress—Elliott Coues, America’s most famous ornithologist and natural historian who became chairman of the congress upon the death of Col. John C. Bundy, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal [R-PJ]* and a highly ‘scientific’ spiritualist; Dr. Richard Hodgson, a psychical researcher who had been dispatched to America by the London Society for Psychical Research to assist its struggling American branch and who served as vice-chairman of the congress; B. F. (Benjamin Franklin) Underwood, noted freethinker who became editor of the *R-PJ* following the death of Col. Bundy, and member of the local arrangements committee; and the indefatigable Lyman J. Gage, president of the First National Bank and a chief official of the World’s Columbian Exposition who held séances at his stately home while Stead was in Chicago. Stead was also particularly struck by the prevalence of fortune-telling mediums throughout the city and found time to visit a number of spiritualist mental mediums along with slate-writing mediums and one materializing medium. Regarding his experience at the materializing séance, Stead reported that it was “intensely in advance of anything I had seen in the old country,” and that as far as he could determine, there had been no deception and that several of his fellow sitters, a number of whom being “professional men—professors, doctors, and others” were satisfied that they “had seen, identified, and held converse with, the materialized embodiment of their departed friends.”⁴

⁴ Stead, “From the New World to the Old,” 281; and John Nerone and Kevin Barnhurst, “Stead in America,” 98-114, in *W.T. Stead, Newspaper Revolutionary* ed. Laurel Brake, et. al. (London: The British Library, 2012). Stead’s visits to mediums in the city are mentioned in “Mr. Stead’s Daily Paper.” *Chicago Tribune*, November 12, 1893, 28. On the prevalence of fortune-tellers in cities like Chicago, see Henry Carrington Bolton, “Fortune-Telling in America To-Day; A Study of Advertisements,” *Journal of American Folklore* 8 (October-December 1895): 299-307.

Chicago newspapers eagerly sought interviews with Stead and questions about his occult proclivities inevitably cropped up. In one interview with the *Tribune*, Stead spoke of his psychical talent for automatic writing, a psycho-spiritual technique whereby the mind goes blank and the hand begins to write automatically, being directed in most cases by a departed spirit. Stead was not aware of his new psychic ability until the early summer of 1892 when he began to communicate with the spirit of a deceased American reform journalist named Julia Ames, who had died of typhoid fever in 1890 at the age of thirty. Ames had been an officer and editor in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and a colleague of Frances Willard, the Union's widely admired and respected leader with whom Stead counted as a close friend and associate. Willard, Chicago's most famous citizen by this time, also displayed an active interest in occultism and psychical research and, although out of the country in 1893, associated herself closely with the Psychical Science Congress. After several years of spiritual communication with Ames' spirit, Stead opened a London office in 1909 which he called Julia's Bureau, with rooms full of women manning typewriters and telephones busily recording calls and letters of individuals throughout Britain and America claiming to have communicated with someone deceased. In the *Tribune* interview Stead described how "other intelligences than my own to use my hand as their instrument for expressing their thoughts on paper." He then related two examples of automatic writing that had occurred while he had been in Chicago and Evanston but these, he confessed, consisted of only "trivial matters" concerning his travels between the two cities. Although the two occurrences were merely "trifles," Stead contended that automatic writing had the potential to penetrate deeply "into the inner mystery of one's life." When asked if he thought anything positive would come from these kinds of occult talents, Stead replied that "good will come" from such subjects when they are studied as "carefully and systematically with the same patience and perseverance that men of science give without hesitation to the investigation of the black beetle or of a fossil." That is when, Stead predicted, science will establish that human beings "do not cease to exist when they lay aside their bodies any more than

they do when they take off their clothes and go to bed.” Stead concluded the interview with his interesting description of a human being “as a kind of two-legged telephone which a fraction of you takes up and uses at birth and which is rung off when the change occurs which we call death.”⁵

Over a decade ago, Roger Luckhurst, noted literary historian of science, challenged, in his own study of Stead’s worldview, the mistaken approach that historians had taken in separating occult interests from the other intellectual pursuits which reformers, scientists, politicians, clergymen, and novelists of the period embraced. Most scholars had tended to view any attraction toward occultism as a crackpot aberration or mere foolishness that could be written off as an embarrassment or idiosyncratic oddity in an individual’s overall psychological constitution. Rather, as Luckhurst presented in the case of Stead, “diverse interests in mass democracy, spirits and phantasms, an Empire-wide penny post, telepathy, imperial federation, new technology, astral travel, and popular science” were all equally important constituents of a complete intellectual makeup and world view and therefore had to be regarded as part “of a wider *episteme*, a network of knowledges in which forms of the occult promised to make revelatory connections across the territory of late Victorian modernity.”⁶ What Luckhurst described for Stead holds equally true for any number of progressive individuals who figured prominently either in the Psychical Science Congress or in the occult environment of Chicago that helped bring it about. Personages such as Elliott Coues, Frances Willard, Lyman Gage, Lillian Whiting, and the Rev. Hiram W. Thomas cannot be fully understood without including their interests and attachments to occult subjects as these proclivities both figured in how they comprehended the world about them and inspired them in turn to change that world for the better. A strong awareness for seeking and developing an ‘advanced spirituality’ became a driving force among the organizers and

⁵ “Stead for Reform. The London Editor Explains Some of His Odd Ideas.” *Chicago Tribune*, November 12, 1893, 25.

⁶ Roger Luckhurst, “W. T. Stead’s Occult Economies,” in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media* ed. Louise Henson, et. al. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004, 125.

participants at Chicago's psychical congress as they sought to unlock the secrets of the unknown while at the same time pursuing secular social reforms.

Notions of the various manifestations of 'psychic force' that generated particular phenomena surrounding mediumistic spiritualism and which grounded speculative theories regarding telepathy and astral travel were often equated, in the late-nineteenth century, with the latest advances in energy and technology. As Linda Simon has illustrated in her historical analysis of electrification in the second half of the nineteenth century, electricity was "understood in terms in relation to other mysterious energies of the time" and appeared to be another form of "illumination...of the human body, and of the spirit and the mind."⁷ Simon and other historians have alerted us to the crucial connections between the cultural reception of early electrification and the rising tide of spiritualism and psychical research to the point whereby we can now safely postulate that the whole domain of psychic forces associated with practical occultism were identified in the public mind with advancements in industrial energy and technology.

Numerous leading Chicagoans were drawn to theosophical ideas of the astral body and astral projection, where the psychical double of the human body presumably traversed vast distances via the mysterious ether which even a number of more metaphysically-minded physicists believed pervaded the atmosphere. Elliott Coues, chairman of the Psychical Science Congress, generated considerable press attention with his claim of astral projection from his sister's residence in Chicago to the home of a friend in Washington DC in the late 1880s. Telepathy was also conceived in the wider cultural imagination as an occult technology similar to the telegraph, telephone, and eventually, wireless telegraph. Spiritualists referred to a 'spiritual telegraph' to account for the communications sent from departed spirits to mediums to be relayed to séance sitters. These occult technologies were often explained in terms the most recent developments in communications systems, which assured their rapidity and

⁷ Linda Simon, *Dark Light: Electricity and Anxiety from the Telegraph to the X-Ray* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2004), 2-7.

dependability as in the speed and supposed veracity of messages received from the spirit world. But Stead had found at least one drawback in using telepathy as a means of transatlantic communication while staying in Chicago. Although acknowledging that the 4,000 mile distance between Chicago and London did not impede the sending of mental messages across the Atlantic to England, he confessed it destroyed “much of the zest with which the investigation is pursued.” When in England, for example, Stead could psychically transmit messages to friends and receive confirmation of their reception in less than a day. Sending telepathic transmissions from Chicago to London, however, meant that it would require at least three weeks to receive verification of their arrival and by then, Stead said, he had either lost interest or completely forgotten about the messages.⁸

No city in America, or the world for that matter, had experienced the rapid growth in numbers and size during the nineteenth century as Chicago had, and with a population of well over one million inhabitants in 1890, it stood as the fourth largest city in the world. Europeans, fascinated by its growth and its rapid assimilation of new technologies such as electric grids and the telephone, regarded Chicago as America’s most interesting and remarkable city, to an extent that Arnold Lewis remarks it was viewed as “the Western world’s urban laboratory of commercial and technological experimentation.”⁹ The rapid electrification of the city and the extensive network of electric lighting was one of the technological marvels which, we have seen, fascinated Stead so greatly.¹⁰ The telephone, which Stead regarded as a model, if not accessory, for occult communication, is another case in point. Chicagoans

⁸ Stead, “From the New World to the Old,” 281.

⁹ Arnold Lewis, *An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago’s Loop, and the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 14. Lewis writes that historians “have underestimated or forgotten that Chicago in these years was the Western world’s most advanced metropolitan laboratory” (20).

¹⁰ On the rapid spread of electrical lighting throughout the city, see Harold L. Platt, *The Electric City: Energy and the Growth of the Chicago Area, 1880-1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). Frances Willard, a leader of the woman’s movement, once suggested that Chicago should be named the “electric city,” instead of the “windy city.” “What Were the Formative Influences in Your Life? Answered by Frances E. Willard,” *Golden Rule* 15 (January 8, 1891): 231.

were quick to adopt the telephone in the 1870s, welcoming it in spite of its social intrusion into domestic privacy. The Chicago Telephone Exchange received its franchise in 1878 and spread far more quickly than in other American cities.¹¹ Telepathy and the telephone were two inter-connected means of intimate communication conceived in the final decades of the nineteenth century, particularly as both worked together to produce the “fantasy of effortless point-to-point communication without wires, where no physical obstacle divided the sympathy of minds desiring mutual communication.”¹²

Chicagoans also embraced occult science as quickly and extensively as they did technological innovations. By 1885, the city had become a national center for spiritualism and theosophy, and boasted one of the largest independent psychical research societies in America, the Western Society for Psychical Research. Chicago then can be considered a *fin-de-siècle* metropolitan center for occult activity as much as it was a leading urban site for absorbing the marvels technological transformation. Frederic Myers, one of Britain’s foremost investigators of occult phenomena dispatched to Chicago in 1893 by the London Society for Psychical Research to read papers on behalf of the Society at the Psychical Science Congress, predicted in the *Chicago Inter Ocean* that Chicago would soon displace London as the world’s capital for psychical research, while Stead himself, enamored by the boundless energy with which Frances Willard was tackling the social evils associated with alcohol, predicted that Chicago might well become “the centre of the English-Speaking Race, so far as Moral Reform is concerned.”¹³ Yet, the world spotlight on Chicago as a center in psychical science would be short-lived. The high point in Chicago occultism came in 1893 when the Psychical Science Congress held its sessions in August and the Theosophical Congress drew large crowds in September at the Parliament of Religions.

¹¹ Lewis, *An Early Encounter*, 92.

¹² Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 153. Marconi’s invention of wireless telegraphy came in 1896.

¹³ “Devoted to Science. Many Schools of Philosophy and Physics Meet.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 22, 1893, 1; and Baylen, “A Victorian’s Crusade in Chicago,” 421.

The deaths of primary organizers and major figures such as Elliott Coues, Frederic Myers, Frances Willard, and Richard Hodgson around the turn of century and the reorganization of the American Society for Psychological Research in 1907 diminished Chicago's status as an occult capital. In addition, the rise in Chicago of a self-development practical psychology in the early twentieth-century New Thought movement dampened the enthusiasm for spiritualism while the national center for theosophy moved westward.

Stead's first novel *From the Old World to the New* (1892), a Christmas annual supplement to the *Review of Reviews*, previewed the coming World's Fair in Chicago, combining a travelogue with romance and a bewildering array of psychic occurrences. Stead's eerie novel offered a prevision of what would occur on April 15, 1912, when Stead perished, along with over 1,500 other souls, as the *Titanic* struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic on its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York. In the novel, a psychic passenger named Julia persuades the captain of the *Majestic*, an actual steamship built in 1890 and operated by the White Star Line, to rescue a lone survivor from a ship struck by an iceberg in the fog.¹⁴ *From the Old World to the New* successfully publicized what Stead referred to as "the Social and Political and Religious possibilities" of the World's Columbian Exposition. Along with being a large advertising catalogue for the upcoming World's Fair, Stead's novel can be considered a precursor to the psychical congress, as he served to the delight of his readers many of the latest developments in British psychical research and his own similar occult investigations.¹⁵ For Stead the World's Fair and Auxiliary

¹⁴ Stead had warned Frederic Myers early in 1893, after receiving a spirit message, against sailing on the *Majestic* for his upcoming voyage to Chicago to attend the Psychological Science Congress. Myers wrote to William James that "Stead's wife's uncle's ghost says that the *Majestic* is to sink on this trip....He has been trying to dissuade me, but I tell him to think of the 'copy' if we do go down." Trevor Hamilton, *Immortal Longings: FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death* (Exeter, UK and Charlottesville, VA: Academic Imprint, 2009), 191.

¹⁵ In the previous year's Christmas annual, *Real Ghost Stories*, Stead had introduced to readers some of his own psychical investigations, only to reveal them more fully in *From the Old World to the New*. As he explained in the opening of the novel, "Last year we indicated the New World that man still has to explore. This year we record the latest results of the supreme triumph wrested by the faith and courage of a solitary adventurer from *the great mystery which had been guarded for ages by the ignorance, the timidity, and the superstition of mankind.*" Estelle W. Stead, *My Father; Personal & Spiritual Reminiscences* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1913), 195; "From the

Congresses at Chicago were to be greatest event of 1893, and he was delighted that a congress had been set aside for psychical research, a triumph itself due largely to the persistent efforts of men he regarded as fellow investigators of the 'borderland' of present material life and the spiritual unknown: Col. Bundy, Elliott Coues, and Lyman J. Gage. Although unable to attend the Psychical Congress, Stead's own contribution came in the form of *From the Old World to the New*, where, as he states in the preface, that he had "not allowed" himself "when treating of psychometry, clairvoyancy, telepathy, or automatic handwriting, to go one step beyond the limits, not merely of the possible, but of that which has actually been attained."¹⁶ In one important sense, then, *From the Old World to the New* was Stead's opening address at the Psychical Science Congress and though the actual gathering was months away, the novel granted Stead a presence in the proceedings he would not otherwise have enjoyed.

Upon returning to London, Stead reflected on his stay in Chicago, referring to the city as "one of the wonders of the nineteenth century," stating that he was "grateful and pleased with the use I was able to make of my time in the city of Chicago," adding that "It seems to me that nowhere on the whole of the earth's surface...could I have been more profitably employed than I was in Chicago in the winter of 1893-94."¹⁷ Lilian Whiting, a journalist and New Thought writer who had met Stead while in Chicago, and who herself served on the women's organizational committee for the Psychical Science Congress, concurred with Stead's assessment both of Chicago and the World's Fair with the belief that the Columbian Exposition was "the concentrated expression of the glory of the earth" and that the Psychical

Old World to the New'; A Christmas Dream of the Chicago Exposition," *Review of Reviews* 6 (November 1892): 430; and "A Christmas Story of the Chicago Exposition," *Review of Reviews* 6 (December 1892): 587.

¹⁶ William T. Stead, "Preface," *From the Old World to the New; A Christmas Story of the Chicago Exposition, 1893* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1892), n.p.

¹⁷ *As Others See Chicago; Impressions of Visitors, 1673-1933* ed. Bessie Louise Pierce (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933), 355, 363; William T. Stead, "My First Visit to America," *Review of Reviews* 9 (January-June 1894): 414-417; and "Says Chicago is the Greatest City. Stead Gives His Impressions of America to London Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, March 15, 1894, 1.

Science Congress in particular had brought about a realization “for the first time the supreme possibilities of mankind—of the new humanity on which we are entering.”¹⁸

Social reform and the search for spiritual and psychic knowledge were frequently inter-linked in the strategies and tools that Chicago’s progressive leaders incorporated in their march toward a better life and in gaining spiritual understanding. This particular combination of the secular and the spiritual represents a leading feature of *fin-de-siècle* cultural progressivism or what can be called early social modernism. For Chicagoans and others from across the nation who would find themselves associated with organizing and carrying out the Psychical Science Congress, held in the late summer of 1893, occultism served as one approach among many that these individuals seized upon to further both social reform and spiritual attainment. Occult knowledge, derived from the spiritual realm, furthered both individual and social development, blurring distinctions between private and public realms of selfhood and generating forces that determined the worldview guiding various reform and uplift campaigns for these individuals. Put differently, occult studies and interests were not the exclusive concern of those prominent Chicagoans who found themselves members of spiritualist, theosophical, or psychical research societies, but were simply located alongside a number of cultural pursuits they undertook to improve human conditions and gain knowledge of spiritual realities and truths. Most of the figures I will be examining in the following pages are far better remembered for their professional achievements and accomplishments in business, medicine, law, science, religion, social reform, journalism, and organizational club work—positions from which they exerted a great influence in correcting a number of social evils they saw in myriad forms about them than they are for any memberships and leanings toward occultism or metaphysical philosophy.

¹⁸ Lilian Whiting, “Life in Boston. Temporarily Transferred to the World’s Exposition.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, September 2, 1893, 13.

Occultism, whether in the variety of spiritualism, theosophy, or psychical research, was only one venue or course of action that acted in concert with a reform impulse for achieving a progressive vision that benefitted both the individual and the human race at large. Occultism occupied considerable cultural space as numerous leading Americans and European intellectuals found themselves drawn to investigate phenomena and speculate on hidden forces and energies which could benefit mankind. The Psychical Science Congress of 1893 and the metaphysical environment throughout Chicago which enabled its appearance stand as a heroic attempt to normalize and legitimize psychical research and practical occultism in America. With its sessions seemingly steeped more in romance than science, the Congress, while drawing large audiences and attracting enormous press attention, remains nearly forgotten today, at most a brief footnote in historical studies on psychical research. This perhaps is not quite so puzzling when we realize its hopes for securing final proofs of man's ultimate place in the universe, an ambitious and exciting undertaking for that generation, was a challenge too great. But in 1893, psychical research, as displayed at Chicago, seemed poised, at least in the minds of its adherents, to take its place among, even to supplant, the physical sciences which had brought so much in natural knowledge and technical advances to those who lived during the nineteenth century. But instead of psychical research becoming the leading science of the twentieth century, it remained at the edges, ever so fascinating but ever so elusive. William T. Stead would be both disappointed and surprised that we, in the twenty-first century, aren't communicating more extensively by automatic writing and telepathy. The modern 'typewriter', with its word processing system, easy touch keyboard, and rapid internet access, has rendered psychic communication unnecessary, sadly relegating what was once mankind's great hope to a curious, archival anachronism.

**CHAPTER ONE: PROGRESSIVE AMERICAN OCCULTISM AND THE 'NEW' CULTURAL HISTORY:
MAGIC, METAPHYSICS, MENTALITIES, AND MODERNISM**

Modern occult studies has only recently found its footings as a transdisciplinary specialty situated on the borders of the cultural history of science, religion, literature, feminism, and public philosophy. It stands roughly where women's studies stood a generation ago—vibrant, confident, expansive—and embellished with an allure of the distinctively new.¹ As with women's history, occult studies invite wide-ranging correspondences and cross-connections among a number of disciplinary interests in the sciences and humanities. Ranging from anthropology to women's history, these disciplines have invested heavily in studying the modern occult revival of the nineteenth century, a widespread spiritual, psychological, and scientific awakening in America and Europe signaled most prominently with the appearance of Spiritualism in the United States and its subsequent trans-Atlantic migration. This occult revival, as is well known, is pictured throughout the historically-turned disciplines as a thoroughly modern project, reflecting and reinvigorating some of the most vexing and pressing cultural concerns of the day. The modern occult movement in the United States generally refers to theoretical and practical developments in occultism, the study and unveiling of hidden realities, as they appeared in the wide-ranging associations among the tens of thousands of individuals attracted to the spiritually-charged and highly-energized pursuits of Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, and Psychical Research. For the purposes of this study, the perspectives of *fin-de-siècle* heterodoxy, of which occultism looms central, will be drawn from the 'new cultural history' and the 'new modernist

¹ The maturity of modern occult studies can be gauged by the collection of essays found in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* ed. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012); and the state of the field report by Christine Ferguson, "Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism," *Literature Compass* 9 (June 2012): 431-440. Such sophisticated studies seem far removed from the desperate call issued over forty years ago in Robert D. Linder, "Wanted: Serious Historians of the Occult," *Fides et Historia* 6 (Fall 1973): 60-70. The numerous works of Frances Yates (1899-1981) along with Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971) were instrumental in stimulating scholarly interest in the occult. David S. Katz, *The Occult Tradition; From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 16.

studies', two vigorous disciplines which have determined that occult and heterodox systems of knowledge and practice were not only more widespread than previously believed, but more importantly, were interwoven into mainstream controversies and developments surrounding the nature of human consciousness, notions of a multi-variant 'self', and newly-discovered mental powers which could transcend material boundaries and transform reality. Indeed, it was occult perspectives which often seemed to be most representative of reigning mentalities regarding psychical features of the individual mind and its capacities for communicating and participating in a wider, if indeterminable, reality—all issues characteristic of *fin-de-siècle* private and public thought.

A Modern Mecca of Psychic Forces, presents a modified microhistory² of what to date, has been a curiously under-studied, but pre-eminently major public event in American occultism—the week-long Psychical Science Congress (PSC), held in Chicago from August 21-25, 1893. The PSC was a division of the Philosophy and Science Congresses of the World's Congress Auxiliary, a wide assortment of international congresses held from May to October in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago World's Fair). Also examined as part of the modified microhistory to be presented here is the three-day Theosophical Congress, held from September 15-17, 1893 as a special Congress granted to the Theosophical Society at the World's Parliament of Religions. These two Congresses, and particularly the Psychical Science Congress, serve as the programmatic targets from which I will project

² Microhistorians generally focus on specific events that help illuminate issues which arise within their broader field of interest. One recent survey defines microhistory as “the intensive historical investigation of a relatively well defined smaller object,” most often meaning a microscopic study of an obscure individual or an unknown small group or family event. I use the term “modified microhistory” as a means to alert the reader that the summer Congresses in 1893 Chicago were not obscure nor were the individuals involved anonymous or unknown. Sigurour Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szigjártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 4. For views from two of the leading practitioners of the Italian school of microhistory see Carlo Ginzburg, *Thread and Traces: True False Fictive* trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2012), ch. 14 “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,” 193-214; and Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” pp. 97-119, in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* ed. Peter Burke, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2011 [2001]). A summary various approaches to microhistory can be found in Francesca Trivellato, “Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33 (Spring 2015): 122-134.

an expanding radius into the wider culture of spiritualism, theosophy, psychical research, and New Thought, all elements which characterized mainstream *fin-de-siècle* occultism (psychical science) in Chicago. This cultural history of what is being termed 'progressive occultism' (essentially an evolutionary belief in a millennial perfection of mankind) will present an array of individuals and the associations they created and joined which promoted a discursive practical occultism that targeted the educated, middle, and reading classes, sponsoring lectures and meetings throughout Chicago, a city recognized by historians today as the turn-of-the-century western center in the United States for metaphysical religion and psychical science. The two Congresses, along with the cultural manifestations of progressive occultism throughout *fin-de-siècle* Chicago, are windows to understanding and appreciating the occult content of mentalities in science and religion that guided Americans in their efforts to reform society through the development of spiritual awareness and psychological empowerment in individual lives.

Among those drawn to Chicago for the purpose of attending or presenting at either of the two Congresses were three internationally recognized British leaders in occultism and psychic science—journalist and editor William T. Stead, poet and psychical researcher Frederic W. H. Myers, and socialist and theosophical leader Annie Besant. Prominent Americans included: the famous ornithologist Elliot Coues (pronounced "Cows"), one of the nation's most foremost scientists, who served as chairman of the Psychical Science Congress following the unexpected death of John C. Bundy, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* and a widely acclaimed spokesman for 'rational spiritualism,' i.e., spiritualism devoid for fraud and deception; Frances Willard, a nationally known spokeswoman from Evanston, Illinois and supporter of psychical research and New Thought tenets, who, as leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, was arguably America's most beloved woman in the 1890s; and Lyman J. Gage, President of the First National Bank in Chicago, Corporate Officer of the World's Columbian Exposition, and an ardent Spiritualist rumored to hold séances in Washington, D.C. while Secretary of

the Treasury for President William McKinley. In addition to these prominent figures, I will provide capsule biographies of a number of individuals who were intimately involved in promoting occultism in Chicago, including a number of representative women such as Cora L. V. Richmond, Spiritualist pastor of the First Church of the Soul (located at Hooley's Theater) and Lilian Whiting, the well-known journalist whose paper on "That Which is To Come," read at the Psychical Science Congress by the famous actress Kate Field, received considerable press coverage. These two women, along with a number of other colorful individuals, were instrumental in making Chicago a national center in the progressive occult movement in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Making it 'New' Again: Occultism in Cultural History and Modernist Studies

While the 'new cultural history' is, of course, no longer new, it, like its related discipline, modernist studies, continues to remake itself 'new', particularly through ever-increasing pluralism, revisionism, eclecticism, disciplinary crossings, and a continued fondness for novelty in subject selection.³ That cultural history continues to re-make itself new has been the position taken by Roger Griffin, noted British professor of modern history and cultural theory at Oxford Brookes University. In the preface to his *Modernism and...series*, Griffin has referred to the "perceptible paradigm shift" which has become evident in approaches to modern cultural history. Characteristic of this shift, he notes, is the trend toward transdisciplinary perspectives, and "the conscious clustering of concepts often viewed as unconnected."⁴ According to one recent text, "the first defining feature of cultural history is its focus

³ The new cultural history formally arrived ca. 1990 with the publications of: *The New Cultural History* ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); and *Interpretation and Cultural History* ed. Joan H. Pittock and Andrew Wear (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). On subsequent reformulations of cultural history, see James W. Cook and Lawrence B. Glickman, "Twelve Propositions for a History of U.S. Cultural History," 13-57, in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future* ed. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁴ Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), ix. On eclecticism, see Alan Gordon, "Introduction: The New Cultural History and Urban History: Intersections," *Urban History Review/Revue*

upon human subjectivity and the creative dimensions of the human mind.” Cultural history, the author proceeds, can be defined as an approach to the past that “focuses upon the ways in which human beings made sense of their worlds, and this places human subjectivity and consciousness at the centre of cultural enquiry.”⁵ Frequently, then, it is through expanding crossroads of historical consciousness and the hidden pathways of ‘higher thought’ through an increasing eclecticism and willingness to cross disciplinary lines that modern occult studies, among other more recently developed transdisciplinary specialties, helps to render cultural history ‘new’.

There is no question that the current status of modern occult studies owes a great deal to the rise and lingering influence of an earlier variety of new cultural history, *l’histoire des mentalités*, to which it remains intimately related.⁶ Though mentalities is no longer a formal school with a dedicated following, it is still widely used as an approach in cultural history, although the term simply frequently appears with little explanation of its meaning offered.⁷ *Mentalités* history is associated with the so-called *Annales* school, a group of historians identified with two giant figures in French historiography, Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) and Marc Bloch (1886-1944), who held chairs at the University of

d’histoire urbaine 33 (Fall 2004): 3-7. For an extensive bibliographic survey of proliferating subject matter found in the new cultural history, see James W. Cook, “The Kids Are All Right: On the ‘Turning’ of Cultural History,” *American Historical Review* 117 (June 2012): 746-771.

⁵ Anna Green, *Cultural History* (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 4. For the idea that cultural history is continually innovative, see Ludmilla Jordanova, “The Practice of Cultural History in Britain,” 63-78, in *Cultural History in Europe: Institutions – Themes – Perspectives*. ed. Jorg Rogge (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 2011), esp. 64.

⁶ On the mentalities notion contributing to historical interest esotericism and occultism, see Jacques Le Goff, “Mentalities: A New Field for Historians,” *Social Science Information* 13 (February 1974), 89; and Jacques Le Goff, “Mentalities: A History of Ambiguities,” trans. David Denby, 166-180, in *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁷ For the debt most social and intellectual historians practicing in America, Britain, and France owe to *l’histoire des mentalités*, see Christopher Clark “*Mentalité* and the Nature of Consciousness,” 387-395, in *Encyclopedia of American Social History* ed. Mary Kupiec Cayton, Elliott J. Gorn, and Peter W. Williams, vol. 1, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), esp. 387. Green observes that for American historians “the influence of the study of mentalities...has been broader than it has been deep” (389). See also Peter Burke, “Strengths and Weaknesses of the History of Mentalities,” *History of European Ideas* 7 (September 1986): 439-451.

Strasbourg.⁸ In 1929 the two historians cofounded the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (renamed *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* in 1946) to “champion a new historiography that embraced the methods and insights of all other branches of learning, particularly such social sciences as geography, sociology, economics, linguistics, ethnology, and psychology.” Under this ambitious multi-disciplinary rubric, history, it was envisioned, would become “the human science and the keystone of the arts and social sciences.”⁹ The term *histoire des mentalités* itself was not formally introduced until the late 1950s by two later generation *Annales* historians Georges Duby and Robert Mandrou.

Always a blurry concept, the history of mentalities, which for purists was the study of mental structures that underscored beliefs held throughout a population (particularly for ordinary people and not the intellectual or social elite) over long periods of time, has today simply become a term nearly synonymous with cultural history.¹⁰ Often defined as “visions of the world,” mentalities historians “map the mental universe which furnishes a culture with its essential characteristics,” becoming “not a history of ideas, but a history of mind.”¹¹ Accordingly, for most cultural historians, mentalities broadly

⁸ Lynn Hunt, “French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the *Annales* Paradigm,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (April 1996): 209-224; Jacques Revel, “The *Annales* School,” 9-15, in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* ed. Lawrence D. Krutzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); André Burguière, *The Annales School: An Intellectual History* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009); and *French Historians, 1900-2000: New Historical Writing in Twentieth-Century France* ed. Philip Daileader and Philip Whalen (Chichester, UK: and Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

⁹ Alfred J. Andrea, “News of Historical Interest: Mentalities in History,” *Historian* 53 (Spring 1991), 605; and Francois Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales* trans. Peter V. Conroy, Jr. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994). For a German perspective on mentalities see Peter Schottler, “Mentalities, Ideologies, Discourses: On the ‘Third Level’ as a Theme in Social-Historical Research,” trans. William Templer, 72-115, in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* ed. Alf Ludtke (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Roger Chartier, *Cultural History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988,) esp. chapter 1, “Intellectual History and the History of *Mentalités*: A Dual Re-evaluation;” and Norman Simms, *The Humming Tree: A Study in the History of Mentalities* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992, esp. 31-32. On the history of mentalities disappearing into cultural history, see Allan Megill, “Coherence and Incoherence in Historical Studies: From the ‘Annales’ School to the New Cultural History” *New Literary History* 35 (Spring 2004): 207-231.

¹¹ Patrick H. Hutton, “The History of Mentalities: The New Map of Cultural History,” *History & Theory* 20 (October 1981), 238. See also Patrick H. Hutton, “Philippe Ariès and the Secrets of the History of Mentalities,” *Historical*

incorporate the “history of attitudes, forms of behaviour and unconscious collective representations.”¹² The study of these domains has vastly expanded the scope historical inquiry. This broadening, with the still uncomfortably vague notion of mentalities, sometimes referred to as the history of sensibilities, has assured its continued appeal for cultural historians.¹³ I will incorporate mentalities as attitudes assumed by proponents of occultism throughout this cultural history of psychical science, with cultural history understood as encompassing both social and intellectual history.¹⁴ The mentalities of the participants of the Psychical Science Congress in the late summer of 1893 and the attitudes expressed in the psychical research society they joined in Chicago, along with the meanings that these participants drew from their experiences, will be one particular approach I will seek to develop.

Reflections/Réflexions Historiques 28 (Spring 2002): 1-19; and Patrick H. Hutton, *Philippe Ariès and the Politics of French Cultural History* (Amherst and London: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

¹² Michel Vovelle, *Ideologies and Mentalities*, trans. Eamon O’Flaherty (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990), 5. As Vovelle notes, event histories are also found in mentalities studies. See his Chapter 11, “The Event in the History of Mentalities.”

¹³ Roger Chartier, “*Histoire des Mentalité*,” 54-58, in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); André Burguière, “From the History of Mentalities to Anthropological History,” 31-44, in *Modes of Comparison: Theory & Practice* ed. Aram A. Yengoyan (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006); and Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *American Historical Review* 112 (June 2007): 661-684. For the place of mentalities in the history of science, see Jacques Roger, “Preface to the 1993 Edition,” xv-xxxvii, in *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century French Thought/Jacques Roger* ed. Keith R. Benson, trans. Robert Ellrich (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), esp. xxxiv-xxxv.

¹⁴ David Paul Nord, “Intellectual History, Social History, Cultural History...and Our History,” *Journalism History* 67 (Winter 1990): 645-648. For this conceptualization of cultural history, see David D. Hall, “Backwards to the Future: The Cultural Turn and the Wisdom of Intellectual History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 171-184; Donald R. Kelley, “Eclecticism and the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (October 2001): 577-592; and Lloyd S. Kramer, “Intellectual History and Reality: The Search for Connections,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 13 (Summer-Fall 1986): 517-545. Peter Burke has used the phrase “the cultural history of intellectual practices” to describe “a middle way between the history of mentalities and intellectual history. Peter Burke, “Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural History,” *Cultural History* 1 (April 2012), 8. For recent similar formulations, see Avner Ben-Zaken, “Cultural History: Difficulties and Possibilities,” *Cultural History* 2 (April 2013): 1-15; and Alessandro Arcangeli, *Cultural History: A Concise Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

Other important disciplinary sources I have drawn upon in my reading of the ‘new’ cultural history of *fin-de-siècle* occultism have been the explosion of interest in the subject emanating from the new modernist studies and Victorian literary history. As Stephen Ross, a leading scholar in modernist theory has explained, “reinventing modernist studies as uncanny,”—a reference to those modernist historians such as Leon Surrlette who have located, in the late-nineteenth century occult revival the birth of modernism—has contributed to “the imperative to make modernism new (again).”¹⁵ The New Modernist Studies emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s (concurrently with the new cultural history) when a number of leading English Literature scholars, already having drifted toward cultural studies, re-worked modernism as reaching beyond the avant-garde coterie of literary and artistic poets and authors, and instead determined that its broader contours rested in the larger cultural domain of modernity—as a cluster of creative formations which served as expressions for the varied and multiple reactions to perplexing and troublesome conditions of urban modernity.¹⁶ The culmination of this revisionist effort was the appearance of the journal *Modernism/modernity* in 1994 and the establishment of the Modernist Studies Association in 1999.¹⁷ Their goal was to make modernism a transdisciplinary domain that would no longer be confined to the study of canonized literary authors as

¹⁵ Stephen Ross, “Uncanny Modernism, or Analysis Interminable,” in *Disciplining Modernism* ed. Pamela L. Caughie (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 35. See also *Make It New: The Rise of Modernism* ed. Kurt Heinzelman (Austin: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, 2003). On the notion of the uncanny, see Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ For definitional consideration of these key terms, see Susan Stanford Friedman, “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism,” *Modernism/modernity* 8 (September 2001): 493-513; Matei Calinescu, “Modernity, Modernism, Modernization: Variations in Modern Themes,” 33-52, in *The Turn of the Century: Modernism and Modernity in Literature and the Arts* ed. Christian Berg, Frank Durieux, and Geert Lernout (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995); and Susan Stanford Friedman, “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” *Modernism/modernity* 13 (September 2006): 425-443. The classical study remains Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

¹⁷ The term “new modernist studies” was first used at the inaugural meeting of the Modernist Studies Association in October 1999. See Ann L. Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. her “Introduction: Rethinking Modernism, Remapping the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 1-14.

had been the tradition since the New Criticism became established in literary studies earlier in the century.¹⁸ As a result, the new modernist studies, along with the new cultural history, has opened up multiple venues of discursive matter—including formerly obscure or marginalized texts from disparate fields such as philosophy, science, and religion which further reveal and highlight tensions and struggles as heterodox systems of knowledge and practices competed with conventional and orthodox establishments for a recognized place in various public spheres.¹⁹

It can therefore be assumed that the tracts and assorted literature of progressive occultism share a family resemblance with forms of modernist fiction. These family resemblances within a broadly conceived modernist literature include: a fascination with socio-economic transformations which were impacting the life circumstances and styles of many urban dwellers; a sense of rupture with past cultural traditions; and a refusal to accept the limitations of Victorian-era rationalism, materialism, and scientism. This refusal was manifested, in one direction, by a ‘metaphysical turn’ which sought to tap and exploit mysterious processes of mind, sub-levels of consciousness, higher dimensions of thought, hidden mental powers, and highly-charged, spiritualized energy. Seen in this light, *fin-de-siècle* modernism seems “far removed from the spheres of philosophy, literature, and art” and should not be regarded as primarily an aesthetic movement but rather as a constellation of “*cosmological*

¹⁸ The New Criticism, a mid-twentieth century formalist movement in American literary studies, emphasized close reading to evaluate works of literature as ahistorical, self-referential aesthetic objects. See Mark Jancovich, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and *Rereading the New Criticism* ed. Miranda B. Hickman and John D. McIntyre (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012). A truly transdisciplinary perspective in the new modernist studies, however, has yet to be realized as most scholars hail from English Departments and focus primarily on literary criticism. Pamela L. Caughie, “Introduction,” 1-10, in *Disciplining Modernism*, esp. 3.

¹⁹ An early call for a radical revision of modernism which would place texts “from other newly forming/firming ‘disciplines’ alongside literary (and literary-critical texts)” was Deborah F. Jacobs, “Feminist Criticism/Cultural Studies/Modernist Texts: A Manifesto for the ‘90s,” in *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism* ed. Lisa Rado (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 289. For this “culturally ‘thick’ sense of modernism’s multiple connections to a wide variety of non-aesthetic practices,” see Peter Brooker et. al. “Introduction,” 1-13, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* ed. Peter Brooker, et. al. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. 2.

phenomenon.”²⁰ This “maximalist” reading of modernism , increasingly the perspective of the new modernist studies, renders it “a wide-ranging project and aspiration” encompassing “movements for change which sought to forge a new world and mode of existence...based on a more transcendental or spiritual conception of life.”²¹

The New Occultism and Its Recent Historiography

The term *occultism* itself was unknown in the English language until it was used by the English Theosophist A. P.[Alfred Percy] Sinnett (1840-1921) in his book *The Occult World* (1881), while the French term *occultisme* appeared in the mid-nineteenth century in works by the French occultist and magician Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875).²² One prominent school linked to the European-based ARIES (*Association pour la recherché et la l'information sur l'ésotérisme*) and the American-based Association for the Study of Esotericism (ASE) prefers using ‘esotericism’ as the umbrella term, with occultism designated as a particular form of esotericism that developed after the European Enlightenment. This school follows the pioneering work of Antoine Faivre, a prominent French historian of Western esotericism. Faivrean scholars generally examine esoteric movements originating from the occult

²⁰ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 54. See also Nathan Waddell, *Modernist Nowheres: Politics and Utopia in Early Modernist Writing, 1900-1920* (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Peter Brooker, “Early Modernism,” 32-47, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel* ed. M. Shiach (Cambridge UP, 2007).

²¹ Thomas Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 132.

²² Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos, “The History of the Occult Movement,” In *Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition* ed. Leon Surette and Demetres Tryphonopoulos (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1996), 19. On Eliphas Lévi, see Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011 [1972]); and Thomas A. Williams, *Eliphas Lévi: Master of Occultism* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1975). For the distinction between older occult sciences and the new occultism see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4-13.

sciences of the Renaissance, tracing them to contemporary New Age movements.²³ But whether as a sub-category of esotericism or a category in its own right, the American sociologist Robert Galbreath believed occultism should be viewed “as an attitude toward the world rather than as a classification of phenomena, practices, and beliefs.”²⁴ A common understanding of occultism in the early-twentieth century viewed it as the exploration, study, and mastery of “*nature’s unseen forces, and the powers in man to govern them,*” with the primary meaning of the term *occult* as “that which is hidden or mysterious, with an element of the magical often superadded.”²⁵ “Occultism, then, as I consider in these pages, is the study and science of metaphysical speculation regarding the spiritual nature of ultimate reality and its application to further the human condition.

Currently, the academic study of *fin-de-siècle* occultism is nearly as fashionable as the pursuit of the occult was throughout the nineteenth century. Two monographs published in 2004 secured the position of modern occult studies as a central consideration for early-twentieth century cultural history—Alex Owen’s *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* and

²³ Faivre is regarded as the leading Continental authority on esotericism in Western thought and culture and all Faivrean scholars acknowledge the significance of “The Components of Esotericism Considered as a Form of Thought” found in his *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10-13. See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1996); Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001); Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (London: Equinox Publishing, Ltd. 2005) esp. 1-3; Kocku von Stuckrad, “Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation,” *Religion* 35 (April 2005): 78-97; Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁴ Robert Galbreath, “Explaining Modern Occultism,” in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives* ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 19. Galbreath prefers *occult* over *esoteric* for the modern period beginning with the nineteenth century, with *metaphysics* and *occultism* being “virtually interchangeable” (16-17). See also Edward A. Tiryakian, “Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (November 1972): 491-512.

²⁵ Margaret B. Peeke, “True Occultism, Its Place and Use,” *Arena* 12 (March 1895): 74; and Edward Clodd, “Occultism,” *Fortnightly Review* 107 (May 1920), 757.

Corinna Treitel's *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*.²⁶ Together, these two works, both widely reviewed, secured the presence of occultism and its related domains of modern enchantment as crucial to appreciating *fin-de-siècle* mentalities.²⁷ As a result it is now widely accepted by scholars working in the field that the approaches to understanding fundamental issues and concerns, as well the kinds of knowledge generated in science, religion, and occultism, were deeply interwoven throughout the period around the turn-of-the-century, and that, therefore, the new occultism can be regarded as one important constituent of cultural modernity.²⁸ Thomas Laqueur is one of the more perceptive and critical reviewers of these two path-breaking works. Thomas Laqueur's is among the more perceptive as well as the most critical. He seems impatient with Owen's and Treitel's insistence that incorporating occultism into the larger picture will greatly change our understanding of modernity, but few have followed his perspective. Laqueur's point that occultism is as much about religion as it is science and that William James's 'Variety of Religious Experience' is a better model than

²⁶ Owen herself places the arrival of modern occult studies with the seminal work of Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Peter Mandler, Alex Owen, Seth Koven, and Susan Pederson, "Cultural Histories Old and New: Rereading the Work of Janet Oppenheim" *Victorian Studies* 41 (Autumn 1997), 78. In addition, we should recognize two works by R. Laurence Moore that were formative in establishing modern American occult studies—*In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977; and "The Occult Connection? Mormonism, Christian Science, and Spiritualism," 135-161, in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives* ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

²⁷ Alex Owen, the senior of these two pivotal scholars, is Professor of History and Gender Studies at Northwestern University. Her first book, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (1990) was widely acclaimed. She is currently working on a third book provisionally titled *Culture, Psyche, and the Soul in Modern Britain*. Corinna Treitel is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Washington University in St. Louis. She has broadened her research interests to food and nutrition studies for a projected book entitled *Eating Nature: Food, Agriculture, and Environment in Modern Germany*.

²⁸ Some works on the modern occult that have appeared in the wake of Owen and Treitel include David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2006); Antonio Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural: The Night Side of the Victorian Mind* (London: William Heinemann, 2008); John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2008); James Smith Allen, "Papus the Misogynist: Honor, Gender, and the Occult in Fin-de-Siècle France," 112-129, in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France: Bodies, Minds and Gender* ed. Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo (Houndmills UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Julia Mannherz, *Modern Occultism in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012).

science to interrogate occultism's relationship to modernity has much to commend.²⁹ Yet is clear that occultism interfaced deeply with both religion and science, and even that conventional view in occult studies itself is now being revised. In a recent article that will surely be incorporated into any future work on occultism, Corinna Treitel has suggested that we need to move beyond conceiving occultism as just science and religion or as something located somewhere between them. For Treitel, the occult only reveals "the inadequacy of our categories of historical analysis and the pressing need to rethink the map of modernity to incorporate occultism in a more positive sense." Since the occult is "everywhere in modernity," students of occult studies, she offers, may need to abandon the science/religion dichotomy and rethink occultism in a redrawn "map of modernity around eclectic, competing, and overlapping 'world views'" in order to more fully comprehend the place of occultism in modern culture.³⁰ Finally, Laqueur questions just how important and widespread occultism really was in late-Victorian culture and his position that science takes the steam out of occultism's enchantment by reducing telepathy and astral travel to known principles of physics is instructive. Yet science itself, other historians note, as an explanatory resource for inexplicable or perplexing phenomena, does not dispel enchantment or wonder. Indeed, it has become increasingly recognized that "modern science is just as likely to *restore* mystery as to extirpate it from the natural world," and that since the late-nineteenth century, science has become "the single most powerful generator of the marvelous."³¹

²⁹ Thomas Laqueur, "Why the Margins Matter: Occultism and the Making of Modernity" *Modern Intellectual History* 3 (April 2006): 111-135.

³⁰ Corinna Treitel, "What the Occult Reveals," *Modern Intellectual History* 6 (November 2009), 612, 625.

³¹ Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, "Introduction: The Varieties of Modern Enchantment," in *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* ed. Joshua Landy and Michael Saler (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

Occultism and American Culture at the *Fin-de-Siècle*

Modern American occultism arose from cultural appropriations of Mesmerism,³² Swedenborgianism,³³ and Transcendentalism.³⁴ Mesmerism, in particular, was instrumental for the emergence of spiritualism as well as other occult movements in the second half of the nineteenth century. Until Alison Winter laid out in great detail the cultural reach of mesmeric thought and practice in nineteenth-century Britain, mesmerism had largely been regarded as a subject located solely on the fringes of the history of medicine and psychiatry, although by the end of the Enlightenment the doctrine

³² For mesmerism in nineteenth-century America, see Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); Robert C. Fuller, "The American Mesmerists," 163-173, in *Franz Anton Mesmer und die Geschichte Des Mesmerismus* ed. Heinz Schott (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985); Robert C. Fuller, "Mesmerism and the Birth of Psychology," 205-222, in *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* ed. Arthur Wrobel (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987); Peter McCandless, "Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston: 'Enough of the Marvelous'," *Journal of Southern History* 58 (May 1992): 199-230; David Schmit, "Revisioning Antebellum American Psychology: The Dissemination of Mesmerism, 1836-1854," *History of Psychology* 8 (November 2005): 403-434; and Joan Kirby, "Shadows of the Invisible World: Mesmer, Swedenborg and the Spiritualist Sciences," 99-115, in *Frankenstein's Science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic Culture, 1780-1830* ed. Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008).

³³ For an appreciation of Swedenborg and his spiritual philosophy, see Marguerite Beck Block, *The New Church in the New World; A Study of Swedenborgianism in America* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968 [1932]); Signe Toksvig, *Emmanuel Swedenborg, Scientist and Mystic* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1948); Inge Jonsson, *Emmanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971); Wilson Van Dusen, *The Presence of Other Worlds: The Psychological/Spiritual Findings of Emmanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Erland J. Brock and E. Bruce Glenn, *Swedenborg and His Influence* (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1988); Robert H. Kirven, *Angels in Action: What Swedenborg Saw and Heard* (West Chester, PA: Chrysalis Books, 1994); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Ernst Benz, *Emmanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002); Douglas Taylor, *The Hidden Levels of the Mind: Swedenborg's Theory of Consciousness* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2011); and Gary Lachman, *Swedenborg: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2012).

³⁴ On Emerson, Transcendentalism and its occult implications, see Kenneth Walter Cameron, *Emerson's Transcendentalism and British Swedenborgism* (Hartford, CN: Transcendental Books, 1984); Mary Kupiec Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism; A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); John T. Lysaker, *Emerson and Self-Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); and Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

of animal magnetism had readily been absorbed into numerous cultural domains.³⁵ It was this heady mix of occult and spiritual understandings of man and his place in the universe that accounted for the later nineteenth century development of the four primary varieties of American progressive occultism—Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, and Psychic Research.³⁶ While not exclusive of all occult interests pursued in *fin-de-siècle* America, these four varieties nonetheless occupied central stage and continue to command substantial historical attention, crowding out smaller and lesser-known occult groups and organizations. Spiritualism, which caught fire in America and Europe in the 1850s, was the doctrine and practice of communicating with the dead through mediums, a majority of whom were female; it postulated an afterlife of spiritual dwellers and went into great detail regarding the conditions which greeted departed souls after death. The Theosophical Society, organized in New York in 1875, (theosophy translates as “wisdom religion”) was cofounded by the former Spiritualist medium and Russian émigré, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and sought to combine science and religion into one all-encompassing doctrine. Theosophy helped popularize Eastern religions in the Western world, encouraged the development of the study of comparative religion, introduced wide-ranging reading publics to notions of Karma and Mahatmas, and actively promoted the study of occultism and the development of a higher self. New Thought began as a metaphysically-based mental and spiritual

³⁵ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Alison Winter, “Mesmerism and Popular Culture in Early Victorian England,” *History of Science* 32 (September 1994): 317-343; and Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See also Silvia Mancini, “Animal Magnetism and Psychic Sciences, 1784-1935: The Rediscovery of a Lost Continent,” trans. Juliet Vale *Diogenes* 48 (Summer 2000): 94-101. Animal magnetism, as devised by the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer, was an epistemology and therapeutic synthesis comprised of astral fluidic and magnetic forces directed by a magnetist for the diagnosis and/or treatment of any number of human diseases and ailments.

³⁶ For the national fascination with spiritualized, occult matters, see Cathy Gutierrez, “Introduction,” xi-xiv, in *The Occult in Nineteenth-Century America* ed. Cathy Gutierrez (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 2005); Robert Galbreath, “The Occult,” 851-885, in *Handbook of American Popular Culture* ed. M. Thomas Inge, 2nd ed. vol. 2, (New York and Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1989), esp. 851-857; Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Arthur Versluis, “The ‘Occult’ in Nineteenth-Century America,” 1-29, in *The Occult in Nineteenth-Century America*.

healing movement following the death of famed New England healer Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1801-1866). Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), a former Quimby patient, became a prominent religious New Thought organization in the 1880s and 1890s, utilizing occult methods of medical treatment such as absent healing and challenging conventional medicine to an extent where regulars in the profession became alarmed at the loss of patients to the rapidly growing religious sect. By the mid-1890s New Thought had also become a form of applied psychology as it promoted, through magazines and texts, a number of occult techniques for self-development and psycho-spiritual growth. Psychical research (now known as parapsychology) was the scientific study of the occult, particularly with regard to spiritualism but it also investigated theosophy, hypnotism, and extra-sensory perception. The first organization, the Society for Psychical Research, appeared in London in 1882, with an American branch soon following in its wake.

To be sure, spiritualism, theosophy, psychical research, and New Thought were distinct from each other in a number of important ways—yet all three shared similar occult mentalities that grouped them together in the imagination of American and European publics.³⁷ Their often vigorous attempts to distinguish themselves from each other could not completely cover the family resemblances of doctrine and practice so prevalent throughout modern American occultism. This helps account for the often strikingly fluid boundaries within public occultism. At various points in their lives, or even running concurrently, individuals could attend spiritualist séances, read Theosophical literature, attend a Christian Science service, and even become a member of a local psychical research society. For most Chicagoans and fellow urban Americans of the late-nineteenth century, the main exposure to modern

³⁷ Catherine Tumber, *American Feminism and the Birth of New Age Spirituality: Searching for the Higher Self, 1875-1915* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 145; and Heather Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939* (Amsterdam—New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2009), 58.

occultism came through public lectures and the printed word, with many quite sympathetic to much of what they were hearing and reading.³⁸

In a number of respects, the New Thought, if used in the broadest terms, is an apt term for the entire American phase of the late-nineteenth century occult and mystical revival. As John B. Anderson, a philosophy professor of Colgate viewed it at the time, the New Thought stood for the sweeping metaphysical movement that emphasized “a spiritual interpretation of life and...a practical use of the occult powers of the soul” for the purpose of “reform[ing] mankind and perfect[ing] the race physically, intellectually, and morally.”³⁹ Anderson correctly understood New Thought as “an attempted reformation and spiritualization of human life in all phases of its being and of its activity,” with its followers “bound together by the invisible ties of a common belief, sentiment, and practice.”⁴⁰ That occultism represented a shared mentality over the period’s cultural concerns has been acknowledged by a number of American historians. Catherine Albanese, noted scholar of American religious thought, boldly asserted that “metaphysical belief [lies] at the center of American culture—endorsing its major presuppositions and prejudices even as it seems to be outside them; capturing its anxieties even as it seems to explode them in something new and different.”⁴¹ One prolific publicist who spent more than one stint in Chicago promoting psychological occultism was William Walker Atkinson (1862-1932), who wrote, in his 1915 history of the New Thought movement, that it had

³⁸ Galbreath, “Explaining Modern Occultism,” 30; and Wolfram, *Stepchildren of Science*, 44.

³⁹ John Benjamin Anderson, *New Thought: Its Lights and Shadows; An Appreciation and A Criticism* (Boston: Sherman, French & Co., 1911), 1-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9, 12.

⁴¹ Catherine L. Albanese, “Introduction: Awash in a Sea of Metaphysics,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (September 2007), 587. Some years before, R. Laurence Moore argued that “the belief structures implied by occultism have considerable relevance for understanding American culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Moore, “The Occult Connection?,” 156. See also Charles S. Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion: The Rise and Development of New Thought* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press), 1963; and J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967).

“permeated all phases of thought and work,” exerting a “marked effect upon the modern view of the meaning and purpose and life.”⁴² Atkinson further regarded New Thought as “a MENTAL ATTITUDE,” [author’s capitalization] that followers and readers of New Thought literature had “simply *absorbed*.”⁴³

Within period studies, the *fin-de-siècle* has undergone a major revision over the last two decades—in part largely due to the influx of studies of heterodoxy—of which the occult has been central. For example, it is well-known that the late-nineteenth century rebirth of hypnotism brought a foreboding fear of losing control of oneself to the psychical manipulations another’s influence, whether in the form of mysterious passes by the travelling stage hypnotist or from long lingering glances of a passing stranger in the street or railcar.⁴⁴ Although such fears were clearly present in the public mind, there was also a counter-balancing mentality which brought new optimism and hope generated by press announcements of medical cure through psychic means. The belief in medical progress that hypnotism would bring somewhat abated the fearful concerns over loss of personal will through the mental penetrations of others. The optimistic tenor of the period has also pushed aside the historiographical emphasis on pessimism due to degeneration theory, always stronger in Europe than America, and which

⁴² William Walker Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles or The Message of the New Thought* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1915), 1. For the characteristics of occult metaphysics as a psycho-spiritual mentality, see Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), esp. 13-15. For an insightful review of this masterful volume, see Richard John Neuhaus, “Metaphysical America,” *First Things* no. 171 (March 2007): 26-30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21. New Thought advocates such as Atkinson held that “mental states, attitudes, ideas, images, and actions determine our mental and physical conditions and status” (27). Such a message exerted a wide appeal to American middle classes at the turn of the century, with women being drawn to New Thought at a rate of two to one over men. Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 51; and Peter van der Veer, “Spirituality in Modern Society,” *Social Research* 76 (Winter 2009): 1097-1120.

⁴⁴ Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37. For the apprehension and fear of control by psychical means during this period, see the following works by Daniel Pick: “Powers of Suggestion: Svengali and the *Fin-de-Siècle*,” 105-25, in *Modernity, Culture, and ‘the Jew’* ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); *Svengali’s Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); and “‘Terrors of the Night’: *Dracula* and ‘Degeneration’ in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 93-110, in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: Bram Stoker’s Dracula* ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003).

set off numerous cultural alarms about the immediate future of mankind and modern society.⁴⁵ An emphasis on public fascination with modes of enchantment, rather than brooding fears over degeneration, now mark the changing tide of fin-de-siècle studies.⁴⁶

There is now little doubt that that a climate of increased spiritual sensibilities in late-nineteenth century America helped usher in the vogue for psychic culture and occultism. Addressing the multiplicity of meanings associated with the term *culture*, George Cotkin has argued that for the nineteenth century, its meaning is perhaps best captured in the manner ascribed to it by Matthew Arnold as a widespread quest toward perfection. Individuals possessing culture would have “higher aspirations and awe for ideal values,” and, it was believed, would live and act accordingly.⁴⁷ In his widely read *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold located the source of this quest for perfection in “an internal condition....becoming something, rather than having something, in an inward condition of the

⁴⁵ On *fin-de-siècle* degeneration theory and its cultural impact, see *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* ed. J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c. 1918* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Susan J. Navarette, *The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Decadence* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998); *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe/Charles Bernheimer* ed. T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Robin G. Schulze, *The Degenerate Muse: American Nature, Modernist Poetry, and the Problem of Cultural Hygiene* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ Michael Saler, “Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographical Review.” *American Historical Review* 111 (June 2006): 692-716. See also two of Saler’s earlier works, “Modernity, Disenchantment, and the Ironic Imagination,” *Philosophy and Literature* 28 (April 2004): 137-49; and “‘Clap if You Believe in Sherlock Holmes’: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940,” *Historical Journal* 46 (September 2003): 599-622). On the changing views of *fin-de-siècle* drawn from scholars from a number of sub-disciplines, see Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, “Introduction: Reading the ‘Fin de Siècle,’” xiii-xxiii, in *The Fin De Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c.1880-1900* ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mike Jay and Michael Neve, “Introduction,” xi-xvii, in *1900: A Fin-de-Siècle Reader* ed. Mike Jay and Michael Neve (London: Penguin Books, 1999); *The American 1890s; A Cultural Reader* ed. Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), Walter Laquer, “Fin-de-Siècle: Once More with Feeling,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (January 1996): 5-47, and esp. the valuable article by Matthew Beaumont, “Socialism and Occultism at the *Fin de Siècle*: Elective Affinities,” *Victorian Review* 36 (Spring 2010): 217-232.

⁴⁷ George Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture, 1880-1900* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 101-102. A similar perspective at the time viewed culture as “making the most of one’s self.” See Bishop H. W. Warren, “The Possibilities of Culture,” *Chautauquan* 9 (October 1888), 33.

mind and spirit.”⁴⁸ Culture, then, could be conceived as “a psychical state” which “makes a man to be something.”⁴⁹ That this culture of mind should possess a strong spiritual flavor was often emphasized.⁵⁰ Such a *fin-de-siècle* depiction of culture, with its “expansive sense of possibility,” projected, according to Matthew Schneirov, a kaleidoscope of what he terms “cultural dreams” in which individuals, filled with the “vitality and energy” of perfected culture, would direct spiritual, mental, and psychic power to overcome the irrationalities of modern life.⁵¹ That progress and culture could be viewed as one and the same is evident in this passage written in 1883 by the well-known English Spiritualist William Stainton Moses where he postulated that “man’s highest duty as a spiritual entity” is expressed “in the word PROGRESS—in knowledge of himself, and of all that makes for spiritual development.” This “highest duty,” he continued, could also be “summed up in the word CULTURE in all its infinite ramifications; ...not for earthly aims alone, but for the grand purpose of developing the faculties which are to be perpetuated in endless development.”⁵² Or, as Lilian Whiting, a well-known American newspaper columnist with strong occult and New Thought leanings put it, “The best results of all true culture” become realized when “they so refine and exalt the real nature of the individual that he becomes more

⁴⁸ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy; An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1869), 12-13.

⁴⁹ John Addington Symonds, “Culture: Its Meaning and Its Uses,” *Littell’s Living Age* 194 (September 10, 1892), 668. For a discussion of the notion of culture as mind, see Harvey Laudin, *Victims of Culture* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1973), 6-10.

⁵⁰ Henry Matson, *Knowledge and Culture* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1895), 5. See also “The Gospel of Culture” *New York Observer and Chronicle* 79 (August 8, 1901), 175. Indeed, it was said that the phrase “getting culture,” popular with Americans at this time, had been borrowed from the phrase “getting religion.” “Getting Culture,” *Current Literature* 12 (March 1893), 339.

⁵¹ Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2-3. John Higham has discussed the extent to which intellectuals were “involved in the psychic turbulence” of the 1890s and of their activism for “doing things.” See “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” 73-102, in John Higham, *Writing American History; Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

⁵² William Stainton Moses, *Spirit Teachings through the Mediumship of William Stainton Moses (M.A., Oxon.)* 5th ed. (London: London Spiritualist Alliance, Ltd., 1904, [1883]), 155; and “Spiritualism,” *Chamber’s Encyclopedia; A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge*, vol. 9, (London and Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, Ltd., 1892), 649.

susceptible and more sensitive to these unseen influences that surround him [and] lead him upward in spiritual life.”⁵³ This notion of culture was completely in tune with what was considered as perhaps the essence of modern occult doctrines—the idea of a progressive soul and the edification of individual subjectivity, of spiritual evolution and the development of ‘higher’ mental powers. Occultism, then, was demonstrably an undertaking, as put forward by a number of progressive thinkers, for acquiring and developing self-culture in *fin-de-siècle* America.

Progressivism, the Occult, and Revitalization

Occultism has not generally been viewed by historians as a feature of progressivism or the progressive movement, a historiographic result stemming from a number of interpretive and research traditions.⁵⁴ Progressivism was long thought of and written about as an exclusively political undertaking, first becoming visible in cities and states in 1880s and 1890s and then on a national level in the 1900s and 1910s. From trust-busting to environmental concerns, Progressivism was most likely to be explained in terms of social, political and economic reform—often pictured as disjointed or non-related undertakings in which just about anyone might call themselves a Progressive. Not until progressivism was framed as a cultural movement in which the ‘self’ was targeted as much as the ‘political’, ‘economic’, and ‘social’ could the idea of occultism be considered part and parcel of progressivism.⁵⁵ If

⁵³ Lilian Whiting, *The Spiritual Significance or Death as an Event in Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1901), 288-289.

⁵⁴ *Progressive Era*, *progressive*, *Progressives*, and *progressivism* are often used with little discrimination. The *Progressive Era* generally refers the decades which incorporated the ‘progressive movement’, occurring anywhere from ca. the mid-1880s to ca. 1920. *Progressives* refer to those individuals who identified themselves or whom historians have cited as promoting or ascribing to particular types of reform during this period, while *progressive* is the more general term applied to those who believed in progress. *Progressivism*, as used in this study, refers to the cultural set of mentalities and broadly-conceived programmatic efforts to improve, and even perfect, individuals and society. The years encompassing the progressive era correspond to those of early modernism.

⁵⁵ Robert M. Crunden (1940-1999), distinguished professor of History and American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, was an early voice for identifying progressivism as a cultural movement. See his “Essay,” 71-103, in John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden, *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1977), esp. 72-75. Other historians have also described progressivism’ as “a mood or an attitude” that was

our notion of progressivism is to be wholly re-visioned within the framework of the new cultural history, and can be identified as a visible component in say, medicine and religion, just as in politics and economics, then a great deal of the discursive content found in public philosophy and popular science could possibly, if not likely, be considered as falling under the rubric of progressivism.⁵⁶ We would, then, also expect to find social and political reformers drawn to scientific and religious heterodoxy as well as the opposite. When George E. Mowry considered, a half-century ago, the essence of progressivism to be the “firm belief that to a considerable degree man could make and remake his own world,” he scarcely considered that proposition to include the mental magic of New Thought, the practical occultism of Theosophy, or the systematic search for explanations of spiritualist phenomena found in psychical research.⁵⁷

As in the new modernist studies, with its broadening of modernism to encompass wide-ranging cultural formations, so too should our notion of progressivism be correspondingly expanded to incorporate ideas and ideals which were progressive in the widest sense. In other words, as modernism as a movement is no longer confined to a select canonical group of avant-garde authors, poets, artists, and intellectuals, so too does the concept of progressivism require expansion beyond the canon of political reformers and the adjustments they made to certain social and economic conditions. Accordingly then, this study will identify with a ‘maximalist’ sense of progressivism, identifying within its contours the vast realm of heterodox undertakings which incorporated a spiritualized occult

“optimistic about the possibilities for human ‘progress.’” See J. Michael Hogan, “Introduction: Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era,” in *Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era* ed. J. Michael Hogan (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003), ix-x; and Eldon J. Eisenach, “Introduction,” vii-xx, in *The Social and Political Thought of American Progressivism* ed. Eldon J. Eisenach (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006).

⁵⁶ An important essay by John C. Burnham (along with Crunden’s) which situated progressivism in the broader cultural realm of personal development, health, and spiritual self-awareness but that is rarely cited in the standard texts of the Progressive Era, can also be found, 3-29, in *Progressivism* (1977). Burnham’s earlier, but again overlooked, revisionist assessment of progressivism can be found in “Psychiatry, Psychology and the Progressive Movement,” *American Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1960): 457-465.

⁵⁷ George E. Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 1900-1912* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 37.

understanding of man's place in the universe and the cosmological plan for his evolutionary development. In this sense, then, a broadly conceived cultural progressivism becomes an important engine for *fin-de-siècle* revitalization.⁵⁸ *Fin-de-siècle* occultism too should be perceived, argues Roger Griffin, not simply on the basis of its cosmic claims or its psycho-spiritual techniques for developing the self and uncovering the unknown but rather through "understanding its social dynamics as a modern revitalization movement." Occultism then becomes a variety of modernism that Griffin terms *social modernism*.⁵⁹ The recourse to occultism in this regenerative atmosphere of the *fin de siècle* became so widespread that one of the central tenets of the new modernist studies is the recognition that the "fascination with magic, the occult, and the supernatural were *integral* to the Modernist spirit."⁶⁰ All modernists, then, whether avant-garde novelists, practical occultists, poets, or metaphysical healers, shared, to some degree, the new attitudes for comprehending reality, with an occult understanding of mind and selfhood frequently found at the core of their conceptual formulations.⁶¹

As such, progressivism becomes an important expression of modernism itself. The doctrines and discourse of occultism figured prominently in the mentalities of modernism and cultural progressivism. An attraction for philosophical idealism, correspondences, and visions of undreamt-of mental powers and invisible forces penetrated the mentalities of those publics drawn to the prolific offerings of occult reading material. Progressive occultism was not characterized as much by esoteric

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the 'maximalist' position in modernist studies, see Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 6. What the new cultural history refers to as the "re-enchantment of modernity," the new modernist studies deem "modern revitalization movements."

⁵⁹ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 131.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 134. According to Leon Surette, "Everyone 'dabbled' in the occult....[It was] ubiquitous in *fin de siècle* Europe and America." Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 36.

⁶¹ Richard Lehan, *Literary Modernism and Beyond: The Extended Vision and the Realms of the Text* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 3. For further discussion of early modernism and the exploration of new models of the mind, see *Modernism and the European Unconscious* ed. Peter Collier and Judy Davies (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); and *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940* ed. Mark S. Micale (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2004).

practices as it was by an exoteric outlook. Through the use of house journals and the newly expanding magazine culture, devotees to progressive occultism pressed their case to prospective followers and the informed reading public.⁶² Progressive occult study and practice was demonstrably public, experimental, and open to all who were serious-minded and forward-looking.

To speak of *progressive occultism* means using the term in two distinct ways. In one sense, the term encompasses the range of evolutionary striving towards individual and societal improvement, with an eye on outright human perfection. The other sense is to directly link those individuals with occult leanings to secular reform activities which have been traditionally associated with the Progressive movement. Many political and economic reformers of the Progressive Era, as some historians have observed, had various occult interests and links to metaphysical associations or psychical periodicals. Or, reversing the equation, we could say that many occultists shared an active interest in promoting political and economic reform. Either way, there was clearly a forging of occult proclivities and socio-political reform. As Catherine Albanese, a prominent historian of American religion, has indicated, New Thought proponents, along with fellow metaphysical occultists, “linked their vision of paradise to the progressivism of their era.”⁶³ Beryl Satter, whose *Each Mind a Kingdom* (1999) remains the standard account on the New Thought, has observed that there was a great deal of crisscrossing of various domains of political reform with a spiritualized New Thought psychology that united both reformers and New Thinkers in an effort “to bring about a new era in the development of the ‘race’,” what she has termed *evolutionary republicanism*. For Satter, what is particularly striking about New Thought and, we might add, occultism in general, were “the interconnections between New Thought and turn-of-the-

⁶² This is the central argument of an important article by Mark S. Morrison, “The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 31 (Winter 2007): 1-22.

⁶³ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 323.

century woman movement leaders, early progressives, and proto- and pioneering psychologists.”⁶⁴

Indeed, mysticism and metaphysics were important streams feeding into the New Psychology of the late-nineteenth century, with leading American psychologists like William James displaying great interest in such matters. Much to the dismay of his colleagues who were seeking to purge the new psychology of its occult content, it was James who loomed as the central figure in mediating metaphysical and occult doctrines to the American public, and in doing so, “established himself as the most important thinker in America.”⁶⁵

Public occultism was clearly an expression of the progressive outlook as it was manifested in the wider culture. It maintained an intimate relationship with a host of incremental or defined progressive reforms particularly at the municipal level even as it professed millennialism and perfectionism as its ultimate goal and ambition. Occultism brimmed with the promise of expected immediate progress, not just in the spiritual realm, but in individual lives and throughout society as well. For this study, then, I will use term ‘progressive occultism’ as designating those occult movements, along with individual leaders, who were eager participants in a cultural struggle to reinvent and revitalize American society in light of a perceived spiritual stagnation brought about by a heavily materialistic culture of science and a flaccid theology preached throughout Protestant denominations. Occultists of this variety shared their

⁶⁴ Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 8-9, 183. See particularly Chapter Six of her work, “New Thought and Early Progressivism,” 181-216. For an early valuable work discussing progressive, evolutionary thought as being intertwined with occultism, see Tom Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel: Studies in English Literary Criticism and Ideas, 1880-1920* (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1973).

⁶⁵ Robert M. Crunden, *A Brief History of American Culture* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 150; and Robert M. Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism, 1885-1917* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Various works of the late Eugene Taylor are also crucial for understanding James as a public mediator for religious, scientific, and metaphysical notions of consciousness and “hidden” aspects of the mind. See e.g., *William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982); *William James on Consciousness beyond the Margin* (Princeton University Press, 1996); *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1999); and “Metaphysics and Consciousness in James’s *Varieties: A Centenary Lecture*,” 11-26, in *William James and ‘The Varieties of Religious Experience’: A Centenary Celebration* ed. Jeremy Carrette (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

perfectionist zeal with other religious and social reformers who sought to bring about an individual and social progress that historians have described as post-millennial.⁶⁶ Progressive occultism, as presented here, is framed as a world view distinguished not only by its forward-looking evolutionary views and its perfectionist vision of both man and society, but also as a system of spiritualized psychological practices embedded within the period's 'psychic culture', which strove to develop, through individual mental and psychic growth, practical ways to improve the quotidian aspects of people's lives.⁶⁷ It blended with other reform movements that engaged progressive men and women of this era. It is partly in this very mixing with other reform strategies and spiritual activities of urban elites that has caused proclivities for occultism to be overlooked and under-appreciated as a factor of progressive reform in a number of standard historical accounts. Occultism alone, for example, hardly defines the public life of Frances Willard or Lyman Gage, but to ignore their occult leanings diminishes both them and their social and civic accomplishments. Occultism, then, should be viewed as one among many viable strategies and outlooks that progressive thinkers of the last two decades of the nineteenth century sought to utilize, either singularly, or in conjunction with efforts to improve and/or perfect the human condition.

Progressive occultism, as I have indicated, encompassed a wide-ranging assortment of movements and associations—an almost endless array of spiritual reform 'religions' and 'sciences' that

⁶⁶ For progressive millennialism of the late nineteenth century, see Jean B. Quandt, "Religion and Social Thought: The Secularization of Postmillennialism" *American Quarterly* 25 (October 1973): 390-409; and Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner, *Protestantism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 59-62. The notion of progress was, of course, a central credo of faith for nineteenth century Americans. See Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence; A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 20; and the section "Optimism and Activism in Late-Victorian Culture," in Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912; Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 134-140.

⁶⁷ In the early nineteenth century, perfectionist and millennial yearnings were a common feature of evangelical Protestantism. See e.g. Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), esp. 3-5; Timothy L. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America," *American Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1979): 21-45; and Louis J. Kern, "Sectarian Perfectionism and Universal Reform: The Radical Social and Political Thought of William Lloyd Garrison," 91-120, in *Religious and Secular Reform in America: Ideas, Beliefs, and Social Change* ed. David K. Adams and A. van Minnen (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1999).

engaged the middle- and upper-classes in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a key element of a vibrant and flourishing ‘psychic culture’ which was broadly embedded in American life and which was closely related to a host of intellectual and practical ideologies centered upon mesmerism, hypnotism, phrenology, physical culture, and faith healing. Much of what nineteenth century writers called ‘progressive literature’ was subsumed under these subjects.⁶⁸ Occultism seamlessly blended with popular psychology and religious liberalism; it lent support to the women’s movement, with its periodicals frequently speaking out on women’s issues, becoming platforms for reform. Perhaps as has been the case in the new modernist studies, there is a need to speak of political, social, and cultural progressivism(s) in the plural. Only then can the plethora of issues, attitudes, and causes be fully comprehended in all that transpired or was hoped for in the culture of early modernism we call the Progressive Era.

Psychic Force, Science, and Magic

The pursuit of culture, perhaps the hallmark of the *fin-de-siècle* generation that wrestled with the complexities and imbalances of urban life, was a driving force of what Howard Mumford Jones has aptly termed the “age of energy,” with Chicago, in the words of David Burg, representing “both the spirit and embodiment of this Age of Energy.”⁶⁹ Energy was a central theme in early modernist discourse as well, with numerous authors fascinated with a number of new inventions during the 1890s that

⁶⁸ See, for example, *The Bibliography of Progressive Literature. A Descriptive Catalogue Comprising a Complete and Classified List of Works Relating to Science, Philosophy, Religion, Evolution, Sociology, Ethics, Psychology, Psychical Science, Thought Transference, Telepathy, Psychometry, Hypnotism, Mesmerism, Animal Magnetism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Occultism, Mysticism, Magic, Symbolism, Astrology, Palmistry, Chiromancy, Phrenology, Physiognomy, Metaphysics, Christian Science, Mind Cure, Massage, Hydropathy and Physical Culture* (New York: New Epoch Publishing Company, 1899). The *Bibliography* proclaimed itself “a book of reference invaluable to all who would follow [the] nineteenth century search for knowledge along novel lines, and its strivings after betterment, whether physical, mental, or spiritual.”

⁶⁹ David F. Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), 45; and Howard Mumford Jones, *The Age of Energy: Varieties of American Experience, 1865-1915* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971). Burg argues that the early 1890s, which is the halfway point of Jones’s periodization, “constituted both the apex and watershed” of the Age of Energy (2).

captivated the public imagination—discoveries such as wireless telegraphy and X-Rays which brought attention to various forms of “radiant energy” consisting of “electromagnetic waves vibrating at various frequencies in the luminiferous ether,” a “hypothetical medium credited with the transmission of such waves.”⁷⁰ This notion of vibratory energy, along with the acceptance in certain scientific circles that the atmosphere was surrounded by the medium of invisible ether lent support to occult claims that thoughts were forces and provided an explanatory base for how thoughts moved between and among people.

So-called *psychic force* was a constituent feature of this vibratory, ethereal energy and became a term used to describe the energy supposedly manifesting around medium-created phenomena witnessed at spiritualist séances. The phrase was coined by Edward William Cox (1801-1879), an English lawyer, publisher, legal author, and early psychical researcher, who, in an 1871 letter to William Crookes (1832-1919), the noted chemist, physicist, and spiritualist, called attention to “the existence of a new force, [which] in some unknown manner [is] connected with the human organization.”⁷¹ The term *psychic force* became widely used in psychical research to designate a broad range of occult occurrences, and Cox himself has been credited by Roger Luckhurst, whose history of telepathy remains to date the definitive study, with placing such phenomena “within the framework of scientific naturalism, and binding it into a network of reference to legitimate science.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Introduction,” in *From Energy to Information: Representations in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature* ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 2; and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Modernism’s Quest for Invisible Realities,” 135-139, in *Make It New*. For “the invisible forms and energies “which featured in formulations of early modernism, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Modernism and Science,” 383-403, in *Modernism* ed. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska, vol. 1, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2007).

⁷¹ William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: J. Burns, 1874), 33; and “Psychic Force,” 1041-1043, in *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology* ed. J. Gordon Melton 4th ed. vol. 2, (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996).

⁷² Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50.

Richard Noakes is another noted historian of nineteenth-century science who has shattered the notion that occultism and psychical research were pitted against a unified, orthodox science that resisted it at every turn. Indeed, as Noakes has related, physics was thoroughly implicated in occultism as leading English physicists eagerly and energetically immersed themselves in experiments and investigations into matters pertaining to psychical research.⁷³ It is now an accepted tenet that boundaries between scientific and non-scientific domains were fluid and that claims for occult phenomena could likely as fall within one domain as the other. As the historian of modernism and science, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, has explained, the attempt to draw absolute distinctions between science and occultism is futile for the *fin de siècle* as investigators working in disparate fields were “deeply engaged with [both] science and occultism and the rich interconnections between them.”⁷⁴ Occultism—as exemplified by spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research—was not just posing as science—it was science, even if it was being contested and denounced as fraudulent. Noakes has disputed the notion that occult sciences such as psychical research were somehow alone in their marginality and precarious position in the scientific world. He has argued that a number of emergent sciences were not securely based and that instead of a “supposedly homogeneous and monolithic thing called ‘science’... it is more accurate to speak of the sciences (plural).” As a result, psychical research,

⁷³ Richard Noakes, “The ‘World of the Infinitely Little’: Connecting Physical and Psychical Realities circa 1900,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (September 2008): 323-334. For “concepts of vibratory energy that circulated between physics and occultism,” see Anthony Enns and Shelley Trower, “Introduction,” 1-29, in *Vibratory Modernism* ed. Anthony Enns and Shelley Trower (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Robert Michael Brain, “The Pulse of Modernism: Experimental Physiology and Aesthetic Avant-Gardes circa 1900,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (September 2008): 393-417.

⁷⁴ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space,” in *From Energy to Information: Representations in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature* ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 138; Matthew Beaumont, “Influential Force: *Shafts* and the Diffusion of Knowledge at the *Fin de Siècle*,” *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 3 (2006): 1-19, esp. 10; and Roger Luckhurst, “Religion, Psychical Research, Spiritualism, and the Occult,” 429-444, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* ed. Peter Brooker, et al (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2010), 429-44.

resembles any number of “nineteenth-century sciences whose protagonists recognized and articulated the religious and social interpretations of their enterprises.”⁷⁵

Yet, for all its identification with science, and its aspiration to appear scientific, modern occultism was always associated with magic. This included both ancient and traditional forms of magical practice as well as its more modern version, which emphasized entertainment over effecting changes. The modern occult, always a blend of the spiritual, scientific, and magical, was both ordinary and extraordinary. The public considered occultism as magical as it did scientific. It was the rare individual in late-nineteenth century America who was not exposed or attuned to some kind of occult activity or printed material with magical content. Occult magic of an entertainment variety was pervasive: magic shows, stage hypnotism, and spectacular demonstrations of mind-reading, including breathtaking carriage rides through cities at high speeds by blindfolded drivers—captivated audiences of all ages.⁷⁶ Occultism could be a serious interest or just a pastime for Americans, regardless of gender or class. It ranged from the study of personal magnetism through a correspondence course to full-fledged membership in the American S.P.R. Magic, then, retains a place in the modern occult, even as it is transformed in modernity. In a recent, ground-breaking study of the magical imagination in nineteenth-century urban Britain, Karl Bell has demonstrated the prevalence of magical thinking as a means in which urban dwellers coped with a rapidly changing environment. While acknowledging a continuing

⁷⁵ Richard Noakes, “The Historiography of Psychical Research: Lessons from Histories of the Sciences,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 72.2, no. 891 (2008), 73, 76. Noakes particularly sees strong affinities between physics and psychical research at the *fin-de-siècle*. See also Giuliano Pancaldi, “The Physics of Imponderable Fluids,” 267-298, in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Physics* ed. Jed Z. Buchwald and Robert Fox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Crosbie Smith, “Engineering Energy: Constructing a New Physics for Victorian Britain,” 508-532, in *The Oxford Handbook*; Crosbie Smith, “Force, Energy, and Thermodynamics,” 289-310, in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 5, *The Modern Physical and Mathematical Sciences* ed. Mary Jo Nye (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and esp. Iwan Rhys Morus, *When Physics Became King* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁷⁶ Fred Nadis, “Of Horses, Planks, and Window Sleepers: Stage Hypnotism Meets Reform, 1836-1920,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 22 (2001): 223-245; Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Fred Nadis, *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, and Religion in America* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

effect of magical beliefs and traditions in ancient forms of divination such as astrology and witchcraft, Bell more broadly conceptualizes the magical imagination as “a fantastical mentality informed by supernatural beliefs, folkloric tropes, and popular superstition,” thus placing the modern magical imagination squarely within the domain of occultism, although he is concerned primarily with the magical mentalities of ordinary citizens rather than the elite occultism found in most works of occult studies, including my own.⁷⁷ In this model, an urban magical mentality has been reinvented in modernity as the “metropolitan transformations of magic into occultism.”⁷⁸

For the United States, Catherine Albanese has postulated that the metaphysical practices found in New Thought were always magical in nature. With the notion of correspondences (i.e., the Swedenborgian notion of a universal and timeless interrelationship between heaven and earth), the practice of magic becomes integral with New Thought adherents. But this metaphysical magic, Albanese notes, is ultimately located in the mind. Hence the magic of modern American occultism becomes “the *mental magic* of vision, reverie, meditation, and affirmative prayer.”⁷⁹ It is this spiritualized form of

⁷⁷ Karl Bell, *The Magical Imagination: Magic and Modernity in Urban England, 1780-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1. For surveys of magical thought and occultism, see Kurt Seligman, *Magic, Supernaturalism, and Religion [The History of Magic]* (New York: The Universal Library, 1968 [1948]); Gareth Knight, *Magic and the Western Mind: Ancient Knowledge and the Transformation of Consciousness* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1991); Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); and Owen Davies, *Magic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁸ Peter Pels, “Introduction: Magic and Modernity,” in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 32. On the persistence of magical thinking in modernity and its subsequent merging with occultism, see Allison P. Coudert, *Religion, Magic, and Science in Early Modern Europe and America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011); and David L. Martin, *Curious Visions of Modernity: Enchantment, Magic, and the Sacred* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011).

⁷⁹ Albanese, “Introduction,” 585; Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 6-7; and Lynne Hume and Nevill Drury, *The Varieties of Magical Experience: Indigenous, Medieval, and Modern Magic* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), esp. chapter 9, “Modern Trance and Meditative Magic.” Particularly valuable are three seminal studies, two quite which explore the inter-relationship of magic, modernism, and occultism at the *fin de siècle*—Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004); Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Leigh Wilson, *Modernism and Magic: Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

magic, used in conjunction with psychological techniques such as auto-suggestion and positive self-affirmation mantras that characterizes much of the magical imagination of late-nineteenth century American occultism.⁸⁰

Occultism and the Psychical Science Congress

While British historians point to figures such as William Crookes to argue that *fin-de-siècle* physics and psychical research bore strong resemblances, the life of American scientist Elliott Coues (1842-1899) reveals the fluid boundaries between science and occultism in America and the manner in which men and women of learning easily moved back and forth between them. Heterodoxy in religion (i.e., the numerous non-orthodox or even unorthodox faiths and practices) and particularly the prevalence of 'higher' or 'progressive' thought, then, stands as a prominent feature of *fin-de-siècle* public philosophy. It stood as a clear challenge to conventional thinking about the self, consciousness, death, the afterlife, even knowledge about what was real or unreal. The fear that heterodoxy might possibly displace orthodoxy in medicine, science, and religion gripped professional elites in these fields, and it was troublesome to them that figures such as Coues and William James would not only lend their authority to occult movements but actually participated in them. Occult knowledge simultaneously contributed to and alarmed established science and established religion. Particularly did the Psychical Science Congress threaten to de-stabilize the other sciences at the World's Congress Auxiliary at the same the Theosophical Congress at the World's Parliament of Religion threaten the cultural position of

⁸⁰ Wouter Hanegraaff has extended the argument that magic persisted into modernity through various adaptations, particularly by assimilating psychological techniques in "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," *Religion* 33 (October 2003): 357-380. For a revision of pejorative notions regarding the use of magical thinking in human affairs, see Carol Nemeroff, and Paul Rozin, "The Makings of the Magical Mind: The Nature and Function of Sympathetic Magical Thinking," 1-34, in *Imaging the Impossible: Magical, Scientific, and Religious Thinking in Children* ed. Karl S. Rosengren, Carl N. Johnson, and Paul L. Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

mainline Christian denominations with both its appealing message and great drawing ability. For occultists, science was more than what practiced in university laboratories; it was primarily a quest for the demonstration of discoveries revealing knowledge that underscored ultimate truths. Occultism, then, inherently implicated in the project of science—i.e., in uncovering and/or discovering Nature’s hidden knowledge—as much as it was involved with religion’s mission to provide solace and companionship with the Divine, provided a measure of faith through an understanding that God had not abandoned humankind in modernity. Any form of belief without evidence implies faith in the unconfirmed, unseen, or unknown; few, if any, among us are free from belief of this sort.⁸¹

Occultism, an ambitious system of esoteric knowledge and psycho-spiritual practices seeking status as a cultural science, presented itself as a public philosophy of great spiritual and scientific import. Modern progressive, public occultism—whether understood as Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, or Psychical Research—can be comprehended as both a ‘variety of religious experience’ in the Jamesian sense and as a developing branch of experimental psychology. In short, occultism was science, religion, and public philosophy, all rolled into one bundle of epistemic knowledge and practice, although admittedly seemingly distinct from a number of conventional religions and sciences. It posed a serious challenge to both laboratory science and traditional Christianity, with its heady and enticing views on humanity’s place in a surrounding but invisible universal reality. Occultism was seemingly poised to collapse the distinction between science and religion and absorb them into one knowledge system. That public occultism could flourish alongside powerful nineteenth-century cultural pillars such as institutional science and denominational religion, speaks volumes to a significantly wide dissatisfaction that various publics held for both, even accounting for the appreciation that most Americans had for conventional science and traditional religion. That Americans could simultaneously respect and disdain

⁸¹ “The urge towards mysticism, the occult and the supernatural is fundamental in human nature; to whatever degree of sophistication the individual may attain, he can seldom quite free himself from it.” D.H. Rawcliffe, *Illusions and Delusions of the Supernatural and the Occult* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 8.

the science and religion of their day speaks once again to the cultural tensions enveloping the experience of modern urban life, and which opened up space for competing systems of knowledge and practice that psychical science and metaphysical occultism soon filled. The new occultism offered an ‘experimental psychology’ available to all ages and socio-economic groups, ranging from parlor entertainments including the ‘willing game’, planchette, and Ouija board to more sophisticated investigations conducted by trained individuals around the spiritualist or hypnotic séance. Practical occultism, like its (almost twin) sister science—applied psychology, and from whom it became nearly impossible to distinguish—took a number of diverse social and cultural paths in the early-twentieth century that led it to alternative medicine, health, happiness, and success formulas, child-rearing techniques, and approaches to salesmanship and advertising. There was little in modern culture that occultism left untouched or did not seek to influence. As I will show in the Epilogue, occultism proffered advice for nearly everything—much of it marketed for public consumption in the vibrant new periodical culture in which editors and publishers of occult materials hoped to make a quick buck.

The widespread manifestation of public occultism in Chicago and other American cities at the turn-of-the-century can be regarded as an expression of cultural progressivism and social modernism. In examining the rich array of occult activity and pursuits in *fin-de-siècle* Chicago, I will be focusing on points of divergence and similarities among individuals and organizations which embraced public occultism in roughly the decade from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s as a means to further progressive and evolutionary notions for the development of a ‘higher self’ and the elevation of the human race. Chicago, which, along with London and Boston, was one of the urban, English-speaking pioneer centers for psychical research, offered a vibrant public occulture to anyone interested in such matters.⁸² The

⁸² The term *occulture* was first introduced by Christopher Partridge to describe a vast array of spiritual beliefs and practices drawn from various occult traditions. Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, vol. 1, (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 68-69. For brief discussions of Partridge’s use of the term, see Danielle Kirby, *Fantasy and Belief: Alternative Religions, Popular Narratives and Digital Cultures* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013), 15-16; and Kennet Granholm, *Dark*

Psychical Science Congress, held in the late summer of 1893, offered a week of occult attractions presented by American and European spiritualists and psychical researchers that drew thousands to the largest attendance rooms of the newly constructed Art Institute Building on Michigan Avenue. The public flocked to hear and see talks and performances by both American and world leaders in spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical science, while Chicagoans read daily accounts throughout the week of Congress activities through newspapers such as the *Tribune* and *Inter-Ocean*. The PSC mediated elite occultism and popular occultism, as it attracted the curious and the occult-inclined of the Fair-attending population. Occultism was confidently displaying its new, if tenuous status, as one of the age's most innovative and dynamic sciences. It had already achieved a certain status in the public mind—even at the same time it invited both skepticism and derision due to fraud, deception, and the outlandishness of some of its claims which seemed to be beyond common sense. How further it could advance to become a prominent cultural science of the twentieth century remained to be seen.

Occult notions not only co-existed alongside standard religious and scientific thought, but were frequently embedded within them while new scientific discoveries and technologies seemed on the verge of making aspects of occultism plausible, e.g. the x-ray or wireless telegraphy might well explain telepathic suggestion, subliminal consciousness, hypnosis, and healing at a distance. Viewed in this light, it does not seem so startling or surprising to us today that table-rapping and other spirit manifestations, generated by the mental processes of mediumship, could be regarded as equally 'scientific' as those phenomena and discoveries brought forward by the other sciences at the World's Congress Auxiliary. It seems quite plausible to insist that psychical research, along with electricity, astronomy, and pharmacy, be regarded as one of late-nineteenth century's progressive sciences.

Enlightenment: The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts of Contemporary Esoteric Magic (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2014), 26-27. See also Christopher Partridge, "Occulture is Ordinary," 115-133, in *Contemporary Esotericism* ed. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2013); Tessel M. Baudin, "Introduction: Occulture and Modern Art," *Aries* 13.1 (2013): 1-5; Christopher Partridge, "Occulture and Art: A Response," *Aries* 13.1 (2013): 131-140; and Christopher Partridge, "Introduction," 1-14, in *The Occult World* ed. Christopher Partridge (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).

The Psychological Science Congress at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition became an international platform for showcasing the latest trends and developments in modern occultism. Today, it has been all but forgotten. The Congress brought occult thought and practices to the forefront of what was "new" and "progressive" not only in American social and intellectual life, but across the world. It was the perfect microcosm of the World's Congress Auxiliary itself as the motto of the WCA—"Not Matter But Mind, Not Things But Men"—could well have stood as the motto of the Psychological Science Congress.⁸³ Promoters and participants of the Congress could hardly contain their enthusiasm over the prospects that the Congress offered for lifting the American Republic to heights it had never dreamed. But their grip on the mantle of science, as well as their challenge to conventional religion, was more tenuous than they imagined, and their hopes for millennial transformations were always in danger of being dashed.

In the chapters that follow I will be examining the cultural environment in which occultism flourished in the immediate years before the psychological congress as well as providing an in-depth look at the preparations and actual unfolding of the congress. The next chapter highlights an emerging psychological culture in Chicago as hypnotism, spiritualism, and theosophy develop strong roots, attracting considerable interest from all social classes. Chapter three discusses the Western Society for Psychological Research, Chicago's own independent group which flourished in the second half of the 1880s, and its struggles to maintain scientific respectability. Chapter Four delves into the preparations for the Psychological Science Congress, the formation of a local Committee for Arrangements, and the publicity and expectations generated through press releases and announcements of its chairman, Elliott Coues. Chapter Five highlights some of the presenters at the psychological congress as well some of the figures associated with the three-day Theosophical Congress held in conjunction with the World's Parliament of Religions. Chapter Six discusses two prominent women associated with the congress, Frances Willard

⁸³ The actual motto of the Psychological Science Congress was "Psychics and Physics—Two Sides of One Shield."

and Lilian Whiting, and considers the issue of race and the absence of African-Americans at the Columbian Exposition and the Psychical Science Congress. An epilogue explores how psychical science has been overdetermined in terms of its Anglo-American and European practices and places it alongside the cultural fascination with Arctic expeditions, speculation over life on Mars, and African-American voodoo/spiritualism. Furthermore, the epistemological links between psychical science, eugenics, and moral environmentalism are explored as well as the failure of psychical science to establish itself among the emerging social sciences of the late-nineteenth century.

As the discussion in this chapter has revealed, the subject I explore lies at the intersection of a number of burgeoning literatures from related disciplines that squarely locates occultism in the social contours of early modernism and progressivism. The remarkable richness of the literature presented and discussed in the above pages only enhances my project of situating a now-obscure Congress arranged by under-studied American proponents of spiritualism and psychical research hosted in a new and thriving modern metropolis which was the marvel of Western world for its management of growth and technological advances. Progressive occultism stood as important feature of an early modernism which both incorporated and reflected much of the advanced thought found in science, religion, and philosophy. Psychical science therefore, sought to gain the world's admiration by revealing and explaining Nature's most hidden secrets of the psyche and soul.

CHAPTER TWO: A CITY AFIRE WITH SPIRIT: PSYCHIC CULTURE IN 1880s CHICAGO—SPIRITUALISM, THEOSOPHY, MESMERISM, AND HYPNOTISM

Whether in *fin-de-siècle* London, St. Petersburg, Berlin, or Chicago, occultism permeated the consciousness of the middle- and upper-classes and helped shape their understanding of the world and the ways to penetrate and explore its mysteries.¹ Occultism, in a bewildering variety of forms, became a scientific and popular craze of the period, serving to meet a multitude of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional needs resulting from rapidly changing social and economic circumstances. Throughout the mid- and late-1880s occultism drew many Chicagoans from the business, religious, and professional worlds through its energy, optimism, vitality—and even its playfulness and theatricality, in its determination to come to grips with pressing questions of individual and social meaning. The interests and steps taken by leading citizens of the city to organize or join societies dedicated to spiritualism, theosophy, New Thought, and psychical research—the four most popular and influential varieties of nineteenth century Anglo-American progressive occultism—would be significant in establishing Chicago as a national occult center capable of hosting and organizing a Psychical Science Congress. In so doing, they wedded occultism to other ideas, means, and projects they envisioned for improving themselves and their surrounding worlds.

As Ruth Bordin wrote in her biography of Frances Willard, arguably America’s most respected and adored woman of the late-nineteenth century, Chicago in the 1880s “was the center of a new flowering of culture and reform that burst into full bloom in the 1890s.”² She could, for all practical

¹ For *fin-de-siècle* urban occultism, see Maria Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia,” 135-152, in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Corinna Treitel, “The Culture of Knowledge in the Metropolis of Science: Spiritualism and Liberalism in Fin-de-Siècle Berlin,” 127-154, in *Wissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit in Berlin* ed. Constantin Goschler (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000); and Charles Maurice Davies, *Mystic London; or, Phases of Occult Life in the Metropolis* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1875).

² Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard; A Biography* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 150.

purposes, have been talking about the flowering culture of elite and popular occultism. By the late 1880s occult subjects attracted such wide attention in Chicago, as it was throughout much of the nation, that some believed the Windy City would overtake Boston as the center of the country's occult activities. The Rev. Dr. David Swing, the popular liberal minister, wrote in the *Chicago Journal* that the westward trek of interest in the occult from Boston to Chicago had been underway for some time, with the result being that "there are places in Chicago in which the human mind can be taught to think and talk in the language of the most profound occultism," while the *Religio-Philosophical Journal [R-PJ]*, the city's widely regarded Spiritualist newspaper, remarked that Chicago "is not only the center of the American business world but the pivotal center of the psychical as well," and had now supplanted Boston as "the hub of the universe."³ When R. A. (Robert Allen) Campbell, St. Louis publisher and lecturer on occult subjects, visited Chicago for three months in 1887, he declared that Chicago's citizens were "full of life and vivacity," more so even than their counterparts in the East. "Women who take up fads [in Chicago]," Campbell stated, "do so with more earnestness and energy than even their sisters in classic Boston." One woman that Campbell said "reads hands very well" was Mrs. Helen S. Shedd, "long President of the Women's Club, Secretary of the Philosophical Society, and member of the Psychical Society."⁴ Two years later the *Inter Ocean* proclaimed that occultism was "booming in Chicago," and was about to be more pronounced with the impending visit of "the celebrated occultist and illuminati,"

³ David Swing, "The Obscure and the Occult," *Current Literature* 7 (June 1891), 168; "General Items" *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 48 (March 1, 1890), 5; and "Personal Right League" *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 47 (February 8, 1890), 2. For an indication of the intense interest in Chicago and throughout the nation during the late 1880s in matters pertaining to the occult, see "Love of the Occult. The Baser Superstitions of Former Ages and the Beliefs of Modern Times—The Faith Cure—Country Folks' Notions—Palmistry, Mesmerism, Phrenology," *Chicago Times* article reprinted in the *Bangor Whig & Courier*, March 17, 1887, 5; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, "The Psychical Wave," *Forum* 1 (June 1886), 377; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, "The Great Psychical Opportunity," *North American Review* 141 (September 1885): 251-266; and G. T., "Telepathic Hypnotism" *Christian Union* 35 (April 7, 1887), 7.

⁴ "The Occult in Chicago. A Palmist Experiments with the Leaders of Society." *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 20, 1887, 16. Mrs. Shedd died in 1894 and while there is no evidence of her involvement with the Psychical Science Congress, she may have been a corresponding member of the London S.P.R. or a member of the Chicago branch of the American Psychical Society. She was president of the Chicago Woman's Club from 1881-1883.

Dr. Joseph C. Street, of Boston. The paper interpreted this visit as proof that Chicago was keeping “abreast of the world in this line, and in all else of a mentally and morally progressive nature,” and announced that the “study of occultism in Chicago during the last year has been engaging the attention of some its most intelligent and industrious students,” with “new orders, organizations, branches, and groups...constantly being formed.”⁵ This chapter explores the occult activities in mid- to late-1880s Chicago concerning spiritualism, theosophy, and hypnotism, noting that while occultism retained strong ties to social reform and offered messages of hope, it simultaneously carried baggage of fraud, suspicion, and humbug.

Varieties of Chicago Spiritualism: Cora L. V. Richmond, John C. Bundy, and the Bangs Sisters

For three quarters of a century, from 1850 to about 1925, modern spiritualism engaged Americans (and Europeans) on individual and collective levels as perhaps no other nineteenth-century heterodox religion ever approached. As a result, it has attracted enormous attention from countless scholars of Anglo-American religion and culture.⁶ Both modern spiritualism, a radical new religion, and the woman’s rights movement, a radical feminist reform imperative, date their inception to events which unfolded in upstate New York in 1848. For spiritualism, the manifestations of rapping and knocking generated through Katie and Margaret Fox in Hydesdale mark the beginning of a widespread,

⁵ “Occult Sciences.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, February 3, 1889, 7. For coverage of Dr. Street’s presentations at Central Music Hall, see “Occult Sciences. Dr. J. C. Street Interviewed on Some Very Abstruse Questions.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, January 24, 1888, 2; “All About Your Astral Body. Taught by Dr. Street at Ten Dollars the Course.” *Chicago Tribune*, January 25, 1888, 3; and “Occult Science Unfolded. Dr. John C. Street, of Boston, Lectures at Kimball Hall on Spiritism.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, February 11, 1889, 2. Street was author of the occult manual *The Hidden Way Across the Threshold; or, The Mystery Which Hath Been Hidden for Ages and From Generations* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1887).

⁶ A small sampling of this considerable literature includes Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Brett E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); John B. Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004); and Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

transnational movement which lasted well into the twentieth century.⁷ The women's rights movement, a similar undertaking of international importance, heralds its formal inauguration with the Seneca Falls Convention. As historian Anne Braude has emphasized, the two movements would find themselves intimately connected as they grew in momentum throughout most of the country, particularly in the northern and western states. Spiritualism quickly evolved and morphed into a sophisticated philosophical system delineating levels of heavenly life while promoting social reform on earth. Knocking and rapping gave way, in the 1850s, to trance speaking with even more sensational performances of materialization through cabinet mediumship dominating spiritualistic manifestations of the 1870s and 1880s.⁸ Estimates of nineteenth-century Americans who were sympathetic or devoted to spiritualism have ranged from two to eleven million.⁹ What made spiritualism modern was the multiple functions it served in a rapidly changing and convulsive social order in which an individual's place and social grounding appeared fluid and unstable. Social agitation and cultural uncertainties abounded in mid- and late-nineteenth century America and spiritualism brought certainty and stability to those uncomfortable with the social and cultural convulsions occurring about them. As the three varieties of Chicago spiritualist activity I will examine attest, advocates of spiritualism professed to demonstrate

⁷ For the Fox sisters, see Earl Wesley Fornell, *The Unhappy Medium: Spiritualism and the Life of Margaret Fox* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964); Ernest Isaacs, "The Fox Sisters and American Spiritualism," 79-110, in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives* ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Katie and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: Harper/San Francisco, 2004); Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005); David Chapin, *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); and Nancy Rubin Stuart, "The Raps Heard Around the World," *American History* 40 (August 2005): 42-80.

⁸ Anne Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Cathy Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost: Spiritualism in the American Renaissance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David K. Nartonis, "The Rise of 19th-Century American Spiritualism, 1854-1873," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49.2 (2010): 361-373; and Kenneth D. Pimple, "Ghosts, Spirits and Scholars: The Origins of Modern Spiritualism," 75-89, in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural* ed. Barbara Walker (Logan, UT: Utah State Press, 1995).

⁹ The high number of devotees to Spiritualism, around eight to eleven million, can be found in Alfred Russel Wallace, *A Defence of Modern Spiritualism* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1874), 14.

scientific evidence of life after death, offered spiritual comfort and solace through formalized religious services, and provided, through mediumistic performance, a packaged blend of entertainment and therapeutic consolation which consumers found satisfying.¹⁰ Just as important, modern spiritualism, joined at the hip, as it were, with women's rights, became a vocal and energetic advocate of a host of reform movements, including abolitionism, prison reform, child advocacy, socialism, and a broad array of social equality initiatives which eventually found favor with the American public. Always a champion of the voiceless and powerless, modern American spiritualism is now recognized as a serious force in seeking and securing nineteenth-century social reform.¹¹

The first Spiritualist medium arrived in Chicago in 1849 and by the time of the Great Fire in October 1871, it was estimated that Chicago had roughly 10,000 residents who might call themselves Spiritualists, while by the mid-1880s, the number had grown to 30,000.¹² From August 9-14, 1864, the National Convention of Spiritualists gathered in Chicago. Recognized as the first national gathering of spiritualists in America, the convention chose Stevens S. Jones, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal [RP-J]* as president. One of the more interesting aspects of this Convention concerned pronouncements by Adaline Buffum, a Chicago spiritualist who edited a small short-lived newspaper *News from the Spirit World*, who declared that Chicago was "the chosen place as a central starting point, the center of that which is to encircle the whole earth." A similar perspective was expressed at the 1868

¹⁰ For an interesting perspective on spiritualism's modern characteristics which emphasized new ways of seeing, see Sheri Weinstein, "Technologies of Vision: Spiritualism and Science in Nineteenth-Century America," 124-140, in *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination* ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

¹¹ Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 12-17; Ramsay Cook, "Spiritualism, Science of the Earthly Paradise," *Canadian Historical Review* 65 (March 1984): 4-27; and Sally Morita, "Unseen (and Unappreciated) Matters: Understanding the Reformative Nature of 19th-Century Spiritualism," *American Studies* 40 (Fall 1999): 99-125.

¹² A. T. Andreas, *History of Chicago, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, vol. 3, (Chicago: The A. T. Andreas Co., 1886), 831.

“Celestial Convention on the Planet Earth” which sought to establish a spiritual kingdom in Chicago under the domain of women, a notion openly mocked in the papers.¹³

Chicago’s predilection for establishing spiritual kingdoms was marked. One journalist writing for the London-based *Spiritual Magazine* in 1867, under the initials A. L., was struck by the strangeness of schemes for utopian spiritualism in Chicago. This writer, possibly Andrew Lang (1844-1912),¹⁴ related his impressions of a certain Professor C. P—G. Washington and the first issue of a spiritualist magazine, *A New Bible*, edited by Washington, which prophesied a series of calamities leading to a new, universal system of government to be established throughout the world, to be led by a modern successor to Christ. While not explicitly claiming to be that successor, but clearly hoping that others would recognize him as such, Professor Washington was set to rule the earth with an imposing apostolic circle of twelve male and thirteen female spiritualist mediums. “Think of it!” wrote Lang, “An independent development of sacerdotalism in the far West—a papacy in Chicago!....of all places in the world!...Chicago, the capital of the great North West, a centre of the most vigorous life of the United States.” Fortunately for Chicago, Lang determined that its “general life is too healthy and sound to be affected more than infinitesimally by delusions.”¹⁵

¹³ For a discussion of the proceedings of 1864 National Spiritualist Convention and the rather curious “Celestial Convention on the Planet Earth” held in Chicago in 1868, see John Benedict Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear; Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 264-265; and “Woman’s Kingdom. Formation of a New Empire to be Governed by Females.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 1868, 4.

¹⁴ While the determination that the author’s identity is Andrew Lang appears credible, the evidence is more circumstantial than certain. Lang, an acclaimed Victorian and Edwardian poet, novelist, journalist, anthropologist, and psychical researcher, was writing for *St. Leonard’s Magazine* as early as 1863 and was well-known for spiritualist proclivities throughout his life. “Mr. Andrew Lang,” *Literature* [London] 9 (November 23, 1901): 484-487. I have been unable to determine whether he visited Chicago in the late 1860s.

¹⁵ A. L., “Notes on Spiritualism and Spiritualists in the United States, in 1866. No. III.” *Spiritual Magazine* [London] 2 (June 1867), 264. WorldCat has an entry for a serial publication *A New Bible, for the Church of the New-Born*, published in Chicago by Prof. C. P-G. Washington. Only one issue, vol. 1, no. 1, October 1866, is known to have been issued.

Cora L. V. Richmond: Church Spiritualist and Trance-Speaker

The most prominent Spiritualist leader of the city, Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond (1840-1923), pastor of the First Spiritualist Society (or Church of the Soul) located at Hooley's Theater, was widely recognized as the nation's foremost inspirational trance lecturer.¹⁶ Born Cora Lodencia Veronica Scott in the burned-over district of upstate New York, her parents were followers of a utopian community called Hopedale, founded by Adin Ballou. Soon after her family moved to rural Wisconsin in 1851 in order to establish a similar type of community, young Cora displayed an ability to speak and write messages while in a trance state and she was soon performing in the surrounding area of Waterloo, Wisconsin. After the death of her father who had been managing her platform appearances, she and her mother moved to Buffalo, New York in 1854 where, by the age of fifteen, she was becoming well-known as one of the nation's foremost trance lecturers. In 1856 she married Dr. Benjamin Hatch, a magnetic healer nearly forty years older than she, and he soon assumed her father's previous role as manager. Cora Hatch then began an extensive performance tour of major East Coast cities but in 1858 she sued for divorce, citing financial mismanagement and sexual improprieties as the basis for the suit. It was during this period that a young Henry James attended one of her performances in Boston and it is now widely accepted that James based his character Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians* (1888) on young Cora Hatch.¹⁷

¹⁶ Willy Reichel, *An Occultist's Travels* (New York: R. F. Fenno and Co., 1908), 163. Her world-wide reputation is mentioned in A. B. Richmond, *What I Saw at Cassadaga Lake: A Review of the Seybert Commissioners' Report*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1888), 148. According to one historian, Richmond "in the 1880s was probably the movement's most celebrated figure." Joseph Jablonski, "Spirit's Progress: Radical Mediums in the Haymarket Era," in *Haymarket Scrapbook* ed. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1986), 146.

¹⁷ Howard Kerr, *Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1972), chapter eight "'The Young Prophetess': Memories of Spiritualism and Intimations of Occult Consciousness in Henry James's *The Bostonians*," esp. 197-203; and Martha Banta, *Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972.)

Cora Scott would re-marry three more times, losing her next husband Colonel Nathan W. Davis and their one-year-old daughter to yellow fever in New Orleans, and divorcing her third husband, Colonel Samuel F. Tappan, in 1876, just prior to her fourth marriage to William Richmond, a prominent member of the First Society of Spiritualists in Chicago, where she was now pastor and would remain so for the next twenty years. Always politically active and an outright defender of “the marginalized or voiceless,” Mrs. Richmond was the leader of a delegation of the Amnesty Association that met with Governor Richard J. Oglesby in 1887 to plead for the lives of the Haymarket anarchists. Her words for mercy were “regarded as impressive by all who heard them,” leaving “the eyes of her auditors tear-stained.”¹⁸ In 1893, she delivered a paper on spiritualism before the World’s Parliament of Religions, the same year she helped found the National Spiritualist Association in Chicago, being elected its first vice-president.¹⁹ Harrison D. Barrett, a fellow Spiritualist and the first president of the National Spiritualist Association, in his glowing biography of Richmond, declared that through her leadership of the First Spiritualist Church, “Chicago became the center...of...leaders in spirit life, so that a healing influence could radiate...to bless the nations of the earth with its power. It has done so, and the effect of [her] Chicago work can never be fully estimated or appreciated.”²⁰ An announcement for Sunday

¹⁸ Jablonski, “Spirit’s Progress,” 146. Most historians agree the most effective appeal given to Gov. Oglesby on behalf of the condemned anarchists was that of Samuel Gompers. Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 373.

¹⁹ Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists and Mesmerists in Performance* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., 2009), 126. The performance perspective of spiritualist platform speakers is discussed in Kelly S. Taylor, “Exploiting the Medium: Anna Cora Mowatt’s Creation of Self Through Performance,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 16 (October 1996): 321-335. See also R. Laurence Moore, “The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalization in Victorian America,” 145-168, in *Women’s Experience in America: An Historical Anthology* ed. Esther Katz and Anita Rapone (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980).

²⁰ *Life Work of Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond*, comp. and ed. Harrison D. Barrett (Washington, DC: National Spiritualists Association, 1895), 437. A claim for Chicago being the strongest urban center for Spiritualism in the United States is made in Bret E. Carroll, “The Context of Cassadaga: A Historical Overview of American Spiritualism,” in *Cassadaga: The South’s Oldest Spiritualist Community* ed. John J. Guthrie, Jr., Phillip Charles Lucas, and Gary Monroe (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 21.

church services in 1888 in the *Tribune* indicates a vibrant Spiritualist First Day activity throughout the city. Several listings under “Spiritualist,” include notices for the Young People’s Progressive Society, the People’s Spiritual Society, the Spiritualists Central Union, the United Society of Spiritualists, the Chicago Association of Universal, Radical, Progressive Spiritualists and Mediums’ Society, along with lectures by Cora Richmond and a Dr. J. H. Warn.²¹

Mrs. Richmond was consistently recognized by contemporaries as one of the foremost inspirational, spiritualist lecturers of the nineteenth century. A letter writer to the *Tribune* signing his name Ernest emphatically declared “As a trance-speaker she has no equal, to my knowledge, in Christendom.”²² On most occasions during her public appearances, audience members would select a topic for her and she would then deliver impromptu poems and lectures dictated from a spirit guide while in a trance. Her two most frequent guides were Adin Augustus Ballou, son of Hopedale community founder Adin Ballou, and a young Native American woman named Ouina. She did, however, have skeptics regarding the genuineness of her performances, including John Curtis Bundy, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. Mrs. Richmond, like many other Spiritualists, had always made a habit of defending other Spiritualists, even those exposed by Bundy’s paper as practicing fraudulent mediumship. Annoyed by her defense of any and all Spiritualists in the city, Bundy ceased publishing her work and openly criticized her. She then drifted more to the offices of the *Progressive Thinker*, another Chicago spiritualist newspaper edited by J. R. Francis that began publishing in 1889. It was here in the offices of the *Progressive Thinker* where, in small group meetings with fellow believers and like-minded liberal intellectuals, she outlined theoretical aspects of Spiritualism which dealt on spiritual and

²¹ “Sunday Church Services,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1888, 3.

²² “Spiritualism, Growth, and Progress of the First Society.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 30, 1877, 11. Frank Podmore, active in the London Society for Psychical Research, considered Richmond the most outstanding platform trance speaker he had ever witnessed. Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism; A History and A Criticism*, vol. 1, (London: Methuen and Co., 1902), 134-137.

soul development, theorizing the “progressive stages of the soul’s fulfillment.” These “soul teachings,” according to what is currently the best mini-biography available on Richmond, irritated scientific Spiritualists such as Bundy, but provided her followers which a much needed theological grounding that “charged their lives with meaning and made Spiritualism more acceptable by presenting it in the context of a historically grounded narrative of human progress.”²³ In the fall of 1897 Mrs. Richmond, who had transformed the First Society of Spiritualists into the Church of the Soul, left Chicago to become pastor of a similar Spiritualist church in Washington, D.C. She returned to Chicago several years later and died in her home in 1923.²⁴

John C. Bundy: Scientific Spiritualist, Editor, and Reformer

The idea of planning for arrangements of a Psychological Science Congress originated with Colonel John Curtis Bundy (1841-1892), editor of the eight-page weekly *Religio-Philosophical Journal [R-PJ]*, the leading voice in the United States for what was called ‘rational spiritualism’. The *Journal* was founded in 1865 by his father-in-law Stevens Sanborn Jones (1813-1877), who was murdered on March 15, 1877 by William C. Pike, a deranged phrenologist who entered the offices of the *R-PJ* and shot Jones twice in the head, killing him instantly.²⁵ Upon the death of father-in-law, Bundy, who had been assistant editor,

²³ Hester L. Furey, “Cora Linn Victoria Scott Hatch Daniels Tappan,” in *Women Building Chicago, 1790-1990: A Biographical Dictionary* ed. Rima Lunin Schultz and Adele Hast (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 745. No full-scale biography of Cora Richmond has yet appeared. The most reliable mini-biography of her is the Furey entry cited above. Mrs. Richmond published, in the late 1880s, a number of works emphasizing soul teachings along Spiritualist lines, including *Voices from Life’s Thither Side: Is Materialization True? With Eleven Other Lectures of Great Interest Given in Chicago, Ill.* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1885); *Spiritual Sermons* (Chicago: The Spiritual Publishing Co., 1887); *The Soul, Its Nature, Relations, and Expressions in Human Embodiments* (Chicago: Spiritual Publishing Co., 1887); and *Psychopathy: or, Spirit Healing: A Series of Lessons on the Relations of the Spirit to its Own Organism, and the Interrelation of Human Beings with Reference to Health, Disease, and Healing* (Rogers Park, IL: William Richmond, 1890).

²⁴ “Accepts Call to Washington. Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond Will Preach Her Farewell Sermon in Chicago Tomorrow.” *Chicago Tribune*, September 4, 1897, 8; and “Spiritualist’s New Leader. Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond to Take Charge of Local Association.” *Washington Post*, October 3, 1897, 4.

²⁵ Pike was declared insane at his trial and spent the rest of his life in an asylum. One of the two officiating ministers at the funeral of S. S. Jones was Cora Richmond. Paul J. Gaunt, “*Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 1865-

became manager and senior editor of the journal and its publishing house. Regarded as “the chief organ of Spiritualists devoted to modern Spiritualism and general reform” in the United States, the paper, by 1875, boasted a circulation of 25,000 and counted among its supports some of the Chicago’s leading citizenry. The *R-PJ* reflected the views of the “scientific and educated wing of Spiritualists,” and generously supported nearly “any scheme adapted to the amelioration of man.”²⁶

Bundy had enlisted in the army at the outbreak of the Civil War whereupon Gov. Richard Yates commissioned him Second Lieutenant of an Illinois cavalry company. In 1862 he married Mary E. Jones of St. Charles and returned to duty as a staff officer under General S. R. Curtis, serving during the march through Arkansas. During this campaign he was promoted to Lt. Colonel of the First Arkansas Infantry, becoming one of the youngest field officers in the Union Army. In 1863, with his health failing, Bundy was discharged from service, receiving a commendation from Gov. Yates. Three years later, he joined his father-in-law in Chicago at the offices of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. He became a member of the London S.P.R. and in the final years of his life had developed a close working relationship with Richard Hodgson, Secretary of the American branch of the S.P.R, in investigating psychical and occult phenomena.

By the early 1880s Bundy had acquired a national and even international reputation as a fierce advocate for bringing legal action against mediums and their managers whenever it could be determined they had engaged in fraudulent practices. His practice was to summon them to his editorial office where he would confront them with evidence of fraud and attempt to persuade them to no

1905,” *Psypioneer* 3 (February 2007): 34-42; “Shocking Murder,” *American Spiritual Magazine* 3 (May 1877): 143-144; and Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles; or, Spirits and Their Work in Every Country of the Earth. A Complete Historical Compendium of the Great Movement Known as “Modern Spiritualism”* (Manchester, UK: William Britten, 1883), 447-448.

²⁶ Andreas, *History of Chicago*, 831. The chief rival to the *R-P J* as the nation’s foremost spiritualist newspaper, the *Banner of Light*, was published in Boston. For the range of spiritualist magazines and newspapers in the United States, see Anne Braude, “News from the Spirit World: A Checklist of American Spiritualist Periodicals, 1847-1900,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 99 (1989): 399-462.

longer engage in such practices. If they refused, he then pursued the matter in the courts. Bundy's efforts to prosecute mediums suspected of fraud, though not always successful, made him and his journal a credible voice for advocating psychical research in the United States and for proposing an international psychical science congress. Indeed John C. Bundy remains one of the more overlooked and forgotten figures in the history of the development of psychical research in America. His death in August 1892 prevented him from seeing to completion his plans for the Congress. Bundy's death was not unexpected, as he had been seriously ill for weeks. When he returned from the National Editorial Convention held in San Francisco in May, where he had been sent as a delegate from the Chicago Press Club, he was far from well. Two weeks later he suffered an attack of pleurisy and his condition steadily worsened, passing away in the company of his wife Mary and daughter Gertrude. Considered "one of the clearest headed, coolest, and most intelligent men of his time," his death was regarded as "a great loss to psychic research in America."²⁷

As Sara A. Underwood, family friend and fellow Spiritualist wrote in the *R-PJ* where her husband B. F. [Benjamin Franklin] Underwood was assistant editor, arrangements for John Bundy's funeral was carried out by Mrs. Bundy "in beautiful harmony with the higher spiritual philosophy in which they both fully believed." Spurning the traditional mourning rites as practiced in the nineteenth century, emblems such as "crape at the door," were abandoned and instead "a beautiful spray of white flowers held together by knots of ribbon spoke of the departure of the soul to spheres of purer life and light." Mourning, for spiritualists, was not generally expressed in terms of deep grief and sorrow but rather accepted and even celebrated as the "natural evolution of a soul in one of the phases of progress

²⁷ "A Scientific Spiritualist." *Arizona Republican*, September 15, 1892, 2; and "John C. Bundy Dead. He Passed Peacefully Away Yesterday Morning." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 7, 1892, 15. Similar articles also appeared in *Waterloo [IA] Courier*, August 25, 1892, 1; and *Jackson [MI] Citizen*, August 30, 1892, 3. The *L.A. Times* called Bundy "a man of international reputation among spiritualists and occultists." "Obituary. Death of an Editor." *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1892, 1. One Wisconsin paper noted that Bundy had been "identified with the business and intellectual interests of Chicago for many years and has left his mark in the world of thought." "Col. Bundy Dead. Close of the Career of a Well-Known Chicago Journalist." *Waukesha Freeman*, August 11, 1892, 2.

toward higher planes of existence.” Only a few close and personal friends, along with representatives of the leading newspapers and Press Club of Chicago attended the services at his home on the morning of August 8, 1892.²⁸ B. F. Underwood delivered the address, prefacing it with a reading of a poem by the spiritualist Elizabeth Stewart Phelps entitled “Afterwards.” Pallbearers were selected from the Chicago Press Club and close friends at the service included Lyman J. Gage, the Underwood’s, Mrs. H. S. Holden, and Mrs. Antoinette Van Hosen Wakeman, all of whom, along with Mary Bundy, expressed a strong interest in spiritualism and the occult and were to play major roles at the Psychological Science Congress.²⁹

Considering his ongoing assaults on the fraudulent practices of materializing mediums, there was a belief in spiritualist circles that Bundy did not subscribe to spirit materializations although this has been contraindicated by Maud Lord-Drake, a well-known medium and favorite of Bundy’s. Mrs. Lord-Drake, in her 1904 book, *Psychic Light*, relates Col. Bundy describing what transpired at a private séance held at the mansion of Chicago theater owner and play manager James H. McVicker, a fellow spiritualist and psychical researcher. Bundy describes how he witnessed the appearance of “a peculiar light...different in color from any phosphorescent light I ever saw.” Suddenly, there appeared what to Bundy was the face of his young, deceased son “looking as natural as in life....The lips moved and I distinctly heard the words, ‘see me papa, see me papa’.” The image lasted only briefly but Bundy was convinced the appearance and voice of his son was real. Throughout his life, Col. Bundy remained a

²⁸ Underwood quotations in “John C. Bundy,” in Julia Schlesinger, *Workers in the Vineyard; A Review of the Progress of Spiritualism, Biographical Sketches, Lectures, Essays and Poems* (San Francisco: Carrier Dove Press, 1896), 222. On nineteenth century mourning and grieving practices, see Barbara Dodd Hillerman, “Chrysalis of Gloom: Nineteenth Century American Mourning Costume,” 91-106, in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America* ed. Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong (Stony Brook, NY: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980); Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000); and Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007).

²⁹ “Col. Bundy Laid to Rest. Simple Rites at the Funeral of the Late Editor and Spiritualist.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1892, 3; and “Death of Col. Bundy. The Spiritualist and Editor Breathes His Last.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 7, 1892, 10.

staunch supporter of Mrs. Lord's, firmly asserting her séance manifestations were genuine and recommending her to friends and associates.³⁰

Bangs Sisters: The "Softest Snap in this City"

Elizabeth S. (Lizzie) Bangs (1859-1922) and May Eunice Bangs (b. 1864), known as the Bangs sisters, enjoyed an extraordinary career from the early 1870s right up to the year of Lizzie's death as mediums of materialization, slate-writing, and automatic art—the latter in which, through departed spirits, they produced materialized portraits in full color. During the 1880s the Bangs sisters were the best known practicing mediums in Chicago and in the spring of 1888 they created a sensation when a prominent photographer, Henry Jestram, went insane after numerous visits to their home séances and shortly afterwards found themselves arrested for fraud and deceptive practices. The Bangs family arrived in Chicago in 1861 from Atchison Kansas where Edward Bangs, the girls' father, was a tinsmith and stove repairman. Their mother, Meroe Bangs, had been a medium herself and recruited the two girls into spiritualistic performance.³¹ By the early 1870s, the sisters could perform a variety of séance effects, as described in "An Evening with the Bangs Children" by Stevens S. Jones in the *R-P J* for August 3, 1872. In his account of the girls' mediumistic skills, Jones described "the wonderful physical manifestations of departed spirits in the presence of the Bangs children" including the playing of musical instruments by spirit hands in a fully lighted room. Jones further noted that a large number of Chicago residents had visited the home of "this wonderful family," witnessing "spontaneous demonstrations" of spiritual manifestations "far more wonderful" than could be obtained through spirit circles. Such were

³⁰ Maud Lord-Drake, *Psychic Light: The Continuity of Law and Life* (Kansas City: The Frank T. Riley Publishing Co., 1904), 393-395. John and Mary Bundy's only son, George, died at the age of seven after being struck by a baseball while watching a group of boys playing in the street.

³¹ For background on the Bangs sisters, see Raymond Buckland, *The Spirit Book: The Encyclopedia of Clairvoyance, Channeling, and Spirit Communication* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2006), 30-31; and Nancy Fodor, *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* (New York: University Books, 1966), 27-28.

the advantages, Jones declared, of having “the privilege of visiting Mediumistic persons in their own homes.”³²

In late December 1887 a West Side spiritualist association took out a four-month lease for Sundays at the Princess Opera House at 500 W. Madison Street where they would feature various mediums for afternoon and evening public performances of spiritualist phenomena including slate-writing and materializations. The featured attraction for the first performance on Christmas Day was the Bangs sisters who provided slate-writing demonstrations and the *Tribune* reported that a large audience filled the Opera House that Sunday afternoon. The same reporter attended next Wednesday evening’s materializing performance at the residence of the two sisters where the girls’ father greeted customers and the mother collected one dollar from each guest. (Allowing for inflation admission to the séance in today’s dollars would be approx. \$25.50.) Although weather conditions had reduced outdoor traffic, the girls still took in thirteen dollars for this Wednesday night and the reporter estimated that the sisters were earning from \$100 to \$500 a week for their shows. During that evening’s performance, more than a dozen spirit materializations emerged from the cabinet to delight and entertain the audience and Mrs. Bangs told the audience that May—the daughter inside the cabinet—was “the most powerful medium that ever lived” with spirits fighting over her for a chance to become materialized. When the show ended and the gas lights were turned up, the cabinet opened and May Bangs, wrote the *Tribune* reporter, “stepped out smiling and shook hands all around, professing to know nothing of what had transpired during her imprisonment in the cabinet. Altogether, it was the shallowest and cheapest fake imaginable. It seems there is absolutely no limit to human credulity. The Bangs family has the softest snap in this city.”³³

³² Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, 539-541.

³³ “A Jolly Lot of Spirits. Those Materialized at a West Side Séance.” *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1888, 17. One British observer writing about spiritualism in America was dismayed over the preoccupation with money, noting

One of the many west-side Chicagoans who witnessed a Bangs Sisters performance in January 1888 at the Princess Opera House, becoming in the process convinced of the truths of Spiritualism, was Henry Jestram, a wealthy and well-known German photographer living on the West Side. Emigrating from Berlin to Chicago in 1882, Jestram and his wife opened a successful photography gallery that allowed him to make substantial real estate investments. While in Berlin he attended a number of exhibitions given by mesmerists and became so interested in mesmerism that he soon claimed to have mastered the science, and proceeded to give his own exhibitions displaying his mesmeric skills. Jestram then began regularly attending spiritualist performances at the sisters' home at 22 ½ Walnut Street, "joining enthusiastically in all the spiritual manifestations." In February he asked to be placed in communication with August Spies, one the anarchists hanged for the Haymarket Square bombing, and the Bangs sisters granted his request. The 'spirit' of August Spies promptly sent a note via slate-writing informing Jestram that he was safe and content in the afterlife. This spirit message greatly affected Jestram, who exclaimed that he recognized Spies' handwriting and that his spirit must now be with them. Taking the slate home, he photographed it in his studio and distributed copies to his friends and associates. Jestram then wrote a letter to the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the organ of the anarchists, in which he proclaimed spiritualism to be scientific truth and vouched for the authenticity of the Spies message. The paper ridiculed his letter in a rejoinder and he replied in a similar strain. By this time, Jestram and his wife were now hosting séances in their home, with both acting as mediums for an audience composed of neighbors and friends. At these séances, Jestram displayed his mesmeric powers, promising to cure his friends of whatever ailed them. Spiritualism now seemed to become an obsession and at a séance at

that as a business, it was "largely mixed up with *dollars* and fraud.....In America everything is almost of necessity associated with dollars, and in public there is continually a strange admixture of earnestness and what strikes an English visitor as irreverence—nowhere more apparent perhaps than in connection with Spiritualism." Morrell Theobald, "Spiritualism Abroad, No. 2." *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult and Mystical Research* [London] 9 (August 19, 1889): 379.

the home of the Bangs sisters in March, 'George,' his favorite whiskered spirit, told him a fire would break out in a few days at one of his rental properties on the corner of Ashland Avenue and Thirteenth Street, and that a tenant would perish in the blaze. Frantic and fearing a disaster, Jestram fled the mediums' home and aroused his tenant, insisting that he must leave the building as a fire was imminent. The tenant, frightened by Jestram's excited manner, was nonetheless relieved when no fire broke out. The next evening at the Bangs home, this same spirit told Jestram that his brother-in-law, a painter in Berlin, would fall from a scaffold that day and die. When a cable to Berlin was answered stating his brother-in-law was fine, he became so agitated that he withdrew funds from his bank and disappeared from home. His alarmed wife notified police that she believed he was bound for Germany and feared he was not in his right mind, as he was continually wandering about "in an aimless sort of way, drawing signs in the air and talking with 'George.'" He was found later that night in a meat market on S. Water Street, delirious and with no clothes, slate in hand conversing with the spirit he called 'George.' Police were called and he was sent to the Detention Hospital for the Insane.³⁴ The Bangs Sisters-Jestram affair was Chicago's own version of a similar spiritualist sensation underway at the same time in New York City, the notorious Marsh-Diss Debar spirit picture scandal.³⁵

The episode with Henry Jestram now hastened what John Bundy and a rival spiritualist of the two mediums hoped to accomplish, arresting and prosecuting the Bangs sisters for scamming money under false pretenses while running a show without a license. A séance at their home, appropriately on April Fool's Day in 1888, just one week after Jestram's misfortune, provided a window of opportunity.

³⁴ "Henry Jestram Crazed. A Wealthy Blue Island Avenue Photographer's Misfortune." *Chicago Tribune*, March 24, 1888, 1; Henry Jestram Goes with Friends." *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1888, 6; "Jestram Gets Violent Again." *Chicago Tribune*, March 26, 1888, 8; and "The Bangs Sisters. The Two Bouncing Mediums of the City of Chicago." *Milwaukee Journal*, April 17, 1888, 1.

³⁵ The public display of spirit paintings by noted New York attorney Luther R. Marsh manifested, he claimed, through the mediumship of Madame Diss Debar and her subsequent trial for fraud created a sensation throughout New York City in the spring of 1888. The story of the Marsh-Diss Debar affair is told in delightful verse by Edmund Richardson, "Nothing's Lost Forever," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 20 (Fall 2012): 19-48. See also Kerry Segrave, *Women Swindlers in America, 1860-1920* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., 2007), 20-34.

Two detectives and a West Side spiritualist, jealous of the sisters' success, planted themselves in the front rows of an audience of about thirty paying customers. With May Bangs inside the cabinet and Lizzie playing the hand organ, spirit faces soon appeared from the cabinet as audience members proceeded to identify them as departed relatives. Suddenly, the rival spiritualist, D. F. Trefry of Englewood, rushed the cabinet, announcing "Sweet spirit, we have a warrant," and called for assistance from the detectives who promptly opened the cabinet, grabbing May Bangs, costumed as a departed spirit. When Lizzie attempted to free her sister and sympathetic members of the audience tried to rescue the mediums, the detectives drew their revolvers, holding them at bay. In the meantime, a roll of gauze or batting, used to make wigs and beards inside the cabinet, had fallen to the floor and the sisters' mother picked it up and ran. A detective pursued her and found her hiding behind a curtain. Detectives also discovered a satchel filled with three sets of whiskers of different colors, five wigs, mustaches and similar paraphernalia of the variety used by actors. They also found that the cabinet contained two compartments with a side entrance that allowed the medium behind the curtain to change costumes.³⁶ The two sisters, along with the cabinet and satchel full of wigs were carted to the Des Plaines Street police station before a crowd of about 150 delighted people gathered on the sidewalk, happy to be rid of their spiritualist neighbors.³⁷

³⁶ Spirit cabinets were considered essential in providing mediums with privacy and security in order to focus on summoning spirit bodies. The cabinets reached their peak of popularity in the 1880s. An article in the *Tribune* offered (tongue-in-cheek) a spirit cabinet for sale, equipped with a secret drawer that "nobody can find—police nor nobody else." Its purchase price of just \$100 would provide "a dandy entertainment that will hold an audience spellbound for an entire séance [and] lay the Bangs sisters out cold, every time." "A Chance for a Medium. Here's a 'Fake' Cabinet All Ready for Use." *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1888, 11. A recent article discussing such cabinets is Elizabeth Lowry, "Gendered Haunts: The Rhetorical and Material Culture of the Late Nineteenth-Century Spirit Cabinet," *Aries* 12.2 (2012): 221-235.

³⁷ "Caught Spirits Napping. The Bangs Sisters, Lizzie and May, Arrested at Their Home Last Night." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, April 2, 1888, 2; and "The Bangs Sisters. A Pair of Handsome Spiritualistic Frauds Arrested in Chicago." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 2, 1888, 8. The last article appeared as "Broke Up the Ghost Show. Unfeeling Detectives Grab a Spook During a Spiritualistic Séance in Chicago." *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 3, 1888, 2; "Bogus Spiritualists Exposed. The Lights Turned Up and the Spook Seized and Arrested." *Washington Post*, April 3, 1888, 4;

The tale of the Bangs sisters and their tribulations in the spring of 1888 is largely a story of a war within spiritualism itself as the raid on their residence was prompted primarily by a rival spiritualist, jealous of their success, and John Bundy, who was determined to rid spiritualism of its tainted elements. Col. Bundy, in the *R-P J*, could hardly contain his satisfaction in the apprehension of the sisters. Observing that on Sunday, April 1, while several spiritualist societies celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the birth of modern spiritualism (the Fox sisters first manifestations of spirit rappings occurred on March 31, 1848) with “the ringing of church bells and organs pealing forth joyful anthems and trained voices filling the air with triumphant strains in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus,” the Bangs women, Bundy angrily complained, “were busily engaged in the cold-blooded, damnable, unutterably vile business of running a bogus materialization show. With a music box making noise enough to drown all other sounds and Mrs. Bangs ever on alert with her cracked voice to fill up any hiatus of the machine music, the daughters went through the sickening swindle with all the coolness of well-trained performers.”³⁸

In an interview with the *Chicago Herald* Bundy related his long experience with the Bangs sisters, first witnessing a performance at their home at the behest of Lizzie’s husband. After sitting in on several séances, performed in total darkness, the *R-P J* editor went away unconvinced and concluded there was no scientific value in continuing his investigations as it could not be determined whether the two sisters, or spirits, were producing the materializations. But around 1887 the Bangs sisters began to receive considerable public attention for their materialization séances, even procuring a new novelty cabinet seized during the April 1888 raid that had been a gift to them from Stephen Martin, of Case & Martin pie bakers, a fellow Spiritualist who appreciated what he had experienced at their séances. The

and “Captured a Ghost: Chicago Detectives Make an Interesting Capture.” *Marshfield [WI] Times*, April 13, 1888, 2. See also “Sham Spooks Shown Up. The Bangs Sisters Now in Limbo.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 7, 1888, 15.

³⁸ John C. Bundy, “The Bangs Sisters Exposed,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, April 7, 1888 at “The Bangs Fall from Grace,” <http://www.spirithistory.com/bangs2.html>.

sisters' increasing prominence, credited by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with conducting "the leading spiritualistic establishment in Chicago," prompted Bundy to once again reach out to the family, asking if they would sit for a series of experimental séances with only a company of mostly Spiritualists and no one who would be objectionable to them. After conducting six séances with the sisters, Bundy determined that the spiritual manifestations were simply the result of trickery and deception. Bundy and the other members of the circle then laid out before the mother and sisters the unbecoming manner in which they were conducting themselves and urged them to change their ways before it was too late. Believing that nothing but public exposure, including a stint in jail, would bring the thing to an end, Bundy told the mother and daughters that warrants were out for their arrest, and that detection and disgrace were the fates awaiting them if they persisted in their deplorable practices. Bundy blamed the mother for her steadfast refusal to abandon "this damnable conspiracy to coin money out of the longings of broken hearts, and sorrowing souls in search of that knowledge which is more precious than life."³⁹

Tragedy did not escape Lizzie Bangs in the wake of her arrest. Her seven-year-old daughter Maude died from diphtheria two weeks after the police raid on her home. At the little girl's funeral, officiated by Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond, Lizzie Bangs bitterly blamed her unjust incarceration for her daughter's death. Citing the cold, damp conditions at the Des Plaines Street Jail, Lizzie transmitted the severe cold she caught to her daughter, who died in less than a week after becoming ill. Two months later, the sisters wrote to the editor of the *Tribune*, denouncing those responsible for their arrest and humiliation, noting with much satisfaction that a Cook County grand jury had failed to indict them on

³⁹ "May and Lizzie Bangs," reprinted from the *Chicago Herald* in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, April 7, 1888 at "The Bangs Fall from Grace," and "Frauds of the First Water. The Operations of the Notorious Bangs Sisters of Chicago." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 16, 1888, 4. The last article was reprinted as "Novel Ceremonies. Funeral of the Little Daughter of One of the Bangs Sisters." *Nashville Tennessean*, April 17, 1888, 2; "Chicago's Star Spiritualists. The Magnificent Establishment of the Bangs Sisters and the Trials of Its Proprietors." *Titusville [PA] Herald*, April 17, 1888, 1; and "Chicago's Bogus Spiritualists. Novel Ceremonies at the Funeral of a Child on Sunday." *Washington Post*, April 17, 1888, 6.

the charges of running a business without a license and defrauding the public. The last word on this affair, at least, belonged to the Bangs sisters. Their careers as spiritualist mediums continued and controversy followed them as they evolved their spiritualistic practices.⁴⁰

The Bangs sisters, while disgusting 'scientific and cultured' spiritualists such as Bundy, were nonetheless an important element of late-nineteenth century spiritualism, performing cultural work that historians are increasingly recognizing as crucial in modern society. As Daniel Herman has explained, mediums "offered their patrons a valuable social product by tying together religion with entertainment and therapy," serving as a type of proto-psychotherapy that provided mental therapeutics to those dealing with the loss of loved ones. Historians and critics unable to see past the fraud and trickery, according to Herman, miss the social services spiritualism provided and the space it carved out for itself as a variety of early cultural modernism. Even the fraud and trickery were a central part of the appeal that nineteenth-century Americans found in spiritualism. The public thronged to the exhibitions of P. T. Barnum and other showmen, as James Cook has shown, knowing full well there was deception behind the show but was thrilled by the performance nonetheless, even enjoying trying to discover the methods behind the trickery. The blending of religion, popular science, therapeutics, and entertainment situated spiritualism in the cultural milieu of modernity and provided services more appealing than those of mainstream Protestantism. Through spectacles of spirit materializations, mediumship depicted a form of theatre not unlike what transpired on stage and came to resemble a species of the acting profession.⁴¹ If Bundy and other scientific spiritualists missed the playfulness through focusing on the fraud, contemporary historians with a different perspective now argue that

⁴⁰ "Novel Ceremonies," 2; and "A Card from the Bangs Sisters." *Chicago Tribune*, June 10, 1888, 11.

⁴¹ Daniel Herman, "Whose Knocking? Spiritualism as Entertainment and Therapy in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco," *American Nineteenth Century History* 7 (September 2006), esp. 417-419 & 436-437; James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001); and David Walker, "The Humbug in American Religion: Ritual Theories of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism," *Religion in American Culture* 23 (Winter 2013): 30-74.

attending a Spiritualist séance, such as those provided at the home of the Bangs sisters, was regarded by participants who attended as a social activity on a par with going to a magic show. Indeed, if spiritualism is a medium of an entertainment genre shared with the theatre, stage magic, cinema, and vaudeville, historians can mine neighboring fields such as film and media studies, drawing on performance, entertainment, and stardom theory to underscore their historical analysis of nineteenth century Spiritualism.⁴² Spiritualist mediumship, whether of the Cora Richmond or Bangs sisters variety, can thus be regarded as a particular type of nineteenth-century profession, open to women with performance and entertainment skills, which offered an early type of grief counseling and spiritual comfort.

Theosophy Arrives in Chicago

Modern Theosophy, a mixture of mesmerism, Spiritualism, Buddhism, pantheism, and ancient esoteric beliefs, emerged through the organizational efforts of a Russian émigré Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and her American counterpart Henry Steele Olcott (1832-1907). It proclaimed to establish a brotherhood of mankind, to promote the study of comparative religion, and to explore and develop latent human occult powers. Described in the newspapers as “one of the most subtle and elusive forms of religion ever communicated to man,” theosophy sought, according to William Quan Judge (1851-1896) head of the American Section of the Theosophical Society (T.S.), “knowledge of the

⁴² Such studies have already appeared in the literature. See e.g. David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Sarah Goldingay, “To Perform Possession and to Be Possessed in Performance: The Actor, the Medium and an ‘Other’,” in *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives* ed. Bettina E. Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson (London: Continuum, 2010); Matthew Solomon, *Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini, and the New Magic of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); and particularly the works of Simone Natale, including “Spiritualism Exposed: Scepticism, Credulity and Spectatorship in End-of-the-Century America,” *European Journal of American Culture* 29.2 (2010): 131-144; “The Medium on the Stage: Trance and Performance in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 9.3 (2011): 39-255; and “Mediums and Stars: Mediumship, Show Business, and Celebrity in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism,” 237-252, in *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and Around the World* ed. Christopher M. Moreman, vol. 3, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013).

laws which govern the evolution of the physical, astral, psychical, and intellectual constituents of nature and man." It was simultaneously, Judge declared, a "scientific religion and a religious science."⁴³

Theosophy, according to Maria Carlson was "the most intellectually important of the fashionable occult trends of the late nineteenth century." Its incorporation of diverse, ancient occult systems and modern proclamations created an active, eclectic, and scientific religion "based on absolute *knowledge* of things spiritual rather than on *faith*."⁴⁴

The Theosophical Society (T.S.) was established in New York City in 1875 with Olcott becoming president, Blavatsky corresponding secretary, George Henry Felt and Seth Pancoast vice presidents, and William Q. Judge general counsel. But Blavatsky, or HPB as she preferred to be called, was always the driving force behind Theosophy. In 1879 she and Olcott moved their headquarters to Bombay and then in 1882 to Adyar, Madras. Theosophy, as did much of late-nineteenth century occultism, developed out of the mid-century vogue for Spiritualism; indeed Blavatsky and Olcott first met in 1874 on a farm in Vermont to investigate spiritualistic occurrences. But HPB soon distinguished Theosophy from Spiritualism as a synthesis of old and new occultism with an emphasis on teachings from the East. Particularly through two seminal works, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), did

⁴³ "Madame Blavatsky." *Washington Post*, May 12, 1891, 4; and William Q. Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy*, 15th ed. (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Co. 1943 [1893]), 1. On Blavatsky, see Marion Meade, *Madame Blavatsky, The Woman Behind The Myth* (New York: Putnam, 1980); Sylvia Cranston, *HPB: The Extraordinary Life of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993); Mark Bevir, "The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (Autumn 1994): 747-767; and K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism," 139, 140; Gary Lachman, *A Dark Muse; A History of the Occult* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 155; and Gillian McCann, *Vanguard of the New Age: The Toronto Theosophical Society, 1891-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 8-9. For aspects of the theosophical movement as it developed in America, see Robert Ellwood, *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of the Wisdom of the Ages* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995); Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steele Olcott and 'Protestant Buddhism,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (Summer 1995): 281-302; and Joscelyn Godwin, "Blavatsky and the First Generation of Theosophy," 15-32, in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden, The Netherlands and Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013).

Blavatsky bring into the American lexicon notions of karma, reincarnation, Masters, Adepts, and Mahatmas. These Masters or Mahatmas, highly developed in their spiritual evolution and dwelling in the mountainous regions of Tibet, guided the human race in its development of inner spiritual growth, with Blavatsky and other leaders of the Theosophical Society keeping in touch with them through both occult and ordinary means. Theosophy attracted large numbers of men, and particularly women, from the educated classes, giving Theosophy an aura of respectability which increased its drawing power.⁴⁵

On May 13, 1884, Elliot B. Page of St. Louis and president of the American Board of Control of the Theosophical Society issued a provisional charter to four Chicagoans—Stanley B. Sexton, Dr. William P. Phelon, his wife, Mira M. Phelon, and Jacob Bonggren—to form a branch to be known as the “Chicago Theosophical Society.” The following year, on November 27, 1885, Page initiated these four individuals and formally recognized the new Chicago branch with Sexton as president as Mira Phelon as corresponding secretary.⁴⁶ Stanley Sexton had become a Fellow in the Theosophical Society in 1879 and Jacob Bonggren (1854-1940) had followed suit in 1882 after arriving in Chicago and assuming editorship of the weekly newspaper, the *Swedish American*. Other early notables initiated into this branch included William H. Hoisington (1813-1899), a Unitarian minister known as the “blind lecturer” on Egyptian religion, and his wife Laurretta H. (Cutter) Hoisington (1826-1915), a former Union Army nurse and avid student of mystical religion. Both had been active abolitionists in the antebellum period with Mrs. Hoisington being well acquainted with John Brown and his family, having grown to adulthood in

⁴⁵ James A. Santucci, “Theosophy and Theosophical Societies: An Overview,” 35-49, in *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of New Age Religions* ed. James R. Lewis (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004); Robert S. Ellwood, “Theosophy,” 315-324, in *America’s Alternative Religions* ed. Timothy Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth Century Explorations* (Westport, CN.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 156-177; Stephen Prothero, “From Spiritualism to Theosophy: ‘Uplifting’ a Democratic Tradition,” *Religion and American Culture* 3 (Summer 1993): 197-216; Gauri Viswanthan, “The Ordinary Business of Occultism,” *Critical Inquiry* 1 (Autumn 2000): 1-20 and Thomas A. Tweed, “American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmonds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32 (2005): 249-281.

⁴⁶ “American Board of Control. The Chicago Theosophical Society,” *Supplement to The Theosophist* 6 (February 1885): 4.

Wayne Township of Ashtabula County, Ohio. Both she and her husband became members of the T. S. shortly after it was organized in New York and became affiliated with the Chicago branch after the granting of the provisional charter in 1884.⁴⁷

Dr. and Mrs. Phelon were well known in Chicago and enjoyed something of a national reputation, being owners and operators of The Hermetic Publishing Co. at 629 Fulton Street. They were also editors of the monthly occult journal, *The Hermetist*, a 10 cent, twelve page monthly magazine teaching ancient wisdoms and occult laws of nature, with 'Get Understanding' as its motto. In 1875 the couple founded the Occult and Mystical Order of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Atlantis, Luxor and Elephanta, for the study of occult literature. This order maintained a close affiliation with the T. S. and at its peak claimed nearly 1,000 members scattered throughout the country. The Hermetic Brotherhood was founded on the belief that the wisdom of sages from the 'lost continent of Atlantis' was held by a body of men and women known as the "Ancient Atlantian Brotherhood," with its members being the true successors of the ancient Atlantians, and Dr. Phelon believed that he was a reincarnation of one of the teachers of the lost continent. By the late 1880s both husband and wife had published monographs on metaphysical healing and occult science, including *Physics and Metaphysics: Their Relations to Each Other* (1888), and *Three Sevens, A Story of Ancient Initiations* (1889). When Mira Phelon, who was a member of the Woman's Press Club, died in 1896, the Rev. H. W. Thomas, a member of the Western

⁴⁷ "Theosophical Work in America: Chicago," *Path* 1 (April 1886): 31; "Faces of Friends," *Temple Artisan* 10 (July 1909), 47; and *History and Genealogy of the Ancestors and Descendants of Captain Israel Jones, who Removed from Enfield to Barkhamsted, Conn. in the Year 1759* (Compiled for Hon. Asahel W. Jones by L. N. Parker, 1902), 235-236. In 1858 Wayne Township was a transfer point for two hundred Sharps rifles that eventually reached John Brown's hideout in Maryland. Brown made his home in the village of Richfield, Ohio in the early 1840s where he earned a living as a sheep farmer and wool broker. Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown, 1800-1859; A Biography Fifty Years After* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1910), 342-343; and E. C. Lampson, *John Brown and Ashtabula County* (Jefferson, OH: Jefferson Gazette, 1955).

Psychical Research, an organizer of the Psychical Science Congress, and a recognized leader of liberal Protestantism in Chicago, officiated at her funeral.⁴⁸

By 1886, Chicago had two branches of the Theosophical Society. The original branch still listed Stanley B. Sexton as president; Annie G. Ordway, who later gained prominence within the Koreshan Unity movement of Cyrus Teed as vice-president; Ursula N. Gestefeld, the well-known teacher of Christian Science and New Thought as recording secretary; Mrs. M. L. Brainard, another follower of Cyrus Teed as corresponding secretary; and the dynamic Mrs. Antoinette Van Hosen Wakeman, journalist and newspaper woman who would later serve on the Woman's General Committee for a Psychical Science Congress, as treasurer and librarian. In the meantime the Phelons had split off and formed the Ramayana Branch, T. S. of Chicago.⁴⁹ The prominence of women in leadership roles in Chicago's theosophical circles represented trends throughout the movement nationwide. The *Tribune* pointed out that the minds of women possessed "a superior faculty for recondite or subtle speculation and for the perception of mystic truth" and that "a large number of women in the City of Chicago have for some time been engaged in the study of Buddhism, that Oriental religion which counts as its adherents more than a third of the whole human race."⁵⁰ By 1888, the *Tribune* reported that while it might surprise people "that Chicago finds time to devote to such an abstruse subject as this, Theosophy is the fashion in Chicago at the present time, and it can truthfully be said that the occult mysticism of the Orientals is steadily gaining ground here." The paper indicated that a number of prominent merchants,

⁴⁸ "Mrs. Mira M. Phelon." *Chicago Tribune*, February 24, 1896, 2; and "No Mourning or Words of Sorrow. Strange Rites at the Burial of Mrs. L. M. Phelon in Chicago." *New York Times*, February 26, 1896, 5. William P. Phelon died in San Francisco in December 1904. "Originator of Queer Cult Dead. Dr. William P. Phelon was Founder of the 'Hermetic Brotherhood of Atlantis, etc.'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 31, 1904, 14.

⁴⁹ "Theosophical Work in America," *Path* 1 (January 1887), 319; "Occult Scientists. The American Section of the Theosophical Society to Meet Here." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, April 7, 1889, 14; and "The Wisdom Religion. Mistakes in Regard to Theosophy—Explanations by the Editor of the Swedish American." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, April 12, 1889, 12.

⁵⁰ "Buddhism in Chicago. Spread of the Oriental Religion in This Practical City." *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1887, 26.

land speculators, and lawyers throughout the city were “studying to become theosophists,” only “they prefer to keep their connection with the brotherhood a secret.” The reason for their secrecy “can be readily understood how much of an advantage a speculator would have if he could stand up in front of a competitor and read his thoughts....Theosophy would take like wildfire on the Board of Trade.”⁵¹

In April 1888, the same month the Bangs sisters were grabbing headlines in Chicago with their spiritualistic shenanigans, the city hosted the annual Theosophical Convention for two days at the Sherman House. In its coverage of the convention held from April 22-23, the *New York Herald* reported that nationwide there were over twenty branches of the Theosophical Society with two each in Chicago, St. Louis, New York, and Philadelphia. Calling the convention “a very peculiar gathering,” the *Herald* stated that there were a number of private sessions that were password protected. The most prominent American Theosophist present was Professor Elliott Coues, the nation’s foremost ornithologist, who chaired the convention. There were a total of about ninety Theosophists in attendance, with sixty of those being residents of Chicago, about one-half of the total number estimated in Chicago to belong to the T. S. Throughout the United States there were an estimated six hundred enrolled members with thousands more secretly affiliated. One reception given for the delegates was held at the home of Col. and Mrs. John C. Bundy at 557 North State Street, demonstrating the close relationship between the leading Spiritualists and Theosophists of the city.⁵²

Theosophists were always eager to state their principles through the printed word. In a widely reprinted article that originally appeared in the *Chicago Times*, Mrs. Antoinette Wakeman of the Chicago branch of the T. S. stated that theosophists welcomed newcomers “to enter and drink at the fountain of

⁵¹ “Theosophy in This City. The Occult Mysticism of the Orientals Gaining Ground.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1888, 27; and Mercie M. Thirds, “Theosophy in Chicago. Two Societies That Prefer Buddhism to Christianity.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 25, 1888, 11.

⁵² “Council of Theosophy. The Live Forever Philosophers to Meet in Chicago To-Day.” *New York Herald*, April 22, 1888, 17; and “Her Astral Presence. Mme. Blavatsky’s Followers in Annual Convention.” *New York Herald*, April 23, 1888, 1.

truth.” Viewing this ‘wisdom religion as “the broadest altruism—a veritable brotherhood of humanity, whose only path to “Nirvana” lies through the utter abnegation of self,” she further explained that in the attainment of Nirvana, “purity of thought, purity of word, and purity of deeds are the essentials.” Mrs. Wakeman noted that since occultists believed “in the broadest sense that knowledge is power,” their primary task was to study “the hidden mysteries of nature and the psychic powers latent in man.” To do so properly, she claimed, students must “attain mastery over the forces of so-called inanimate nature [and] bring his own carnal nature under the subjection of the will.”⁵³ The *Kansas City Star*, in remarking on the closing of the 1888 Theosophical convention in Chicago, wondered “just what these people believe is not easy to define from their own exposition.....This religion would seem to be better adapted to the abstract intellects of India than to the practical minds in the United States.” Theosophy however, continued to attract even more devotees and in just one year alone, from 1887 to 1888, the number of “Madame Blavatsky’s deluded worshipers” had more than doubled.⁵⁴

From Chicago to Washington: The Astral Projection of Elliott Coues

One of the earliest stories told in the papers of theosophy and astral projection in Chicago was in regard to the conversion experience of Stanley B. Sexton, one of the city’s founding members, following a foreign trip undertaken in 1879. During his stay in Tibet, the land of Blavatsky’s mysterious Mahatmas, Sexton became intrigued by astral travel and in a meeting with a learned Brahmin teacher inquired whether proof could be provided that human doubles or even objects could travel through the etheric astral fluid. The Brahmin asked if there was anything he wanted and Sexton replied he desired a

⁵³ Antoinette V. H. Wakeman, “Occultism in Chicago. Three Societies Devoted to the Study of the Great Problem.” *Wichita Eagle*, May 13, 1886, 3; reprinted in *Mind in Nature* 2 (May 1886): 47-48; the *Janesville [WI] Daily Gazette*, April 19, 1886, 4; and the *Bismarck Tribune*, July 8, 1886, 2. For further discussion of mastering one’s own spirit and will, see “Occultism,” *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health* 86 (March 1888): 138; and J. J. [James Johnson] Morse, *Practical Occultism: A Course of Lectures through the Trance Mediumship* (San Francisco: Carrier Dove Publishing House, 1888).

⁵⁴ “News/Opinion,” *Kansas City Star*, April 25, 1888, 2; and [No Title], *Independent* 40 (April 26, 1888), 12.

package of letters which was in a box at his house in Chicago, thousands of miles away. A few moments later, the Brahmin, through some mysterious astral process, handed him the letters, and when he later returned to Chicago and opened his desk drawer, the package was not there. The story was well known in Chicago's theosophical circles and was generally believed to be true. When a reporter for the *New York Herald* asked a "leading Theosophist" who travelled to Chicago to attend the April 1888 convention if there were Theosophists in Chicago who could project their astral body, the individual replied, "Perhaps Stanley Sexton, the president, teacher [and] elder of the North Side Society." When asked about the mysterious astral travel of the package of letters from Chicago to Tibet, this 'leading Theosophist' answered, "I have no doubt of the truth of the statement made, as it was credited to Mr. Sexton himself".⁵⁵ Occult notions such as astral travel were central to the tenets of the Theosophical Society.

An even more widely told story of astral travel by an ethereal double pertained to Elliott Coues (1842-1899), who had presided over the Theosophical Convention in Chicago. Coues had first met Blavatsky and other leaders of the T.S. while on an 1884 trip to England, and became, upon his return to the United States, founder and president of the Gnostical Theosophical Society of Washington, D.C., and later served as President of the American Board of Control. During the years between 1884 and 1889, his active years with Theosophy, and right up to his nasty public rift with the movement's leadership which resulted in his expulsion during the summer of 1889, Elliot Coues was probably the most prominent public Theosophist in the United States. With the abolishing of the Board of Control in 1886 and the creation of American Section of the Theosophical Society with William Q. Judge named as General Secretary, Coues pressed Blavatsky to use her influence to make him president. Blavatsky ignored these repeated requests and Coues, believing he would never secure the office, launched in 1889 a series of attacks against Blavatsky and the T.S. in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, a move which

⁵⁵ "Higher Life. Theosophy Spreading the Virus of Virtue in Wicked Chicago." *New York Herald*, April 29, 1888, 11.

led to his expulsion from the Society.⁵⁶ When William Emmette Coleman (1843-1909) indiscreetly related to Coues a scurrilous story he had heard from the spiritualist medium D. D. Home about Blavatsky and her out of wedlock deformed child, Coues included it in a denouncement of Blavatsky and Theosophy that appeared in the *New York Sun* on July 20, 1890. Blavatsky then brought suit against Coues and the *Sun* which was only terminated upon her death on May 8, 1891. One year later the *Sun* published a favorable sketch of her life written by Judge and in an editorial on September 26, 1892, retracted the Coues article, stating it had been misled.⁵⁷

Frequently visiting Chicago, Coues would often attend to theosophical matters and as previously noted, presided over the National Convention of Theosophists held in Chicago in April 22-23, 1888. According to statements made during an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Coues claimed to have on numerous occasions, projected his astral form from one location to another. Because of his public prominence as one of America's best known scientists, the story of Coues' astral flight from Chicago to Washington on June 23, 1887 received considerable notice. Attending a reception on his behalf hosted by his sister, Mrs. Lucy Flower, herself a prominent civic reformer and wife of a leading Chicago attorney, James M. Flower, Coues in the account provided to newspapers, projected his astral body to the home of an "an accomplished lady in Washington, who possesses great psychic power." This "accomplished lady" claimed later to have conversed with the astral figure, recognizing it as Professor

⁵⁶ On Coues' attacks on the theosophical leadership and his consequent expulsion from the T.S., see "Theosophy and Its Critics." *Washington Post*, June 23, 1889, 4; "Frauds of Theosophy. Talk with Prof. Coues on the Exploded Mystery." *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1890, 5; "The Explosion of Theosophy." *Chicago Tribune*, July 23, 1890, 4; Elliott Coues, "Theosophy: What It Is Not," *Californian Illustrated Magazine* 1 (February 1892): 133-137; "Says Theosophy is a Wicked Humbug. Dr. Elliott Coues Calls 'Bill' Judge a 'Psychological Bunko Steerer.'" *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1895, 1; and Howard Murphet, *When Daylight Comes: A Biography of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1975), 237-239.

⁵⁷ Michael Gomes, *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century; An Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London: Garland, 1994), 495-496. See his bibliographic entries relating to Coues and the *Sun* libel case, 528-534. Further accounts can also be found in Joseph H. Fussell, *Incidents in the History of the Theosophical Movement* (Point Loma, CA: The Aryan Theosophical Press, 1915), 8-12; and *The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1950* (Los Angeles: The Cunningham Press, 1951), Chapter 11, "The Coues-Collins Charges," 143-155.

Coues, who informed her on what was transpiring in Chicago at that very moment, even providing her with a couple of names of persons then at the home of his sister. According to Coues, this Washington lady later told him that he had paid her three astral visits over the last six months and that in the most recent visitation of his astral double from Chicago, she asked for the names two persons present with Coues as proof that his physical body was, in that moment, at the Chicago reception. Following their brief conversation, the astral figure disappeared and the Washington lady immediately wrote down the time as Coues' double had requested, in order to accurately report the episode to him at a future date.⁵⁸

Theosophists and other occultists accepted the story as a matter of course, but sceptics hooted at it, doubting Coues' veracity and questioning his judgment.⁵⁹ Still, Coues had his defenders. One distinguished Bostonian, Josiah Phillips Quincy, lawyer, poet, and descendent of one of the leading families of that city, questioned the logic of those scientists and others who would automatically discredit Coues' astral travel claims. Quincy reasoned that if such critics rejected the psychical claims of a leading occultist such as Henry Steele Olcott, simply because he lacked the credentials of "a specialist in natural science," then what should be done with the "testimony of the eminent professor of anatomy and biology? Is it not a little awkward... to bow to the authority of Dr. Elliott Coues upon the flight and migration of birds, and then to reject the narrative of his own flight and migration in gasiform duplicate of his physical body from the house of Mrs. Flower in Chicago to that of an accomplished lady in

⁵⁸ "Omnipresent Dr. Elliott Coues. While at a Chicago Reception His Double Bobs Up in Washington." *Chicago Tribune*, January 9, 1888, 1; "In Two Places At Once." *Washington Post*, January 15, 1888, 5; and "Higher Life," 11. The *Chicago Herald* referred to Coues as "one of the most brilliant men of science America has produced. He is our foremost living ornithologist, and attached to his name is a string of titles, honorary and scientific, that would occupy half a column of print." Quoted in "A Talk with Prof. Elliott Coues on the Subject. The Apostle of Occult Science on Astral Bodies, Secrets of the Theosophical Society—Etc." *Sacramento Record-Union*, May 2, 1888, 7. The two names given by Coue's astral double to the lady in Washington were Rodney Welch and Sarah Hackett Stevenson, both mentioned in subsequent chapters.

⁵⁹ On Coues' scientific colleagues being appalled at his Theosophical and occult pronouncements such as regarding astral travel, see Paul Russell Cutright and Michael J. Brodhead, *Elliott Coues: Naturalist and Frontier Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 293-295. One fellow naturalist Edward Drinker Cope (1840-1897) viewed Coues' preoccupation with the occult as "rather silly." Jane Pierce Davidson, *The Bone Sharp: The Life of Edward Drinker Cope* (Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, 1997), 232.

Washington?”⁶⁰ Such was the controversy that surrounded the subject of astral travel whenever the subject of Coues’ Chicago to Washington flight arose in public discussion.

Coues himself did not shy away from discussing the episode and even described the process by which astral projection occurred. Through a process of “self-mesmerization,” Coues placed himself in a “state commonly called clairvoyance” in which the astral body of another person “would then be as plain to my psychic senses as his natural body would be to my natural senses.” Coues insisted that it took a great deal of time and self-training to conduct experiments of this sort in psychic science and although “I am a very busy man with my ordinary scientific avocations; I have several times accomplished this result.” When the subject of his astral visit in Washington came up in one interview, with the reporter commenting “This almost transcends the bounds of credibility,” Coues stated simply, “it is nevertheless strictly true.”⁶¹ Coues insisted that the success of those occultists who had mastered the teachings of theosophy and who had demonstrated their ability to project their astral selves had become “so well established that it was no longer a question for discussion.” Furthermore, he announced, that with the current “revolution of public sentiment now going on upon this subject,” that he was prepared to make a prediction that within one year’s time “there will be a perfect mad rush of people to the front seeking to claim the originating of this doctrine [of astral travel]. I know that it is not now considered a sound or reasonable doctrine, and that people who believe in it are generally regarded as cranks. But you will see within the time I have mentioned an entire change in public opinion upon this subject.” The reporter taking this all in concluded that Elliott Coues “represents one of the most peculiar types of eccentric thinkers in Washington. His scientific position has given to him a

⁶⁰ Josiah Phillips Quincy, *The Peckster Professorship; An Episode in the History of Psychical Research* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1888), 249.

⁶¹ “A Talk with Prof. Elliott Coues,” 7. Two years earlier Coues insisted that “clairvoyance, mesmerism, [and] astral visitation are facts, and the scientific world will be forced to admit it sooner or later.” “The Occult World. A Talk with Gentlemen Who Claim Adeptship in Eastern Mysteries.” *Rushford [NY] Spectator*, January 7, 1886, 2.

notoriety which would not have been created if he had been a plain ordinary man laboring under an ordinary delusion.”⁶²

From Mesmerism to Hypnotism: Fluid Boundaries and Continued Controversy

The Mesmeric Shows of ‘Dr.’ Townsend

One of the central features of the new psychic culture of the 1880s was the resurgence of popular and scientific hypnotism, rejuvenated versions of mesmerism supposedly diverged of the notion of a magnetic force emanating from the magnetizer and which instead located the source of the hypnotic trance as a condition generated by the subject. The new hypnotism emphasized an enhanced suggestibility fostered by the monotonous repetitions of the hypnotist, and investigators and physicians drawn to hypnotism sought to secure it squarely within the new psychology. But as Hilary Grimes has recently indicated, large elements within both public and scientific worlds never quite grasped the difference between mesmerism and hypnotism, and how, whether in texts, manuals, or actual practice “uncannily close these discourses were, which blurred into one another and made each other indistinct.” She further notes that at the close of the nineteenth century the “vocabulary and goals” found in handbooks of the two mental sciences could not be distinguished and argues that writers on hypnotism, like those of mesmerism, were unable to completely separate their science from the occult. Such overt relations with occultism, along with “the dubious reputation” which the practices of both mesmerism and hypnotism held with the public at large, limited the prospects that proponents for hypnotism sought, i.e., full scientific acceptance and a recognized status as an important therapeutic resource within medicine and even as a tool for social reform.⁶³ Such was the case in Chicago with the

⁶² “A Notable Theosophist. Conversion of a Smithsonian Professor to Mysticism.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1886, 9.

⁶³ Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Co., Ltd., 2011), 9, 67-68; and Fred Nadis, “Of Horses, Planks, and Window Sleepers: Stage Hypnotism Meets Moral Reform, 1836-1920,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 22 (September 2001): 223-245. For hypnotism being explored as a resource in social reform, see Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American*

mesmeric performances of Dr. W. H. Townsend, a travelling mesmerist and showman, and the hypnotic demonstrations of Dr. Charles G. Davis before the Chicago Medical Society in the spring of 1885.

Hypnotism, as portrayed before physicians in Chicago, seemed as fully clothed in charlatanry as did the mesmerism performances at the opera houses, and appeared to be just another variety of disreputable, occult showmanship.

The first notices of Dr. Townsend giving mesmeric performances in the city were taken by the *Chicago Tribune* as early as 1882. Townsend was on the circuit throughout the Midwest touting himself as a "Psychologist and Mesmerist." In one performance given at Hershey Music Hall⁶⁴ Townsend spoke of the practical benefits to be derived from 'psychology'; for example, he claimed that mining companies were employing mesmerized subjects to help locate underground mineral deposits, a technique, he informed his audience, which would no doubt prove extremely useful to the companies. Townsend even provided proof that mines were discoverable by individuals under mesmeric influence and related an account of the discovery of a copper mine in the province of Quebec by the wife of a mining engineer. As Townsend told the story, the woman, while riding in a stage coach suddenly exclaimed that there were rich veins of copper in the ground right below them that mining companies could exploit. Her remarks provoked a great deal of laughter in the coach but one individual not so skeptical felt moved enough to have his company begin digging and found the copper just as she had said.⁶⁵

Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), esp. the section "Hypnosis and Evolutionary Republicanism: The Social Thought of Benjamin Orange Flower (1858-1918)," 188-192.

⁶⁴ In 1875 Mrs. Sara Hershey-Eddy, musician, pianist, and vocal instructor arrived in Chicago via New York whereupon she founded the Hershey School of Musical Art, "the leading institution of its kind in the West." The Hershey Music Hall, five stories high and constructed in 1876, was located at 20-24 W. Madison Street. In the summer of 1885 the Hall was renovated and became Haverly's Minstrel Theater. The following year it was sold and the building became known as the Madison Street Theater. The theater was demolished in 1905. Andreas, *History of Chicago*, 637, 669-670.

⁶⁵ The mining engineer in question was William Denton (1823-1883) and the female psychometrist his wife Elizabeth M. F. Denton (1826-1916). The couple wrote a number of volumes touting Elizabeth's psychometric talents. The discussion of her discovery of copper in the Acton Copper Mine of East Canada can be found in William

Townsend closed his lecture with a further plea for the exploitation of mesmerism and related psychological studies, declaring “there is much in premonitions, dreams, and the like, that would well repay investigation.”⁶⁶

In February 1885 the *Tribune* reported on Townshend’s performances of mesmerism being given at Grenier’s Garden on the West Side, noting that they had created a “good deal of interest, especially among a number of physicians who were interested in the performances from a professional standpoint.” There were perhaps a half-dozen physicians in the audience hoping to discover “something in the strange power that might be employed in surgical or other operations.” Some of the physicians attended four or five performances a week, witnessing a variety of “marvelous things.”⁶⁷ Particularly of interest to these doctors were the so-called ‘horses’ in Townsend’s employ, young men paid to withstand tests of hypnotic trance by undergoing tests to demonstrate insensitivity to pain. These ‘horses’ could prove unpredictable and at a following performance one of them, after Townsend reportedly withheld his pay, rushed the stage shouting the whole thing was fraud and a sham.⁶⁸ Still, several physicians, intrigued by Townsend’s demonstrations, gathered the following evening at the

and Elizabeth M. F. Denton, *The Soul of Things; or, Psychometric Researches and Discoveries* (Wesley, MA: Denton Publishing Co., 1888), 251-254; and in mines more generally in William Denton and Mrs. Elizabeth Denton, *Nature’s Secrets, or Psychometric Researches* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1863), 257-263. Psychometry became a psychic craze in the late-nineteenth century and was heralded as “the new science, so weird and wonderful, that it is just now interesting a growing number of people in Chicago.” Mercie M. Thirds, “New Psychic Force Fads. Sensitive Persons May Work Wonders With the Astral Fluid.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1888, 25.

⁶⁶ “Mesmerism.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 1882, 8; “Mesmerism. Dr. Townsend Still Continues His Psychological Séances in Farwell Hall.” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, February 21, 1882, 4; “A Mesmeric Adventure. How Some Young Students of Psychology Puzzled a Professor.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 2, 1883, 6; and “Amusements. Taylor Opera House—Psychology and Mesmerism.” *Trenton [NJ] Evening Times*, February 11, 1883, 1.

⁶⁷ “Mesmerism. The Strange Class of Professionals Discovered by West Side Doctors.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 25, 1885, 9. Grenier’s Garden, opened in 1884 by Thomas L. Grenier, was a multi-purpose entertainment building, hosting circuses and comic operas. Andreas, *History of Chicago*, 671.

⁶⁸ “A Mesmerist’s ‘Horses.’ ‘Dr.’ Townsend’s Subjects Explains His Power Over the Senses.” *Richmond [VA] Dispatch*, February 27, 1885, 4.

offices of Dr. John B. Armstrong on West Madison Street to discover for themselves if there was any value in the mesmeric condition that could be of use in medical diagnosis or treatment.⁶⁹

When publicly accused of using paid accomplices as dupes to purportedly illustrate his mesmeric feats, Dr. Townsend responded to critics in a letter to the editor of the *Tribune* on March 1, 1885, denying the use of ‘horses’ and decrying the “so-called ‘searchers for truth’ on the West Side” who sought to discredit him, offering \$100 “to any respectable citizen of Chicago who will bear the same tests in his normal state [e.g., needles in the flesh, etc.] as he had been subjecting to the young men while in a mesmerized state.”⁷⁰ Two days later, in a similar letter to the editor, Judge C. G. Foster (1837-1899), who had attended Townsend’s lectures and performances on several evenings during his February tour, chided the city’s papers for having “given no truthful reports of the experiments of Dr. Townsend, or half done him justice.” Noting that the audiences in attendance had included “many of the most intelligent people of the city, including physicians, editors, reporters, clergymen, lawyers, and shrewd business-men,” a number of whom Judge Foster knew, and all of them with whom he had conversed with stipulated that the tests of Dr. Townsend had been “fairly and squarely made...closely scrutinized at every point” with no fraud or trickery being detected. Scolding those West Side physicians choosing to dismiss mesmerism as useless, he pointed to other physicians in the city who had studied in Europe and had returned home convinced that mesmerism had value in surgical practice, naming Edwin J. Kuh in particular as one of those Chicago physicians.⁷¹

⁶⁹ “Mesmerism. Professional ‘Subjects’ Give an Interesting Exhibition of Nerve.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 26, 1885, 6.

⁷⁰ W. H. Townsend, “Letter to the Editor—Mesmerism.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 1, 1885, 6.

⁷¹ C. G. Foster, “Mesmerism and Psychology.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 3, 1885, 5. Foster was appointed Federal Judge for the District of Kansas by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1874, an office he served until three months before his death. “Obituary. Judge C. G. Foster.” *New York Tribune*, June 22, 1899, 9. Edwin James Kuh, M.D. (1858-1940) practiced medicine in Chicago for 58 years, from 1882 to the time of his death. Dr. Kuh comes to notice again later in 1885 when, as a council member of the Western Society for Psychical Research, he declared that hypnotism had taken its place among the sciences of the day. “Edwin J. Kuh, M.D.” in *Columbian Exposition Dedication Ceremonies*

Hypnotism and the Chicago Medical Society

Just two weeks after the commotion over Dr. Townsend's mesmeric shows subsided, the *Tribune* on March 17 reported on the further "prominence given to the phenomena commonly called mesmerism" which was brought up at a Chicago Medical Society meeting held at the Grand Pacific Hotel. The lecture and demonstration of medical hypnotism given by Dr. Charles Gilbert Davis (1849-1928), in the eyes of a number of physicians present, could hardly be distinguished from that of Professor Townsend's mesmeric shows, demonstrating the near identical discursive formations around mesmerism and hypnotism during the mid-1880s. After reading his paper on hypnotism, Dr. Davis demonstrated its powers by conducting experiments on three subjects who, "under the strange influence obeyed every command of the doctor." One subject "imagined himself an organ-grinder," while another young man "played monkey and gathered the pennies." The third subject invited all present for to go to the downstairs bar for drinks—money was no object to him as his name was Vanderbilt. One of the three lads was then hypnotized and told to open his eyes and gaze upon the ghost of George Washington, and according to the *Tribune* reporter who witnessed the performance, the "expression and cries of terror were so realistic that if he was feigning, his place is on the boards among the tragedians. He cowered and quaked in a corner in a most pitiful way." Following the conclusion of these demonstrations, a heated discussion ensued in which some sharp words passed between Dr. William E. Clarke (1819-1898) and Dr. Davis. After speaking sarcastically of what he had just witnessed, Dr. Clarke declared the exhibition worthless and a complete humbug.⁷²

Memorial; A Graphic Description of the Ceremonies at Chicago, October 1892 (Chicago: The Metropolitan Art Engraving and Publishing Co., 1893), 582-583; and "Obituaries." *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1941, 37.

⁷² "Hypnotism. An Interesting Paper and Some Experiments before the Chicago Medical Society." *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 1885, 2. Dr. William E. Clarke, regarded by some observers as one of the discoverers of the use of ether in anesthesia, was a past president of the Chicago Medical Society (1875-76) and a formidable figure in Chicago medical circles. *History of Medicine and Surgery and Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago* (Chicago: The Biographical Publishing Corp., 1922), 54. Charles G. Davis, "one of the most prominent physicians in the United States," and

About three weeks later, on April 6, 1885, at a subsequent meeting of the Chicago Medical Society, Dr. Clarke placed a motion before the membership that the demonstration of hypnotism by Dr. Davis be stricken from the records. In explaining the rationale for this move, Clarke declared the performance before the society at the recent March meeting had to be ranked as the “most audacious act of charlatanism ever practiced outside of a dime museum.” During his long connection with the society Dr. Clarke said he had never witnessed such quackery. After a long discussion, with supporters of Dr. Davis making a plea on his behalf, a vote was taken for censure which resulted in a tie—fifteen physicians voting for and fifteen against the measure. On the second ballot seventeen physicians voted for striking it out and thirteen voted against, and Dr. Davis’s demonstration of the powers of hypnosis was accordingly stricken from the list of subjects presented before the Chicago Medical Society.⁷³

On April 13 Dr. Davis published a rejoinder to the actions initiated by Dr. Clarke, complaining that the steps taken by the medical society was the result of efforts undertaken by “my enemies, whose triumph was secured in my absence and without my notification.” In this letter to the editor of the *Tribune*, Davis provided sworn affidavits from the “so-called *hired assistants*” or ‘horses’ in which they stipulated that there had been no collusion between them and him. Quite stung by the fact the society had removed his demonstration from their records, he complained that those in the profession who knew him endorsed his sincerity and honesty and for “those who do not know me I would ask what could possibly be the motive of a medical man in attempting the silly exposition of a time-worn

who enjoyed “one of the largest and most lucrative practices” in Chicago, was also a member of the Western Society for Psychical Research and delivered a paper on hypnotism at the 1893 Psychical Science Congress. [No Title], *Milwaukee Journal*, September 1, 1892, 2; “Editorial Review,” *Dental and Surgical Microcosm* 3 (July 1893), 214; and “Dr. C. G. Davis in Fore Ranks of Medical Field.” *Wilmette Life*, November 16, 1928, 41.

⁷³ “Doctors Disagreeing.” *Baltimore Sun*, April 8, 1885, 1.

deception, placing professional reputation at jeopardy in the hands of persons who for a few dollars could be hired to enact lies?”⁷⁴

On April 21 the *Tribune* described what was a “well-attended meeting” of the Chicago Medical Society the previous evening at the Grand Pacific Hotel in which there was to be clarification of the action taken by the Society in regard to Dr. Davis’s demonstrations at the previous meeting. Dr. Clarke wanted it fully understood that he had meant only to have the performances accompanying the paper expunged from the records. Regarding the paper itself, he said, there were many parts of it quite “well-written because they were taken bodily from the Cyclopaedia Britannica.” Clarke was indignant that the society had been imposed upon in this manner and presented an affidavit of his own from one of the ‘horses’ in which the young man stated he had been an accomplice working for Dr. Townsend at his mesmeric shows back in March. For his “stellar performance as an organ-grinder and for splendidly seeing the ghost of General Washington,” the young man confessed he had been paid five dollars by the brother of Dr. Davis. It was only seeing the predicament that Dr. Davis was in that he had signed an affidavit swearing there had been no collusion between them in their activities before the medical society. He re-affirmed his belief that Dr. Davis had been sincere in bringing him and his associates before the society as valid illustrations of hypnotic influence.⁷⁵

Davis, like Townsend before him, had his defenders. J. E. Woodhead, editor of the pioneering Chicago journal on occultism and mental science, *Mind in Nature*, rejected the decision taken by the Chicago Medical Society as uninformed and unfair. “Had this action been taken one hundred years ago”

⁷⁴ “Hypnotism. Dr. Davis and the Chicago Medical Society.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1885, 8. Dr. Davis’s paper appeared in volume I of *Mind in Nature: A Popular Journal of Psychical, Medical and Scientific Information* for April 1885, 22-25. *Mind in Nature* served as the unofficial organ of the Western Society for Psychical Research.

⁷⁵ “City Intelligence. One of the ‘Horses’ in Recent Experiments in ‘Hypnotism’ Before the Medical Society Makes an Affidavit.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 1885, 2. Coverage of the affair continued locally until early June. See “Hypnotism. A Committee Investigating the Charges against Dr. Davis.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 29, 1885, 3; and “Hypnotism. Report of the Committee with Reference to the Charges against Dr. Davis.” *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1885, 1.

Woodhead indicated, “it would not have been surprising, but that a Chicago Medical Society should shut their eyes and ears to facts, and then declare there are no facts to be seen or heard, causes surprise in our progressive, wide-awake Western Metropolis.”⁷⁶ The whole affair attracted some national interest as shown in a short notice entitled “Hypnotic Chicago,” which appeared in the *Medical and Surgical Reporter* on May 16, 1885. Poking fun at all involved, the periodical mused that such antics appeared “to be quite an avocation in Chicago, a city which is nothing if not progressive. The result of it is that there is not a man left in Chicago who has faith in any variety of ‘ism whatever.” Furthermore “The whole matter” concluded the *Philadelphia Medical Times*, could not possibly “impress favorably the profession of this [or any other] city.”⁷⁷

It was this highly charged atmosphere of spiritualism, theosophy, and hypnotism in Chicago that spurred the formation of the *Western Society of Psychical Research* (WSPR), the subject of the next chapter. The Society served as the nation’s leading psychical research organization outside of Boston and provided the organizational experience required as a forerunner to the Psychical Science Congress. The closing years of the 1880s seemed, in the eyes of many observers, to herald the arrival of new psychical discoveries that would bring a more complete understanding of mankind’s place in the order of things. Truth was a constant byword of occultists as they sought to uncover inner realities of human potentialities. Such advances in this uncovering of spiritual truths, wrote John C. Bundy in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, were “to be a marked feature of the coming half-century.” Citing the flourishing developments and progress that had been achieved through “mind cure, faith cure, Christian Science, psychology, hypnotism or magnetism, Theosophy, occult science, etc.,” all signature accomplishments, according to Bundy, that signaled even further greater developments. The source of the mighty psychical changes coming, he indicated, was “modern Spiritualism—the great tidal wave, on the rise of

⁷⁶ J. E. Woodhead, “A Surprise,” *Mind In Nature* 1 (May 1885), 41.

⁷⁷ “Hypnotic Chicago.” *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 52 (May 16, 1885), 628; “Chicago,” *Philadelphia Medical Times* 15 (June 13, 1885): 693-694; and “Chicago: Hypnotism,” *Medical News* 47 (July 11, 1885): 53.

which all these things have come up.” Spiritualism, in Bundy’s optimistic view, had provided “an inspiring vitality to all other psychic movements of whatever names. Hence it’s central and commanding importance...in the study of psychic science.” Future historians, he predicted, would mark the previous half-century as “the era of intellectual freedom and activity, of material development and inventive genius;” and the half-century just now underway as “the era of spiritual culture and the harmonious development of man.”⁷⁸ Such were the expectations of those occultists who anxiously awaited the imminent arrival of spiritual enlightenment and its accompanying social reform. The formation of the Western Society for Psychical Research by the city’s leading scientific spiritualists and occultists was an action taken to hasten that coming day.

⁷⁸ “An Opening Era,—Spiritualism,—Psychic Research,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 47 (September 7, 1889): 4; and Giles B. Stebbins, *Upward Steps of Seventy Years—Autobiographic, Biographic, Historic* (New York: United States Book Co., 1890), 264. The masthead of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* proclaimed ‘Truth Wears No Mask, Bows At No Human Shrine, Seeks Neither Place Nor Applause; She Only Asks A Hearing.’

CHAPTER THREE: THE WESTERN SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH: SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY AS SCIENCE, ROMANCE, AND RELIGION

Psychical Research: An Eclectic Discipline and Alternative Public Science

As we saw in chapter two, the mid- and late-1880s were active years for a variety of occult pursuits as spiritualism, theosophy, mesmerism, and hypnotism became prominent features of a vibrant psychic culture, and while attracting the interest of Chicago's educated and cultured classes, these psychical practices did not always generate respectability, appearing at times somewhat shabby, shallow, cheap, and vulgar. An additional institutional development of the late-nineteenth century, societies for the scientific investigation of occult phenomena, or psychical research,¹ was expected to elevate public appreciation and understanding of modern occultism, particularly in larger urban centers such as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, where an American national society was established and a number of local, semi-independent societies for psychical research attracted both leading citizenry and well-known scientists and physicians. These societies variously engaged in exploring hidden realities of mind and spirit and hoped inform all levels of the reading public about new discoveries that would elevate and establish a scientific status for psychical research. Success in these endeavors varied, depending on the locale and the commitment to scientific methods. Subsequently, psychical research enjoyed its greatest success in advancing knowledge of hidden mental processes and the occluded unknown in London and Boston, and less so in Chicago.

¹ The terms *occultism* and *psychical research* were often conflated. For example, when asked what he meant by 'occult science,' Elliott Coues, who served as the presiding officer at the 1893 Psychical Science Congress, simply replied that "occultism is an old name for what is now preferably called psychical research." "A Talk with Prof. Elliott Coues on the Subject. The Apostle of Occult Science on Astral Bodies, Secrets of the Theosophical Society—Etc." *Sacramento Record-Union*, May 2, 1888, 7. The term *psychical* was also used as a synonym for the term *psychological* well into the twentieth century, referring generally to mental, as opposed to physical phenomena, although by the 1880s it had taken on special meaning of its own, becoming associated more closely with the supernatural and supernormal. Deborah J. Coon, "Testing the Limits of Sense and Science: American Experimental Psychologists Combat Spiritualism, 1880-1920," *American Psychologist* 47 (February 1992), 145.

Currently, psychical research is undergoing considerable revision by historians of science. There is now a more sympathetic view taken toward scientists who entered psychical research after establishing a reputation in the physical or psychological sciences. The older historiographic tradition that dismissed the pursuits of elite psychical researchers as frivolous, insignificant, or foolish has been replaced with a more even-handed treatment that situates psychical research alongside contemporary scientific activity. Historians of science today are often more inclined to chastise those scientists who offhandedly brushed aside and ridiculed colleagues working in in the psychic domain without troubling themselves to determine whether there was anything to learn or discover in psychical research.² There is also found in the recent scholarship a deeper appreciation of the unique peculiarities surrounding scientific psychical research and a fuller awareness that scientists, particularly physicists, understood that mediums could not be handled like lab instruments, and that less callous and more compassionate approaches were required when using human beings as investigative tools to conduct research. Thus a more sympathetic view to the special difficulties involved in undertaking psychical research, including appreciating problems in producing replication, a more tolerant attitude toward fraud, and a condemnation of aggressive detective behavior directed toward mediums, is likely to be found in today's historiography.³

² Andreas Sommer, "Psychical Research in the History and Philosophy of Science: An Introduction and Review," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 48 (December 2014): 38-45, esp. 42; and Andreas Sommer, "Psychical Research and the Origins of American Psychology: Hugo Munsterberg, William James and Eusapia Palladino," *History of the Human Sciences* 25 (April 2012): 23-44. Fraud, self-deception, and experimental error were frequent objections that official science raised against psychical research, along with the central epistemological opposition to its metaphysical and philosophical implications.

³ See esp. Richard Noakes, "Haunted Thoughts of the Careful Experimentalist: Psychical Research and the Troubles of Experimental Physics," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 48 (December 2014): 46-56. See also Courtenay Raia-Grean, "From Ether Theory to Ether Theology: Oliver Lodge and the Physics of Immortality," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 43 (Winter 2007): 18-43; and Courtenay Raia-Grean, "Picturing the Supernatural: Spirit Photography, Radiant Matter, and the Spectacular Science of Sir William Crookes," 55-79, in *Visions of the Industrial Age, 1830-1914; Modernity and the Anxiety of Representation in Europe* ed. Minsoo Kang and Amy Woodson-Boulton (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008).

Psychical research arrived on the late-nineteenth century scene at a time when the physical sciences were enjoying their greatest success in eliminating vitalism and metaphysical speculation from their research programs. Ten years before the organization of the London Society for Psychical Research (SPR), Emil Du Bois-Reymond, the well-known German pioneer in electrophysiology, delivered in 1872 a lecture titled “On the Limits of Our Knowledge of Nature” before the forty-fifth Congress of German Naturalists and Physicians. In this highly influential speech, DuBois insisted that there was limit to what could be known through the scientific method and that two puzzles were beyond what natural science could ever hope to solve—first, the nature of matter and force could never be understood or explained and second, the phenomena of thought and consciousness would forever elude scientific comprehension. His declaration of *ignorabimus*, or “we shall never know,” became widely discussed in scientific and religious circles. Some scientists at that time regarded the declaration as surrender to religious cultural forces but historians have more recently concluded that the *ignorabimus* was a creative boundary device constructed to pursue scientific research devoid of the meddling subjectivities of vitalism, metaphysics, and religious values.⁴

The debate over the implications of the *ignorabimus* declaration posited enormous implications for ‘scientific’ excursions such as psychical research, for according to Keith Anderton, *ignorabimus* was ultimately a cultural manifesto stipulating that “what counted as ‘knowledge,’ what constituted proof of that knowledge, *and who had the right to decide*” rested with a materialistic corps of professed scientific agnostics. The upshot of the manifesto, Anderton stipulates, was to promote a public science of agnostic naturalism that furthered the mission to place the program of mechanistic science before the public as ‘official’ science, which was then to become established as science instruction in all areas of

⁴ Torsten Wilholt, “When Realism Made a Difference: The Constitution of Matter and Its Conceptual Enigmas in Late 19th Century Physics,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 39 (January 2008), 3. Sociologist Wolf Lepenies has described the *ignorabimus* declaration not as a retreat from pursuing knowledge but rather as “an incredibly self-confident support for scientific hubris masked as modesty.” Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 272.

formal education. The ‘limits of science’ creed then, as proposed by physical scientists in the 1870s, was not only a boundary creating and hegemonizing strategy, but in claiming that some things could never be known, there was now the strong implication that “there was nothing there to know.”⁵ Physical science and the dogma of the materialistic view and understanding of the world, resisted by occultists of all shades and varieties, had moved even more aggressively against the metaphysicians by denying the occult any epistemic credibility, or even possibility. And for those scientists tempted by or drawn to psychical research, the scorn from physical scientists was that of priests toward heretics. The insistence by psychical researchers that occult phenomena could be scientifically discerned was now dismissed as ‘impossible’ by establishment elites. Undeterred by the declaration that “we cannot and will not ever know,”—that apprehending the mental and physical essence of matter and life was beyond scientific reach—psychical researchers pushed ahead with the resolve that ‘we can and we must know.’ Psychical researchers were motivated and determined to demonstrate that the application of scientific methods could indeed bring to light a series of facts and that laws governing the manifestation of psychical phenomena could be established.⁶ Psychical researchers, therefore, openly ignored the prohibition that drew a boundary between scientific knowledge and religious belief. They embraced the position that

⁵ Keith M. Anderton, “The Limits of Science: A Social, Political, and Moral Agenda for Epistemology in Nineteenth Century Germany,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1993), 21, 23. See also Martin Carrier, Gerald J. Massey, and Laura Ruetsche, “Introduction: Science at the End of the Century: Prospects and Limits of Science,” 1-9, in *Science at Century’s End: Philosophical Questions on the Progress and Limits of Science* ed. Martin Carrier, Gerald J. Massey, and Laura Ruetsche (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), and more generally *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth-Century Science* ed. David Cahan (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). See also the more recent studies by Gabriel Finkelstein, including “Emil du Bois-Reymond’s Reflections on Consciousness,” 163-184, in *Brain, Mind and Consciousness in the History of Neuroscience* ed. C.U.M. Smith and Harry Whitaker (New York and London: Springer, 2014); “Emil du Bois-Reymond on ‘The Seat of the Soul’,” *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 22 (January 2014): 45-55; and *Emil du Bois-Reymond: Neuroscience, Self, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2013), esp. chapter 12, “Limits,” 265-289.

⁶ This approach is well expressed by a leading SPR investigator, Frederic Myers, who wrote, “we must remember that our very *raison d’être* is the extension of the scientific method, of intellectual virtues—of curiosity, candour, care,—into regions where many a current of old traditions, of heated emotion, even of pseudo-scientific prejudice, deflects the bark which should steer only towards the cold, unreachable pole of absolute truth.” Martha Banta, *Henry James and the Occult—The Great Extension* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 14.

factual and useful knowledge could be gained by “removing spirits from their environment and bringing them into the laboratory” and if that seemed “impertinent, ridiculous [and] disturbing” to late-nineteenth century physical scientists, then it was these physical scientists who were the true unscientific investigators, betrayed both in their blind attitudes and prejudicial pre-judgments.⁷

Varieties of Psychical Research: London, Boston, and Chicago

The British SPR and the Subliminal Psychology of the Supernormal

It was in this environment of the consolidation of scientism, then, that psychical research in Great Britain and the United States emerged.⁸ The eminent British and American scientists drawn to psychical research hoped and indeed confidently expected to develop and present an alternative to the public science of agnostic materialism.⁹ To date, the two most recognized societies and the ones overwhelmingly portrayed in the scholarly literature during the 1880s are the London SPR (1882-present) and the American SPR (1884-1889). Other urban SPRs, for the most short-lived or even still-

⁷ Joao Vasconcelos, “Homeless Spirits: Modern Spiritualism, Psychical Research and the Anthropology of Religion in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *On the Margins of Religion* ed. Frances Pine and Joao Pina-Cabral (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 21.

⁸ In the 1880s and early 1890s organized psychical research was almost exclusively an Anglo-American affair. For the development of psychical research in France, see France Régine Plas, “Psychology and Psychical Research in France around the End of the 19th Century,” *History of the Human Sciences* 25 (April 2012): 91-107; M. Brady Brower, *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010); and Sofie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853-1931* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). For Germany, see Heather Wolfram, “Hypnotism, Lay Medicine and Psychical Research at the *Fin de Siècle*,” *Clio Medica* [Amsterdam] 88 (2009): 83-130; and Andreas Sommer, “Normalizing the Supernatural: The Formation of the ‘Gesellschaft für Psychologische Forschung’ (‘Society for Psychological Research’), c. 1886-1890,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 49 (Winter 2013): 18-44.

⁹ According to Roger Luckhurst, the founders of London SPR viewed their experiments in telepathy and the subliminal subconscious as the pathway to revisioning the supernatural as the supernormal and hence, legitimate science. In their thinking “it was merely a matter of time before they could be accepted into the framework of normal science.” Roger Luckhurst, “Knowledge, Belief and the Supernatural at the Imperial Margin,” in *The Victorian Supernatural* ed. Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 197.

born, have received little, if any, scholarly attention. Yet Chicago had a vibrant and active independent psychical society of nearly one-hundred and fifty men and women drawn from business, religion, education, law, journalism, the arts, and medicine. Although the Western Society for Psychical Research (1885-1889) has been overshadowed by its two towering predecessors in London and Boston, Chicago's organizational foray into psychical research should not be overlooked or ignored. By examining the leadership and membership of the WSPR and the manner in which it conducted psychical research, the presuppositions it brought to the field enables us to historically situate and discriminate divergent varieties of psychical research in the closing decades of the nineteenth-century, the richest period of Anglo-American psychical research and the era in which efforts seemed most promising. Rather than being a homogenous or uniform undertaking, psychical research, as developed in London, Boston, and Chicago, differed in each locale and was not the singular undertaking as was say Christian Science, which adhered to a strict hierarchy and conformity, even reproducing exactly the same Sunday services and readings anywhere a Christian Science church service was held. Instead, psychical research presents us with a distinctly different picture, as practiced in London, Boston, and Chicago, with each specific Society offering its own version of what 'psychical research' looked like. Chicago's version resembled a form of 'wild' speculative philosophy of occult belief and literary romance laced with openly acknowledged spiritualist sympathies, precisely the kind of psychical research that Simon Newcomb, William James, and most of the members of the American Society, headquartered in Boston, strenuously sought to avoid.

The London SPR, formally organized around the so-called 'Sidgwick Group' composed of Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), philosopher and professor at Trinity College, Cambridge, his wife Eleanor Sidgwick (1845-1936), a profoundly competent investigator and central figure after the death of her husband, her brother and future prime minister Arthur Balfour (1848-1930), Frederic W. H. Myers (1843-1901), Edmund Gurney (1847-1888), Frank Podmore (1856-1910), and famed physicists William Crookes (1832-

1919) and William F. Barrett (1844-1925), rendering the Society's makeup a veritable *Who's Who* of late nineteenth-century intellectuals and scientists.¹⁰ Under the guidance of Myers and Gurney, the SPR helped develop some of the pioneering trends in the human sciences, particularly in experimental psychology, statistics, psychological medicine, and the psychology of dreams and hallucination. As Richard Noakes, prominent British historian of science has observed, the British society was highly eclectic both in the intellectual backgrounds and preoccupations of its members and in the range of academic disciplines which propelled it into scientific and public prominence.¹¹ A number of leading British spiritualists were active in the early years of the SPR but left the Society when it became clear that an official endorsement or at least an acknowledgement of the reality of spirit communication by the SPR was not going to happen.¹²

Frederic W. H. Myers is a crucial figure for understanding the psychological advances made in British psychical research and his writings, mostly in the Society's *Proceedings* and *Journal* were to have an enormous influence upon the thinking of William James. Myers, who will be discussed further in following chapters, emerged as a central figure at the 1893 Psychical Science Congress in Chicago,

¹⁰ Myers and Gurney agreed to join the SPR only if Henry Sidgwick was named president, an office he served from 1882-1884 and again from 1888-1892. For biographies of individual SPR founders, see Bart Schultz, *Henry Sidgwick, Eye of the Universe: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Trevor Hamilton, *Immortal Longings: FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death* (Exeter, UK and Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2009); Gordon Epperson, *The Mind of Edmund Gurney* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997); William H. Brock, *William Crookes (1832-1919) and the Commercialization of Science* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008); and Shane McCorrstine, "William Fletcher Barrett, Spiritualism, and Psychical Research in Edwardian Dublin," *Estudios Irlandeses* no. 6 (2011): 39-53.

¹¹ Noakes, "Haunted Thoughts," 46; Shane McCorrstine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); 105; and Elisabeth Wadge, "The Scientific Spirit and the Spiritual Scientist: Moving in the Right Circles," *Victorian Review* 26 (Spring 2000): 24-42. By the end of 1882 the SPR had a membership of around 150; it rose to about 600 in 1886 and close to 1,000 in 1900.

¹² On spiritualism and the formation of the British S.P.R. see Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); *Psychical Research: A Guide to its History, Principles and Practices: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Society for Psychical Research* ed. Ivor Grattan-Guinness (Wellingborough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1982); Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research, 1882-1982: A History* (London and Sydney: MacDonald & Co., 1982); and Philip K. Wilson, "Conflict and Cooperation of Science and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Anglo America Writings," 145-158, in *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World* ed. Christopher M. Moreman, vol. 2, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013).

representing the London SPR and reading papers of those SPR members unable to make the journey to Chicago. Although his background centered in poetry and literature, his reading was wide-ranging, particularly in the psychological sciences, where he drew extensively from French and German literature in formulating his concept of the subliminal. Subliminal psychology was an important stream in *fin-de-siècle* mental science, according to John Cerullo, coming “closer to achieving mainstream status within the new psychological profession than is generally recognized,” with the accompanying notion of telepathy providing “a conceptual overview for the entire field of [British] psychical research.”¹³ These investigations had further implications for the new fields of individual psychology and psychotherapeutics as British physicians such as Lloyd Tuckey and John Milne Bramwell, both SPR members, became interested in applying studies in hypnotism by Myers and Gurney to the treatment of patients presenting a host of psycho-physical disorders. Accordingly, by the mid- and late-1880s, the SPR investigations and published work of Myers and Gurney had placed them “squarely in the middle...if not in the vanguard” of a number of new fields in analytical and applied psychology.¹⁴

Mental Science and the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR)

The first important meeting of leading New England scientists to discuss the organization of an American society for psychical research was held in Boston on September 23, 1884, with Professor William F. Barrett, a highly regarded physicist and a vice-president of SPR in London, presenting to the Americans the English investigations into mind-reading, action-at-a-distance, and spiritualism. The Americans were especially concerned about the widespread popular appeal of spiritualism and hoped to

¹³ Myers was a classicist and poet who lectured at Trinity College at Cambridge from 1865 to 1869 and was an Inspector of Schools from 1862 to 1901. John J. Cerullo, *The Secularization of the Soul: Psychical Research in Modern Britain* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982), xii, 65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159; and Eugene Taylor, “Who Was Frederic William Henry Myers?” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17 (November-December 2010): 153-171. One major publication of the 1880s was Myers, Gurney, and Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), a lengthy study of mental hallucinations.

dispel public beliefs about mediumistic powers. A committee of nine so-inclined scientists, mostly from Boston, was appointed to explore the practicality of forming an American Society.¹⁵ The Committee subsequently recommended moving ahead with the plan and the first official meeting of the new organization was held in January, 1885 at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Eugene Taylor, the late distinguished historian of American psychology, has credited the ASPR (1884-1889) as having considerable impact on the early history of psychological science in America, even becoming the first organization in the country to formally undertake experimental psychology, with its *Proceedings* (issued annually from 1885 to 1889) ranking as the earliest professional journal devoted to the subject. According to Taylor, the central difference between the British and American organizations lay in the latter's de-emphasis and almost complete avoidance of drifting into spiritualist interpretations to account for mediumistic phenomena they investigated or witnessed. The American group saw such manifestations as question of human mental abilities only.¹⁶ William James, who chaired two committees—Mediumship and Hypnotism—along with Richard Hodgson, who arrived from London in 1887 to become Secretary and Research Manager for the ASPR became the central investigators for the American Society.¹⁷ The two men investigated numerous mediums throughout the Boston and New

¹⁵ "Psychical Research in America," *Science* 4 (October 10, 1884): 359; and "Psychical Research in America," *Science* 4 (October 17, 1884): 369-370. *Science* magazine, under the editorship of Samuel Scudder, one of the committee of nine and director of the Boston Museum of Natural History, gave generous coverage to the formation of the ASPR. See e.g., "The American Society for Psychical Research," *Science* 5 (January 16, 1885): 55-56; "The Prospects of the New Psychical Society," *Science* 5 (January 16, 1885): 44-45; and "American Society for Psychical Research," *Science* 5 (January 2, 1885): 13. The American organization closely resembled its counterpart in Britain, even down to the same committees—Experimental Psychology, Thought Transference, Apparitions and Haunted Houses, Hypnotism, and Mediumship.

¹⁶ Eugene Taylor, "The American Society for Psychical Research, 1884-1889," in *Research in Parapsychology, 1985; Abstracts and Papers from the Twenty-Eight Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association, 1985* ed. Debra H. Weiner and Dean I. Radin (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1986), 187-188. See also Seymour H. Mauskopf, "The History of the American Society for Psychical Research: An Interpretation," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 83 (January 1989): 7-29; and Seymour H. Mauskopf and Michael R. McVaugh, ed. *The Elusive Science: Origins of Experimental Psychical Research* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

¹⁷ Richard Hodgson (1855-1905) was born in Melbourne Australia and received a doctor of law degree from the University of Melbourne in 1878, the same year he left Australia for England. Attending St. John's College in

England area, most notably the famous mental medium Mrs. Leonora E. Piper (1857-1950), “probably the most extensively studied medium in history,” a mother of six who lived in Belmont, Massachusetts. James had discovered Mrs. Piper in 1885 following the death of his young son, eighteen month-old Herman James, when his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Gibbens, suggested he visit the medium. In due time, she became his ‘white crow,’ convinced that she possessed the ability to read his thoughts and thus acquire information that she could not otherwise have known.¹⁸ Serving with James on the Committee on Hypnotism was the prominent Boston physician James Jackson Putnam, Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School and Department Head of Neurology at Massachusetts General Hospital. This committee was interested in both the work of the London SPR and the French schools of hypnotism of Charcot and his disciples at the Salpetriere and of Bernheim and Liébeault at Nancy, conducting subsequent experiments in post-hypnotic suggestion, dissociative personality, crystal gazing, and automatic writing. Through Putnam, James, and Morton Prince, another leading Boston physician and neurologist, hypnotic suggestion was employed at Massachusetts General and Boston City Hospitals and

Cambridge, he studied poetry and was active in the Ghost Society, a college club devoted to looking into psychical phenomena. While at Cambridge he studied under Henry Sidgwick and joined the SPR upon its formation. In 1885, he led the Society’s investigation into Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society and was dispatched two years later to assume the position of Secretary of the ASPR, spending considerable time with William James investigating Mrs. Piper and other mediums in Boston, becoming inclined in later years to accept a number of Spiritualist tenets. Hodgson became a central figure at the Psychical Science Congress of 1893, serving as vice-chairman of Arrangements under chairman Elliott Coues. “Dr. Richard Hodgson (1855-1905),” in Raymond Buckland, *The Spirit Book: The Encyclopedia of Clairvoyance, Channeling, and Spirit Communication* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2006), 176; Alexander T. Baird, *Richard Hodgson; The Story of a Psychical Researcher and His Times* (London: Psychic Press, Ltd., 1949); and James H. Hyslop, “Dr. Richard Hodgson,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 1 (January 1907): 2-15.

¹⁸ James’ belief in telepathy, the result of many years of sittings with Mrs. Piper, is not widely acknowledged in most of the literature that has grown around James as a psychologist and philosopher. While accepting that telepathic communication between two or minds sometimes occurs, James remained unconvinced of the doctrine of spirit communication, acknowledging there may well be “something in it” but insisted more facts of a scientific nature were required before any judgment could be reached. Marcus Ford, “William James’s Psychical Research and its Philosophical Implications,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 34 (Summer 1998): 605-626, esp. 606 & 612-613; William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and Carlos S. Alvarado, “Mediumship and Psychical Research,” 127-144, in *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World* ed. Christopher M. Moreman, vol. 2, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013).

the Boston School of Psychotherapy was born.¹⁹ If Frederic Myers looms a crucial figure for British psychical research in the 1880s and 1890s, his close friend and associate William James was the American counterpart during these same years.²⁰

Opposing James and those in the British SPR disposed toward accepting the reality of telepathy was Simon Newcomb (1835-1909), first President of the ASPR and Director of the Smithsonian Institution. Not widely known today, Newcomb was an admired and highly regarded scientist among his contemporaries, including William James, who believed Newcomb brought greater prestige and credibility to the ASPR than almost anyone else who could have been chosen as president. But Newcomb took a skeptical stance when it came to telepathy and his scientific credibility as a mathematical astronomer who had skillfully applied statistical analysis to his own scientific work came into play when he argued that Myers, Gurney, and others in London SPR had carelessly conducted research which had not fully ruled out that mental communication at a distance was “mere chance coincidence,” something Newcomb pointed out occurring “somewhere in the country nearly every day in the year.”²¹ For Newcomb, ruling out chance and coincidence must be one of the first priorities of psychical research and he feared that the Londoners were only furthering the public’s “natural tendency to believe in the possibility of so-called telepathy.” Citing as an example the popular belief in the power of the mesmerizer to influence a subject by the mere exercise of his will, Newcomb flatly discredited this

¹⁹ Taylor, “The American Society for Psychical Research,” 191.

²⁰ Carlos S. Alvarado and Stanley Krippner, “Nineteenth Century Pioneers in the Study of Dissociation: William James and Psychical Research,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17 (November-December, 2010): 19-43; Alexandre Sech Junior, Saulo de Freitas Araujo, and Alexander Moreira-Almeida, “William James and Psychical Research” Towards a Radical Science of Mind,” *History of Psychiatry* 24 (March 2013): 62-78; and Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006). From 1884 to 1889 James was a corresponding member of the London SPR and when the American Society became a branch of the SPR, he became a vice-president, holding the office until 1909 except for two terms he served as president from 1894 to 1896. According to one recent work on James, “no facet of James’s career received more ink in the general press than psychical research, at least during his lifetime.” Paul Stob, *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 114.

²¹ Simon Newcomb, “Psychic Force,” *Science* 4 (October 17, 1884), 372.

belief indicating “that the longer we live, the more evidence we see that there is no such action,” with the corollary “the more closely we look...the less foundation we can see for any positive belief in telepathy.”²² When it came to haunted houses and ghosts, psychical phenomena which would become a favorite of the Chicagoans in the Western Society for Psychical Research, he was even more skeptical insisting that reports of ghostly disturbances were all “equally inconclusive,” recounting that nearly all people, lying on their beds late at night have inevitably heard “some sound the cause of which it is beyond [their] power to guess; and we do not see any essential distinction between this case and that of a haunted house.”²³ Newcomb regarded the reports of the London SPR on haunted houses as nothing more “than very scientific children’s ghost-stories,” adding that “this incredulous tendency will be greatly strengthened if the assistance of spiritualistic performers is called in.”²⁴ Newcomb and James, in private correspondence and in public forums, politely crossed swords over the legitimacy of SPR investigative procedures and the evidence resulting from psychical research into telepathy and mental suggestion, with James defending both the investigations and conclusions of the London SPR.²⁵

There were however, areas of agreement between Newcomb and James in their understanding of what psychical research must be if it were to ever become a branch of accepted scientific practice.

²² Ibid., 373.

²³ Ibid. “The general public assumes that hauntings involve apparitions, or ghosts, of the dead, but in fact, apparitions are connected to only a minority of cases. Most hauntings involve noises like phantom footsteps; strange, unexplainable sounds; tapping; knocking sounds; strange smells; and sensations like the cold prickling of the skin, chilling breezes and even the feeling of being touched by an invisible hand.” Troy Taylor, *Haunted Chicago: History and Hauntings of the Windy City* (Alton, IL: Whitechapel Productions Press, 2003), 10.

²⁴ Newcomb, “Psychic Force,” 373-374.

²⁵ For a critique of Newcomb’s presidential address before the first annual meeting of the ASPR on January 11, 1886 and his dismissal of telepathy as a psychical phenomenon found throughout the general population (he regarded telepathy to be so rare that any manifestation must only be explained by special circumstances forever unknown), see “Recent Psychical Researches,” *Science* 7 (January 29, 1886): 91-92; William James, “Professor Newcomb’s Address before the American Society for Psychical Research,” *Science* 7 (February 5, 1886): 123; and the response to James by Newcomb, “Professor Newcomb’s Address before the American Society for Psychical Research,” *Science* 7 (February 12, 1886): 145-146.

Especially did William James possess a strong personal desire to see the ASPR succeed as a scientific organization and possibly even being able to substantiate some psychical phenomena. He shared these predilections in a letter dated February 1, 1885 to his friend Thomas Davidson who, shortly after the establishment of the American society, complained that it seemed to be staffed disproportionately by scientists with bias against spiritualism. After assuring Davidson that the ASPR membership was impartial, James indicated that the presence of well-known scientists as officers of the governing council provided psychical research prestige and a credible public standing. "What we want," James wrote Davidson, "is not only truth, but evidence. We shall be lucky if our scientific names don't grow discredited the instant we subscribe to any 'spiritual' manifestations. But how much easier to discredit literary men, philosophers or clergymen! You'd better chip in, and not complicate matters by talking either of spiritualism or anti-spiritualism. 'Facts' are what are wanted." But facts were what were slow in coming and by the end of his first term as ASPR president, Newcomb's skepticism was even more pronounced. Though offering to step down after the conclusion of his first term, he was reelected to a second term as ASPR president. Even when he declined reelection at the end of a second term in January 1887, Newcomb stayed on as a Council member, remaining with the Society until its dissolution and merger with the London SPR in 1889. By then Newcomb felt that psychical research had run its course, with sittings with mediums, of which he had many, and telepathic experiments lacking any scientific standing.²⁶

The ASPR formally disbanded at its fifth and final annual meeting held at the Boston Society of Natural History. Attended by nearly 200 members and associate members, William James, who presided over the meeting, reported on the bleak financial condition of the society and the offer of the London group to form a branch in the United States. In his address to the American membership, James

²⁶ Albert E. Moyer, *A Scientist's Voice in American Culture: Simon Newcomb and the Rhetoric of Scientific Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). I have drawn from Moyer's informative take on Newcomb and psychical research found throughout pp.166-182. The letter from James to Davidson is found on pp. 170-171.

stated he had feared early on that the organization would not survive due to a lack of commitment by most of the membership to engage in experimental work, as they could not spare the time from their other scientific interests. Nor were the necessary funds required to sustain the Society forthcoming from required dues and voluntary contributions. The result, James said, was that psychical investigations had languished, having been carried out exclusively by Secretary Richard Hodgson and a mere handful of members. The question of dissolving the Society and becoming a branch of the British Society was then put to a vote, passing unanimously. The condition of the ASPR was such that only nine individuals were eligible to cast a vote, reflecting the total number of dues-paying members remaining in good standing.²⁷

Formative Influences of the WSPR: John C. Bundy, Liberal Religion, and the Philosophical Society of Chicago

Individual and institutional streams that resulted in the formation of a psychical research society in Chicago in the spring of 1885 arose from a number of psychological and spiritual tributaries, particularly from: scientific spiritualists and periodical editors such as John C. Bundy and John E. Woodhead, who were determined to bring spiritualism into the limelight as a recognized, respectable scientific religion; progressive religious liberals such as Dr. H. W. Thomas and Bishop Samuel Fallows who were both attracted to advanced metaphysical philosophy and openly sympathetic to spiritualism; distinguished jurists such as Arba Waterman and William McAllister, appellate court judges of a philosophical mind who found spiritualism appealing and were therefore eager to investigate it further; and physicians like Charles G. Davis and Edwin J. Kuh, who hoped that in harnessing mysteries of the mind such as hypnotism, discoveries would be made which could then be applied to therapeutics ends. These four groups, along with a considerable number men and women from business, education, the

²⁷ "Psychology," *American Naturalist* 24 (March 1890): 284-285. Associate, non-voting members of the ASPR from Chicago included John C. Bundy, Frances Willard, and John E. Woodhead.

arts, and journalism, rounded out the membership constituency of the Western Society for Psychical Research (WSPR), Chicago's own peculiar and 'wild' brand of psychical research.

Throughout the early 1880s, efforts to organize a society for psychical research in the United States were taken up by Col. John C. Bundy, probably the most overlooked figure in the early history of American psychical research, both in his role as a self-proclaimed 'scientific spiritualist' and in his capacity as editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. Even before William F. Barrett had arrived in the United States urging the formation of an American society, Bundy was calling for the establishment of an organization along the same lines. Particularly during the summer of 1884 Bundy attracted some press notice with his call for a formal organization to investigate psychical phenomena. The progressive paper *Advance* reported that Bundy's proposal was netting "wide attention" citing one unnamed Unitarian minister who had informed the paper that "The interest in...the study of spirit, or mind, or soul,...is becoming so profound and general that a great cry is going up for organized effort, for thorough and scientific investigation, and for reaching the people with the wonderful facts and truths of psychology," further declaring that a scientific demonstration of the spiritualistic truths "in such a way as to meet general acceptance, will be the greatest achievement of the 19th century."²⁸ Three months later the *Advance* reported that Bundy's efforts had been rewarded by the formation of the ASPR in Boston and the WSPR in Chicago, indicating that "the[published] reports of such societies will [carry] great weight with all intelligent unprejudiced minds."²⁹ The *Chicago Tribune* heartily concurred, applauding that psychical researchers would now be exposing fraudulent mediums and that the "better

²⁸ "Psychical Research," *Worthington [MN] Advance*, November 13, 1884, 1. Psychology in 1880s America, even to educated reading classes, meant hypnotism, mind-cure, and psychical research. For a brief discussion of Col. Bundy's satisfaction with the strong, if hidden, spiritualist presence among Unitarians, see John B. Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth Century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004), 215.

²⁹ "Psychical Research," *Worthington [MN] Advance*, July 16, 1885, 1. In a letter to his friend Thomas Davidson dated January 4, 1885, William James inquires whether Col. Bundy "would be a safe member" for American SPR. Beginning in July 1885, Bundy is listed as an associate member. William James, *Essays in Psychical Research* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 401, n. 22.3.

class of Spiritualists, including Maj. [sic] Bundy, will hardly object to this form of investigation, as it is of a kind for which they have frequently called.³⁰ But as one West Coast newspaper pointed out, the American SPR, through its membership, and the goals stated in its constitution, was hardly what Bundy had in mind and that he must now be surely disappointed.³¹ For as the New England paper *Springfield Republican* explained, Bundy's plan for organized psychical research only faintly resembled what was now the American SPR. Bundy and the *R-PJ*, the Massachusetts newspaper continued, desired a society founded by Spiritualists, claiming that Bundy was personally acquainted with at least twenty Spiritualists possessing an aggregate wealth of over sixty million dollars who would be willing to endow a psychical research society. Bundy's plan, according to the paper, called for the formation of a college equipped with a corps of experimenters to investigate spiritualism using the tools and methods of representative sciences such as "chemistry, mathematics, mechanics, anatomy, physiology, electricity mesmerism, biology, psychology, phrenology, etc." The school would be under the direction of a scientific spiritualist, but such an arrangement, the paper feared, differed too greatly from that of the London SPR and would be "regarded with very little respect."³²

Throughout the final quarter of the nineteenth century, Chicago was a city in restive religious ferment, with theological and institutional crises raging alongside the mounting interest in Spiritualism, Theosophy, Christian Science, and New Thought.³³ Fundamental questions of Christian theology concerning the nature of God, the personhood of Christ, atonement, sin, punishment, and Biblical

³⁰ "Investigation of Spiritualism." *Chicago Tribune*, February 9, 1885, 4.

³¹ "Investigating Spiritualism. Organization of Scientific Societies for that Purpose." *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, February 16, 1885, 4.

³² "Psychical Research." *Springfield [MA] Republican*, November 10, 1884, 4.

³³ According to Alice Fallows, the 1870s and 1880s found "The spiritual world of Chicago...full of bubbling, provocative, creative energy....Nowhere in the country, probably, was the [spiritual] effort more intensely centered...than in Chicago." Alice Katharine Fallows, *Everybody's Bishop; Being the Life and Times of The Right Reverend Samuel Fallows, D. D.* (New York: J. H. Spears & Co., 1927), 254.

inspiration swept across denominational boundaries and occupied the attention of many a congregation and church governing body. Interest had been particularly piqued during the 1870s by the heresy trials of two prominent clergymen, Professor David Swing (1830-1894),³⁴ the leading and highly popular Presbyterian minister and Dr. Hiram W. Thomas (1832-1909), the foremost Methodist clergyman and a central figure in the formation of psychical research in Chicago. In 1872 Dr. Thomas began his ministry as pastor of the First Methodist Church which held its services at the famous Church Block on the corner of Clark and Washington streets. By the time of his appointment, five years later, to the pastorship of Centenary Church, the largest Methodist church in the city, his theological thinking on a number of matters had diverged substantially from standard Methodist doctrines. Particularly his views regarding the atonement, Biblical inspiration, and future punishment alarmed elements within the church hierarchy. In addition, Chicago newspapers, discovering that his sermons made good Monday morning reading, made him appear as a crusading progressive clergyman, which only fueled the resentment Methodist leaders already held toward him. At the 1880 gathering of the Rock River Conference he was asked, but refused, to withdraw from the church and steps were taken to arrange a heresy trial in September 1881. At the trial, Dr. Thomas was acquitted on the charge of subverting Biblical inspiration, but was found guilty of holding and preaching heretical views on the atonement and future punishment and found himself expelled from the ministry and membership of the Methodist Church. Even before the trial, however, a number of influential friends had arranged for him to be retained in Chicago as pastor of the newly established People's Church, where, as the trustees promised, he could "preach the gospel upon a broad and evangelical platform...in accordance with the will of God and best promotive of

³⁴ William R. Hutchison, "Disapproval of Chicago: The Symbolic Trial of David Swing," *Journal of American History* 59 (June 1972): 30-47; and Joseph Fort Newton, *David Swing, Poet-Preacher* (Chicago: Unity Publishing Co., 1909). Professor Swing went on to pastor an independent church which met at Central Music Hall. Col. Bundy wrote regarding Dr. Swing that he was "not quite yet a Spiritualist but has spasmodic symptoms indicating there is a chance we may yet count him in." "David Swing—Preacher and Farmer," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 47 (September 14, 1889): 4.

His cause in the welfare of mankind." Dr. Thomas would serve as pastor of the People's Church until leaving Chicago for Washington DC in 1902.³⁵ Sunday services of the People's Church, held at McVicker's Theatre would regularly draw between 1,500 and 2,000 congregants when Dr. Thomas held the pulpit.³⁶

One institutional result of Thomas's tendency toward speculative philosophy and something which drew the ire of Methodist leaders was the formation in October 1873 of the Chicago Philosophical Society, which held its meetings and offered public lectures in the Methodist Church Block, where Thomas preached at the First Methodist Church. The Chicago Philosophical Society was composed of a wide-ranging group of learned men and women interested in the broader aspects of moral and social philosophy, natural science, and history. Dr. Thomas served as the Philosophical Society's second president and soon the organization boasted a membership of nearly three hundred liberal-minded, leading citizens of Chicago, including Judge Henry Booth, Prof. Rodney Welch, (both of whom served prominently on the Western Society for Psychical Research) Dr. Samuel Willard (1821-1913), General Napoleon Bonaparte Buford (1807-1883), Dr. Edmund Andrews (1824-1904), Rev. Dr. Joseph Haven (1816-1874), president of the Society at the time of his death, Professor Austin Bierbower (1844-1913),

³⁵ "Hiram Washington Thomas," in Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, *The University of Chicago Biographical Sketches*, vol. 1, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1922), 351. The first services of the People's Church were held at Hooley's theater on November 7, 1880. Limited space for the growing congregation prompted a move to the Chicago Opera House in September 1885, followed by a final move to McVicker's Theatre in 1886. McVicker's Building also served as headquarters and general western agent for Purdy Publishing Co., a distributor of Christian Science, Metaphysical, Occult, and Swedenborgian literature. For the heresy trial, see Thomas E. Lenhart, "Hiram W. Thomas: Heretic or Prophet?" *Methodist History* 23 (October 1985): 31-45.

³⁶ James H. McVicker (1822-1896), the well-known theater manager, owner, and promoter, was a devoted Spiritualist, hosting frequent séances at his mansion at 1842 Michigan Avenue which were attended by a number of theater celebrities. McVicker was elected to the governing Council of the Western Society for Psychical Research and served on the Committee of Arrangements for the Psychical Science Congress. McVicker's death in 1896 received national newspaper notice. Dr. Thomas conducted the funeral services. See Death of J. H. M'Vicker." *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 1896, 28; "Death of James H. McVicker." *New York Times*, March 8, 1896, 5; "Manager J. H. M'Vicker Dead: The Well-Known Theatrical Man Succumbs to a Stroke of Paralysis." *Washington Post*, March 8, 1896, 1; J. H. McVicker Dead. Veteran Theatrical Manager and Old-Time Actor." *Boston Globe*, March 8, 1896, 4; and "M'Vicker Funeral Plans. Services Will Be Held Tomorrow at 11:00 A. M." *Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 1896, 5.

John W. Ela (1840-1902), president of the Chicago Civil Service Commission, and “two hundred or three hundred liberal sceptics, spiritualists, atheists, Catholics and all the shades between these.”³⁷ The liberal and speculative nature of the Society is indicated in its printed prospectus for the 1880-1881 lecture season, which extended from October to April with papers and open discussion offered every Saturday evening. The Society openly sought “the cooperation of all the thoughtful people in our city who are interested in the dissemination of truth.”³⁸ Speakers scheduled for 1881-1882 included Professor Rodney Welch, Dr. Hiram W. Thomas, Rev. L. P. Mercer, Frances E. Willard, Col. Arba N. Waterman, Dr. Sarah Hackett Stevenson, and Dr. A. Reeves Jackson, all of whom were associated either with psychical research, occultism, or the psychical science congress of 1893. Dr. Thomas especially expressed a strong sympathy with spiritualism and the occult. Thomas was frequently quoted in spiritualist texts supporting “the essential truth of the continuity of life and the possibility of communion between the two worlds,” and would often share public platforms with well-known spiritualists.³⁹ In an introduction to one spiritualistic text, Thomas indicated “The old theology is losing its hold upon the real beliefs of many thoughtful minds...In the occult world we are finding that hypnotism, clairvoyance and telepathy are facts....making more common and real the idea of the possible communion of earth with heaven.”⁴⁰

³⁷ “Rev. Hiram Washington Thomas,” in *Album of Genealogy and Biography, Cook County, Illinois*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Calumet Book & Engraving Co., 1896), 443-444.

³⁸ “The Philosophical Society of Chicago: Prospectus for the Season of 1880-1881,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 15 (April 1881), 195.

³⁹ J. M. Peebles, *What Is Spiritualism, Who Are These Spiritualists, and What Has Spiritualism Done for the World?* (Battle Creek, MI: Peebles Institute Print, 1903), 31; H. W. Thomas, “Introduction,” 15-17, in Jacob Straub, *The Consolations of Science or Contributions from Science to the Hope of Immortality, and Kindred Themes* 3rd ed. (Chicago: S. W. Straub, 1886); and Nellie Beighle, *Book of Knowledge; Psychic Facts* 3rd ed. (Published for the author by the Hicks-Judd Co., 1911 [1903]), 123. “Preachers to Spiritualists. The Rev. R. A. White and Dr. H. W. Thomas Address Their National Convention at Handel Hall.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1900, 5. On Rev. Thomas’s sympathies towards spiritualism, see an advertisement for the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in E. W. Stevens, *The Watseka Wonder; A Narrative of Startling Phenomena Occurring in the Case of May Lurancy Vennum* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1887), n.p.

⁴⁰ H. W. Thomas, “Introduction,” in T. A. Bland, *“In the World Celestial,”* (New York: The Alliance Publishing Co., 1901), 4-5.

Dr. Thomas was also intimately connected to an additional informal association that he founded along with Samuel Fallows (1835-1922), Bishop and national head of the Episcopal Church.⁴¹ Thomas and Fallows, who was also a member of the WSPR, called their nondenominational clergy club of progressive religious leaders the “Round Table,” drawing to its ranks some of the city’s foremost liberal religious leaders who were favorably inclined to discussing and investigating occult subjects such as spiritualism, telepathy, and psychical research. Included among the regular attendees of “Round Table” gatherings were Professor Swing, Rabbi Hirsch,⁴² Rev. Mercer,⁴³ Rabbi Felsenthal,⁴⁴ Dr. Ryder,⁴⁵ Rev. Truesdel,⁴⁶ and many other liberal church leaders who devoted their time to investigating mediums and

⁴¹ Bishop Fallows preached his first city sermon, on the rights of religious skeptics, on Sunday, July 4, 1875 at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. The *Chicago Tribune* printed the sermon in full the next day, thereby admitting him “to the hierarchy of Chicago’s popular and liberal preachers—a pleasant aegis behind which he worked for almost forty-seven Chicago years.” Fallows, *Everybody’s Bishop*, 254.

⁴² Dr. Emil Gustav Hirsch, (1851-1923), for forty-three years Rabbi of Chicago’s Sinai Congregation, was “one of the foremost pulpit orators and scholars of the country.” Born in Luxemburg Rabbi Hirsch arrived in Chicago in 1880, becoming active in civic life as a member of the board of trustees of the Chicago Public Library and the board of commissioners of the Public Charities of Illinois. “Death Takes Dr. Hirsch, Noted Divine. One of the Foremost Jews of His Time.” *Chicago Tribune*, January 8, 1923, 1.

⁴³ Rev. L. P. [Lewis Pyle] Mercer (1847-1906) served twenty-five years as pastor in Chicago’s Swedenborgian churches and twenty years as president of the Illinois Association of the Church of New Jerusalem, making him one of the most recognized Swedenborgian ministers in the United States. “Suddenly Called From This Earth Was Rev. Dr. Lewis Pyle Mercer, Pastor of Church of the New Jerusalem of Avondale.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 7, 1906, 8; and “Pastor Falls Dead. Dr. L. P. Mercer Stricken With Heart Disease.” *Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 1906, 2.

⁴⁴ Dr. Bernhard Felsenthal, (1822-1908), a Jewish theologian recognized as “the world’s greatest Hebrew scholar,” was widely known as the founder of the reform movement among Chicago Jews and as a leader of “reformed Judaism,” known abroad as the “Americanized synagogue.” Dr. Felsenthal arrived in Chicago from Germany in 1858, becoming active in citywide educational, philanthropic and charitable works. “Noted Hebrew Scholar Dies. Dr. Bernhard Felsenthal’s Long and Useful Career is Closed.” *Chicago Tribune*, January 13, 1908, 2.

⁴⁵ Rev. Dr. William Henry Ryder (1822-1888), D.D., was pastor of St. Paul’s Universalist Church and a leader in Chicago charitable concerns, including being president of the Home of the Friendless. “End of a Useful Life.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 1888, 1; “Eulogizing the Late Dr. Ryder. A Sermon by the Rev. J. Coleman Adams at St. Paul’s.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 1888, 2; and “In Memory of the Rev. Dr. Ryder. Honors by the General Convention of the Universalist Churches.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 24, 1888, 5.

⁴⁶ Rev. Charles G. Truesdel (1827-1903) was a prominent Methodist minister known throughout the country for his active charitable leadership as Superintendent of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society and President of the Public Charities Association of Illinois. “Well Known Minister Dead. Heart Disease Claims the Rev. Charles G. Trusedell [sic] of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 1903, 1; and “Obituary. The Rev. Charles G. Trusedell [sic].” *New York Tribune*, February 18, 1903, 14.

uncovering suspected fraud.⁴⁷ Years after the WSPR had expired Bishop Fallows recalled that that the society for psychical research in Chicago had emerged from the “little preachers’ club we used to call the Round Table...a group of about twenty-five in all...where we used to discuss psychic topics.”⁴⁸ One important stream feeding into the Western Society for Psychical Research, and defining its membership, then, was the strong and active religious liberalism prevalent in Chicago demonstrated through such figures and H. W. Thomas and Samuel Fallows and organizations such as the Philosophical Society and the preachers’ Round Table.

Luminaries of the WSPR: Officers and Council

Another important figure in the organization of psychical research in Chicago was J. E. (John Edward) Woodhead (1840-1918), who as Hiram Thomas described, was an exceptionally “busy man,” serving as: Secretary-Treasurer and Manager of Investigations for the WSPR; editor and publisher of *Mind in Nature: A Popular Journal of Psychical, Medical and Scientific Information*, a monthly periodical which served as the unofficial organ of the Society; the western sales and promotional agent for the Lamb Knitting Machine Co.; and founder and manager of the National Letter Return Association, a private organization seeking to return dead letters to senders.⁴⁹ Woodhead’s journal (the first issue of *Mind in Nature* appeared in March 1885) was an early variety of a periodical genre which became more

⁴⁷ Fallows, *Everybody’s Bishop*, 364. Bishop Fallows was actively engaged in Chicago’s temperance movement and other reform activities, serving as president of the Board of Managers of the Illinois State Reformatory at Pontiac, trustee of the United Societies of Christian Endeavor, editor-in-chief of the Human Interest Library, and president of the Chicago School for Home Nursing. His inclinations toward spiritualism can be found in Samuel Fallows, “Introduction,” in *The Home Beyond or, Views of Heaven and Its Relation to Earth, by Over Four Hundred Prominent Thinkers and Writers* (Chicago: Coburn & Newman Publishing Co., 1884), 5.

⁴⁸ Voice From the Grave. Husband Heard a Cry from His Wife’s Coffin.” *Washington Post*, February 18, 1900, 21.

⁴⁹ H. W. Thomas, “Retrospect and Prospect,” *Mind in Nature* 1 (February 1886): 178. Woodhead, born in England, arrived in Chicago with his wife in 1871, shortly after the Great Fire. He founded the Cosmic Publishing Co. which published *Mind in Nature*. “Obituary.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 1918, 11; and Leonard W. Pizskiewicz and Bruce H. Mosher, “The National Letter-Return Association of Chicago,” *American Philatelist* 108 (August 1994): 710-718.

common in the 1890s—a magazine of contributors from medicine, religion, education, and literature who wrote about occult topics of the day, including psychotherapeutics, spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research.⁵⁰ Early reviews of journal were quite favorable, with reviewers praising the manner in which its first issues dealt with “psychical questions...in ordinary language that the wayfaring may understand.”⁵¹

With organizational arrangements completed during the spring of 1885, the Western Society for Psychical Research held its first general meeting at the Sherman House in Chicago on June 30, 1885. Officers of the new organization, in addition to Woodhead, were A. Reeves Jackson, M.D., President—a gynecologist with a national reputation whose death in 1892 prevented him from playing a prominent role at the Psychical Science Congress; Rev. Charles G. Truesdel, Vice-President—pastor at the Methodist Episcopal Church and superintendent of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society; Professor Rodney Welch, Vice-President—lecturer in Chemistry at the old Chicago University, organizer of the Chicago Homeopathic Medical College, and editor of the *Prairie Farmer* and the *Chicago Times*; and Council members Rev. Hiram W. Thomas; Col. John C. Bundy; James H. McVicker, theater manager; and Ernest E. Crepin, lumber and insurance executive who helped establish the Fort Dearborn National Bank. Each of the above council members, along with President Jackson, would serve on the Committee of Arrangements for a Psychical Science Congress in 1892. Additional WSPR Council members included the Rev. L. P. Mercer, pastor of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) Church; Boerne Bettman, M.D., President of the Illinois State Board of Charities; Orville Peckham (1846-1927), senior law partner of Packard, Peckham & Barnes and general counsel for the First National Bank; William K. McAllister, Circuit Court Judge for Cook County and former Illinois Supreme Court Justice and Appellate Court Judge

⁵⁰ [Advertisement], *Bookmart* 4 (June 1886): 38.

⁵¹ “Book Table,” *Indiana School Journal* 30 (May 1885): 306; and “Literature,” *Advance* 21 (May 20, 1886): 314. The journal expired with the February 1887 issue from a lack of subscriptions. John C. Bundy praised the magazine for its “two years of honorable and useful life,” noting it had been edited with “vigor and intelligence.” “*Mind in Nature No More*,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 42 (February 26, 1887): 4.

for the Northern District; Judge Arba N. Waterman of the Cook County Circuit Court; the Rev. Edward I. Galvin, pastor of the Third Unitarian Church; and Edwin J. Kuh, M. D. Among the membership were some of the leading business, medical, religious, literary, and educational figures of the city who were considered “the best intellectual and philosophical elements in Chicago society.” These included Lyman J. Gage, President of the First National Bank and Corporate officer of the World’s Columbian Exposition; Bishop Samuel Fallows, of St. Paul’s Reformed Episcopal Church; Col. Francis Wayland Parker, principal of the Cook County Normal School and pioneer of the progressive school movement in the United States; Dr. Adam Miller, physician and clergyman known for his lectures on mental and physical culture; William M. Salter, an associate of Felix Adler who founded the Chicago Society for Ethical Culture; William H. Rand, who, along with the foreman of his printing shop, Andrew McNally, established the publishing house of Rand-McNally; Henry M. Lyman, Professor of Medicine at Rush Medical College, best known for *Insomnia and the Disorders of Sleep* (1885); and James P. Root, first cousin to Elihu Root and one of the attorneys who argued before the electoral commission on behalf of President Rutherford B. Hayes during the disputed election of 1876. Notable among women members were Ursula N. Gestefeld, Dr. Lelia G. Bedell, Mrs. Mary E. Bundy, and Dr. Alice B. Stockham, whose careers and influence in psychical matters impacted both social and spiritual reform.⁵²

Two society members with affiliations in the Philosophical Society of Chicago were Rodney Welch and Adam Miller. Professor Rodney Welch (1828-1896) was President of Minerva Seminary in Kentucky until 1861, when the prevailing anti-slavery sentiment forced him to come to Illinois. He then became principal of Geneva, Ill. High School, and in 1865 accepted a chair in chemistry in the old Chicago University, while also lecturing at Hahnemann Medical College. His literary endeavors included becoming the agricultural editor of *Prairie Farmer*, and from 1872-1888 as associate editor of the

⁵² The reference to the best elements in Chicago society can be found in “Western Society for Psychical Research,” *Mind in Nature* 1 (June 1885), 57.

Chicago Times. Besides membership in the WSPR and Philosophical Society, Prof. Welch was one of the founders of the Saracen Club and the Illinois Press Association.⁵³ His friend and close associate who preached at his funeral, the Rev. Dr. Adam Miller (1814-1901), was known as the father of the German Methodist Church in the United States and one of the earliest Methodist ministers to give sermons in German. Regular, frequent preaching, however, took a toll on his throat and vocal chords and in 1850, Rev. Miller retired from the pulpit to pursue a degree in medicine.⁵⁴

Members of the legal profession were also quite visible among the WSPR leadership. Prominent among them were two Cook County Circuit Judges—William K. McAllister (1818-1888) and Col. Arba N. Waterman (1836-1917). Judge McAllister, a friend of Col. Bundy and inclined towards spiritualism, enjoyed a wide reputation, not only as an unimpeachable jurist, but as a scholar and patron of the arts. One contemporary writer praised McAllister for his “superior intellect,” with his “integrity and motives...absolutely above reproach.”⁵⁵ His friend and associate on the Circuit Court, Arba N. Waterman, possessed “a keen relish for scientific studies” and along with Hiram Thomas, was a founder of the Chicago Philosophical Society and served as president of the Irving Literary Society. Judge Waterman also represented the 11th Ward in the City Council from 1873 to 1874, the only public elective office he held. Toward the end of his life in 1915, Waterman attracted considerable press coverage in the aftermath of crossing paths with a confidence man named Carleton Hudson-Betts, “one of the

⁵³ “Rodney Welch Dies at General Lieb’s. For More than Thirty Years He Was Engaged in Educational and Literary Work in Chicago.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1896, 1; and “Rodney Welch,” in *History of Kane County* ed. Gen. John S. Wilcox (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1904), 933; “Funeral of Prof. Rodney Welch.” *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 1896, 8.

⁵⁴ “Death of Rev. Adam Miller. Founder of German Methodist Church in the United States—Author of Many Books.” *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1901, 3; and “Death of a Chicago Nonagenarian.” *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1901, 6. An exposition of spiritualist philosophy can be found in Adam Miller, M.D., *Life in Other Worlds; Including A Brief Statement of the Origin and Progress of Life in Our World* (Chicago: Fox, Cole, 1878).

⁵⁵ Francis B. Wilkie, *Sketches and Notices of the Chicago Bar, Including the More Prominent Lawyers and Judges of the City and Suburban Towns* 3rd ed. (Chicago: Henry A. Sumner, 1871), 6; and “Judge M’Allister Dead. He Passes Away at Midnight at His Suburban Home.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1888, 1.

shrewdest characters [ever] brought to public attention in Chicago.” Hudson-Betts, aka “The Count of Coxsacke,” a title ascribed to him due to his penchant for fleecing elderly men and women of their financial assets through means bordering on hypnotism, set up quarters at Waterman’s legal offices at the First National Bank and convinced the elderly Judge to transfer nearly all his money and the deed to his home in Groveland Park to himself. Hudson’s next move was to have the old man placed in a New England sanitarium named Vermont Hills in Melrose Park, just outside of Boston. Edwin A. Munger, prominent Chicago attorney and a lifelong Waterman associate, tracked down the judge, secured his release, and restored the \$150,000 estate back to his control. But court battles over the estate and assets of Judge Waterman lasted for over two years after his death.⁵⁶

Press notices of the establishment of the WSPR frequently pointed to the stature that its members held in their chosen professions, whether it was business, law, education, religion, or medicine. Particularly striking to Dr. John E. Purdon, an Alabama physician who would present a paper at the 1893 Psychical Science Congress was that the WSPR president, A. Reeves Jackson, was also the president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Noting that the “great West is alive to the importance of psychical research, not only as a means of education in a special department, but also as an instrument of social and religious freedom,” Dr. Purdon was convinced that “no greater evidence of the tolerance and progress of the age in the region of the occult and mysterious could be adduced” from Dr. Jackson’s place as head officer and “the fact that a very large percentage of the members of the

⁵⁶ “Court Expels Hudson as Aid to Waterman: Friends and Kin Prove Ex-Judge’s Mental Decay; Trust Company Named.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 1915, 1; “Waterman Gay at Stage Fete in Old Home: Sees Play with Friends, Unaware of Hudson’s Hostile Move.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 10, 1916, 1; “Arba Waterman Happy Old Man Despite Trials: Former Judge Restored in Mind and Body by Careful Nursing.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 1916, 12; “A. N. Waterman Suffers Stroke, Is Near Death.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1917, 1; “Arba Waterman Dead After Life of Queer Turns. Civil War Veteran, Judge, and Then Victim of Alleged Swindler.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 1917, 13; and “Betts Openly Claims Estate of Waterman: Notifies Tenants That the Property was Deeded Over to Him.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1917, 12.

Chicago society write M.D. after their names.”⁵⁷ A. [Abraham] Reeves Jackson (1827-1892) graduated from the Medical Department of Pennsylvania University in 1848 and moved to Chicago in 1870 to help secure the incorporation of the Woman’s Hospital of the State of Illinois where he became surgeon-in-chief. In 1882 he was a primary founder of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago, serving as President and Professor of Gynecology until the time of his death. In June 1889, Dr. Jackson was elected President of the Association of Acting Surgeons of the United States Army.⁵⁸ At his funeral procession to the Second Presbyterian Church at Twenty-first Street and Michigan Avenue over three hundred students from the College of Physicians and Surgeons along with the college faculty marched in the procession.⁵⁹ Dr. Jackson was also well known as the figure referred to as “My friend, the Doctor,” in Mark Twain’s *The Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrims’ Progress* (Hartford, CN: American Publishing Co., 1869). Jackson was ship surgeon aboard the steamship *Quaker City* when it departed New York on June 3, 1867 carrying Samuel Clemens and seventy journalists, pilgrims, and tourists bound for Europe and Palestine.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Purdon stated that the issues and concerns before the WSPR were vital to the ultimate concerns of humanity, and “deal with consequences that may be said to involve the very existence of the race in the coming time.” John E. Purdon, M.D., “Psychical Investigation a Necessity of the Age, Growing Out of the Advance Made by Spiritual Inquirers.” *Memphis [TN] Appeal*, December 6, 1885, 3.

⁵⁸ “Dr. A. Reeves Jackson Seriously Ill. He Is Stricken with Apoplexy and May Not Recover—Sketch of His Life.” *Chicago Tribune*, November 4, 1892, 1; “Dr. Jackson Is Dead. His Demise Results from a Stroke of Apoplexy.” *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1892, 7; “Obituary. Dr. A. Reeves Jackson.” *Chicago Clinical Review* 1 (December 1892): 243-247; S. C. Stanton, “In Memoriam: Abraham Reeves Jackson, M.D.” *New York Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics* 3 (January 1893): 37-40; F. Henrotin, “In Memoriam: A. Reeves Jackson, M.D.” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children* 27 (January 1893): 104-107; Henry T. Byford, “Abraham Reeves Jackson,” in Howard A. Kelly, *A Cyclopaedia of American Medical Biography Comprising the Lives of Eminent Deceased Physicians and Surgeons from 1610 to 1910*, II, (Philadelphia and London: W.B. Saunders Co., 1912), 32-33; and Arba Nelson Waterman, *Historical Review of Chicago and Cook County and Selected Biography*, I, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1908), 294.

⁵⁹ “Funeral of Dr. A. Reeves Jackson.” *Chicago Tribune*, November 15, 1892, 7. The resolutions adopted by the College of Physicians and Surgeons on behalf of Dr. Jackson can be found in “In Memory of Dr. A. Reeves Jackson.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, November 14, 1892, 3.

⁶⁰ For literature pertaining to Dr. Jackson and Mark Twain, see Robert Regan, “Mark Twain, ‘The Doctor’ and a Guidebook by Dickens,” *American Studies* 22 (Spring 1981): 35-55; Robert Regan and Leon T. Dickinson, “The

In addition to Dr. Jackson, several prominent city physicians, a number of whom were personal friends of Jackson, joined the WSPR. For example, one colleague of Jackson's, Dr. James H. Etheridge (1844-1899), a professor of gynecology at Rush Medical College, was elected to the WSPR Council in 1886. Dr. Etheridge was also a member of the Chicago Medical Society (serving as president in 1887), the Chicago Medico-Legal Society, and in 1890, president of the Gynecological Society.⁶¹ Another associate of Dr. Jackson's, Dr. Boerne Bettman, (1856-1906), elected to the WSPR Council in 1885, began practice in Chicago in 1881 as an eye and ear specialist, helped found the Chicago Ophthalmological Society, served as President of the Illinois State Board of Charities, and held the chair in ophthalmology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons.⁶² In addition Drs. Charles G. Davis and Edwin J. Kuh, both members of the Chicago Medical Society who employed hypnotic therapeutics and published papers on hypnotism, were both active WSPR members.

In his opening address to members and guests gathered at the Sherman house for the formal launching of the WSPR at the Sherman House on June 3, 1885, President Jackson pointed to the promising beginnings of both the London and American organizations and pledged to follow in their footsteps. Anticipating that many might wonder why another such society was needed, Jackson noted "that the field of research in question is of exceeding extent and richness," and "that in the Western portion of our country especially, there has been developed during the past few years a very great

Newspaper Letters of Another 'Innocent Abroad,' Dr. Abraham Reeves Jackson," *Mark Twain Journal (MTJ)* 33 (1995): 2-59, esp. the introduction by Regan, 3-5; and Dewey Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad; the Cruise of the Quaker City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), who refers to Jackson as "a man of good humor and great charm" (39). Newspaper coverage can be found in "Mark Twain Solves Problem of 'The Doctor.'" *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1901, 45; and "Innocents Known. Mark Twain Positively Identified Them." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 4, 1901, 7.

⁶¹ "Dr. J. H. Etheridge Dies. Chicago Physician Passes Away of Heart Disease." *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 1899, 1.

⁶² "Obituary Notes," *Medical Record* 69 (June 2, 1906): 887; "Boerne Bettman," in *History of Medicine and Surgery and Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago* (Chicago: The Biographical Publishing Corp., 1922), 162-163; and "Boerne Bettman, M.D., Chicago," in *Physicians and Surgeons of the West. Illinois Edition* ed. H. G. Cutler (Chicago and New York: American Biographical Publishing Co., 1900), 452-453.

interest in the subject.”⁶³ More outspoken on the need for a local society that would complement Boston and London was Society secretary J. E. Woodhead who maintained “that the conditions of life, climate, and modes of thought” varied so radically between the three cities “as to produce psychical phenomena differing if not in kind, yet in degree, and calling for new and local investigators.” In addition, while not wanting to boast, it was self-evident to Woodhead “that “the western mind is less shackled by conventionalism and traditions than is that of Boston or London, of Vienna or Paris. Men brought up within sight of the White Mountain can never quite escape the influence of its mighty shadows, and English *savans* lack the inspiration of a clear, bracing and electric atmosphere which finds its reflex in a quick, intellectual keenness and lucidity, not usually characteristic of the British mind.”⁶⁴

At the next monthly meeting, with about fourty members in attendance, Secretary Woodhead reported on what had been done thus far to bring the society into smooth working order, announcing among other things that steps had been taken to bring the society into close harmony with the British and the American SPRs and that membership had now climbed to over one hundred. Col. Bundy then presented a working plan, under which investigations were to be conducted by five sections or committees, and announced those appointed to various committees. Five committees were organized: Committee on Thought-Transference, Rev. H. W. Thomas, Chairman; Committee on Hypnotism, Clairvoyance and Somnambulism, Dr. Edwin J. Kuh, Chairman; Committee on Apparitions and Haunted Houses, Professor Rodney Welch, Chairman; Committee on Physical Phenomena

⁶³ “The Western Society for Psychical Research. First General Meeting,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 38 (July 4, 1885): 1; and “The Western Society for Psychical Research,” *Mind in Nature* 1 (August 1885): 82-85. For coverage of the first general meeting, see “Notes and News,” *Science* 6 (July 24, 1885): 78; “Western Society for Psychical Research” *St. Louis Courier of Medicine* 14 (August 1885): 142; and “The Western Society of Physical [sic] Research,” *Magazine of American History with Notes and Queries* 14 (October 1885): 417.

⁶⁴ “The Western Society for Psychical Research,” *Mind in Nature* 1 (July 1885): 66. The London SPR quickly recognized the WSPR, sending a letter to Secretary Woodhead promising cooperation and support as well favorable rates for the SPR’s *Proceedings* and other similar arrangements it had secured with the ASPR. “Meetings of Council,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 1 (July 1885): 450-451.

(Spiritualism), Denison W. Chapman,⁶⁵ Chairman; Committee on Psychopathy—mind cure, faith cure, metaphysical treatment, magnetic healing, etc., Colonel Arba N. Waterman, Chairman. These committees were dispatched to gather well-authenticated facts, investigate psychical phenomena, and issue written reports which the Secretary would publish from time to time. Dr. Thomas, Col. Waterman, and D.W. Chapman offered brief remarks on the work their respective committees would have to perform, and urged members to use the vacation session to organize the direction of the work to be accomplished.⁶⁶ Rev. Galvin expressed great satisfaction with the growth of the society, which he welcomed as a sign that Chicago was about to take a leading position as a national center in educational, scientific, and artistic pursuits as it had in commercial and industrial affairs.⁶⁷

Expectation for results from the WSPR appeared from other sources as well. The *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, pleased that a representative of their specialty, Dr. A. Reeves Jackson had been selected as president of the society, accorded a hearty welcome to the announcement of the WSPRs formation. Hopeful that the society would gather, record, and classify psychical manifestations in a strictly scientific manner, the journal believed that society investigators would do much in eliminating the fraud and deceit so prevalent in occult and spiritualist settings. It regarded the formation of such a society in the American west as a clear sign of the “awakening attention of the public to matters pertaining to metaphysical phenomena, with a resultant interest in mental hygiene.”

⁶⁵ Denison W. Chapman, M. D, was President of the Chapman Manufacturing Co., a pharmaceutical and chemistry concern. “Society Reports: The Western Society of Psychical Research,” *Chicago Medical Journal and Examiner* 51 (October 1885): 378.

⁶⁶ “Psychical Research. Appointment of Committees at the Western Society’s Meeting Last Night,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1885, 5. “Notes and News,” *Science* 6 (July 24, 1885): 78; and “City Items. Psychical Research.” *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1885, 5.

⁶⁷ “Psychical Research. Appointment of Committees,” 5. Rev. Edward I. Galvin, came to Chicago in 1880 as pastor of the Third Unitarian Church. He resigned in 1882 to become superintendent of the Chicago Athenaeum, originally the Young Men’s Christian Union, a position which he held for twelve years. “Obituary,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1908, 2; and George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America; A History of Its Origin and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 337.

The medical journal particularly awaited results from the Committee on Psychopathy, the section of society devoted to what was popularly known as faith-cure, mind-cure, magnetic healing and metaphysical treatment. With the number and repute of the WSPR physicians, hope was extended to achieving therapeutic developments for the growing class of patients suffering from neurasthenic and related mind-body afflictions.⁶⁸

At the third general meeting of the WSPR, held at the clubroom of the Sherman House on October 5, Secretary Woodhead reported that about thirty members had been elected since the last meeting, bringing the total membership to nearly one-hundred and forty. The following memorial, commemorating the death of WSPR member Frank I. Jervis (1823-1885), who had passed away on September 10, was read and entered upon into the minutes of the society: "We regret losing so early in our career, the services of one well fitted both by inclination and culture, to aid us in our work. The loss seems the more severe since none of us expected that so soon one of our number would solve the problem which we are trying to disentangle."⁶⁹ The memorial represented the kind of philosophical stance taken in psychical research which troubled William James who once, in a letter to Thomas Davison expressed his disappointment with the direction psychical research had taken in Chicago.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Editor's Table," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 1 (September 1885): 292. Neurasthenia, coined by George M. Beard, was the term applied to a wide-ranging assortment of psycho-physical disorders during the Gilded Age, including symptoms of fatigue and nervousness usually ascribed to women. The prevalence of the disorder's symptoms, supposedly the result of rapid urban modernization following the Civil War, prompted patients, particularly middle-class women, to seek out unconventional healers and practitioners in Christian Science and other New Thought sects. On neurasthenia, see F. G. Gosling, *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Susan Walsh, "Speaking of Illness: Nerves, Narratives, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26 (Spring 1998): 185-196; *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War* ed. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, B. V., 2001); Katherine Williams, "American Women and 'Nervousness': Neurasthenia Then and Now," 7-19, in *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America* ed. Katherine Williams et. al., (Stanford: The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2004); and David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ "W.S.P.R." *Mind in Nature* 1 (November 1885): 130

⁷⁰ See note # 92.

Frank Jervis stood as an example of the literary kind of psychical researcher instead of the scientific type urged by James. Jervis, unknown and unheard of today, enjoyed a degree of literary fame in England where he wrote for the same daily and weekly London newspapers as Charles Dickens and Douglass Jerrold, becoming friends with both men. He arrived in America in 1864 and for many years was editor of the *Davenport [IA] Democrat* and soon following his arrival in Chicago in 1876 became a familiar figure in newspaper, art and literary circles, serving as musical and dramatic editor of the *Chicago News*, with his dramatic work as a theatrical director highly respected. During the first year of its existence, Jervis was drawing-master and head instructor of the Ladies' Decorative Art Association in Chicago, and owned a studio on Dayton Street, near Lincoln Park, where, in conjunction with Karl Lederer, a former illustrator for a number of New York papers and magazines established an art school. Jervis had indeed "run a remarkable career," as the *Washington Post*, noted not least of which was his interest in spiritualism and membership in the WSPR.⁷¹

At the January 1886 meeting of the WSPR, Professor Rodney Welch, Chairman of the Committee on Haunted Houses, reported that he had sought out many houses in Chicago reputed to be haunted, but had encountered resistance from the homes' owners or agents to having rumors of supposed spiritual manifestations from the houses becoming known. The refusal to allow the committee access to these sorts of building supposedly occupied or possessed by poltergeists led Welch to conclude that real estate agents in the city were "in collusion" to keep anyone connected with the Society from entering or investigating homes believed to be haunted. Professor Welch said he hoped to be able to visit a house in Waukegan reportedly haunted and would rent it for a short period if the price was reasonable, and then conduct a leisurely investigation. This same meeting was also covered in the

⁷¹ "Art in Chicago. The Studios and Galleries," *Chicago Tribune*, April 3, 1881, 20; "Chicago: A Farrago of News." *Louisville Courier Journal*, November 27, 1882, 5; "General News and Notes." *McCook [NE] Tribune*, September 24, 1885, 2; "Frank I. Jervis at Rest." *Kansas City Times*, December 12, 1885, 1; "Death of a Critic. A Well Known Dramatic Writer Dies in Chicago." *Boston Advertiser*, September 11, 1885, 5; and "End of a Varied Career." *Washington Post*, September 11, 1885, 1.

Inter Ocean, which announced that “science is after the ghosts,” sharing its opinion that the WSPR “is a society of sensible and practical men, noting that its membership of roughly one-hundred twenty-five was “of superior quality.”⁷² In truth, the WSPR, in its membership makeup and manner of investigating psychical phenomena, resembled more the discussion clubs of the Philosophical Society of Chicago than it did the judicial attitudes and scientific procedures of the London and American SPRs.

The Society’s pursuit of ghosts and attempts to enter so-called haunted houses throughout the city attracted wide press notice. At the February 1886 regular meeting, WSPR president, Dr. A. Reeves Jackson, reported that he believed there were over one hundred and fifty haunted houses in Chicago that were tenantless as a result of apparitions or unexplained sounds and disturbances allegedly seen or heard by various individuals and that were now common stock of prevailing neighborhood beliefs. When pressed by a *Tribune* reporter for a fuller explanation, Dr. Jackson remarked that he had underestimated the number of Chicago’s haunted houses, indicating that if the committee’s new estimates were correct, the number was much higher. Dr. Jackson, when asked by the reporter whether or not he believed the houses to truly be haunted by real ghosts, replied to the contrary, pointing to a lack of real evidence to convince him otherwise. While there were instances of visual or auditory manifestations witnessed by more than one person, in nearly all cases, he stated, “the sights and sounds have been wholly illusory, or have been due to the pranks of a mischievous rodent and his family.” Jackson believed that imagination played an important role in perceiving natural occurrences as

⁷² “Society for Psychical Research. First Annual Meeting—Haunted Houses and Thought Transmission.” *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1886, 6; and “Various Meetings. Psychical Research.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, January 6, 1886, 7. . On an American preoccupation with ghosts, sees Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Introduction,” 1-17, in *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination* ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); R. C. Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead and Cultural Transformation* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996); and H. Addington Bruce, *Historic Ghosts and Ghost Hunters* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1909). There have been a number of popular expositions of haunted sites in Chicago. See e.g., Rachel Brooks, *Chicago Ghosts* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2008); Troy Taylor, *Weird Illinois: Your Travel Guide to Illinois’ Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2005); John B. Kachuba, *Ghosthunting Illinois* (Cincinnati: Ennis Books, 2005); and Ursula Bielski, *Chicago Haunts: Ghostlore of the Windy City*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 1998).

something uncanny, noting that “the mere anticipation of supposed supernatural manifestations often creates them in fancy.”⁷³

Not all newspapers gave credence to the WSPRs desire to investigate Chicago’s ghosts and hauntings, viewing its public releases of statements to this effect as pretentious nonsense. The *New York Times* greeted the WSPR announcement by facetiously stating that the mission to “learn what ghosts are made of...in that wicked city has hardly attracted all the attention it deserves.” The *Times* scoffed that the Chicago society was as prepared and equipped to investigate ghosts as if it were “contemporary with Apollonius, [attended meetings presided] by Voltaire or old Montaigne, listened to lectures by Joseph Glanvil,...Cotton Mather,...and Eusebius, and sat down at little symposiums in Cocagne with Hamlet’s father, Mr. Maskelyne’s ‘Psycho,’ [and]... the Cock-lane ghost, to say nothing of Raw-head-and-bloody-bones and Tam o’Shanter.”⁷⁴ In other words, the *Times* article offhandedly concluded, the WSPR was “as well qualified to investigate the matter as if it did not exist at all.” But the opportunity, the paper mockingly cited, had come just in time since ghosts always seemed to appear

⁷³ “Haunted Houses. The Psychical Research Society to Investigate Chicago Dwellings with Ghastly Reputations.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 4, 1886, 6. Abbreviated versions were reprinted in “Haunted Houses. A Chicago Society Will Investigate the Ghostly Tenements.” *Wheeling [WV] Register*, February 5, 1886, 1; “Haunted Houses. A Society for Psychical Research to Make an Investigation.” *North American* [Philadelphia], February 5, 1886, 1; “Chicago’s Haunted Houses.” *New York Times*, February 5, 1886, 1; and “Haunted Houses in Chicago.” *Washington Post*, February 5, 1886, 1. The number of city haunts had grown considerably in “Poor Chicago! Nearly Two Thousand Houses Made Tenantless by Ghost Stories.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 4, 1886, 7.

⁷⁴ Apollonius of Tyana, a first century Greek orator and philosopher, has been compared to Jesus of Nazareth by writers since the fourth century; Joseph Glanvil (1636-1680), an English philosopher and clergyman, speculated that magnetic waves permeated the ether, allowing for communication at a distance; Eusebius was a fourth century Roman historian, Christian bishop, and Biblical scholar; John Nevil Maskelyne (1839-1917), an English stage magician who investigated and exposed numerous Spiritualists, invented, along with George Alfred Cooke, “Psycho,” a whist-playing automaton who could perform psychic feats; the Cock Lane ghost was an alleged London haunting that captured public attention in 1762; Rawhead-and-Bloody Bones is an English creature or bogeyman living near water or under stairways in homes and was invoked to keep children in line; and “Tam o’Shanter” (1791) is a poem written by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. In the poem, a drunken “Tam” comes across a haunted church while horseback riding and is besieged by dancing witches and the devil playing the bagpipes.

just when a crisis was around the corner. Most likely, it quipped, “the [Chicago] ghosts [had] known all along that Sam Jones was coming!”⁷⁵

Popular and publicly engrossing as they might be, spiritualism, haunted houses, ghosts, and psychical research took a back seat when it came to the appeal of plain, old-fashioned, urban evangelical revivalism. Samuel Porter Jones (1847-1906) or Sam Jones, as he preferred to be called, was one of the most celebrated evangelists of his time, often referred to as “the Dwight Moody of the South.” At the time of his death in 1906, it was said that Sam Jones had spoken to more Americans than anyone who ever lived. Said by many to be the most widely quoted person of the nineteenth century, he readily coined epigrams which have sunk deep into the well of popular expressions; for example, the phrase “The road to hell is paved with good intentions,” often mistaken as Biblical, is attributed to Jones, as is the appealing aphorism “I despise theology and botany but I love religion and flowers.” At the peak of his career in the 1880s, Rev. Jones estimated that from September 1885 to September 1886, he traveled twenty thousand miles, preached one thousand sermons to three million people, and added seventy thousand members to the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church, South. During this same period, Jones became a national celebrity with press coverage of his March 1886 Chicago revival so extensive that he estimated that every sermon he preached in Chicago was read by approximately one and a half million people. Each morning he filled the Moody Tabernacle and each night he preached at the much larger South Side Casino Skating Rink, where thirty-five newspaper reporters were always on hand covering those evening meetings. Full texts of these sermons ran daily in urban mid-western newspapers.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “A Psychical Enterprise.” *New York Times*, February 25, 1886, 4.

⁷⁶ Kathleen Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), ix, 71; and Victoria Logue and Frank Logue, *Touring the Backroads of North and South Georgia* (Published by the authors, 1997), 15. One historian estimates that Jones attracted about 260,000 Chicagoans to his sermons during his five-week stay. Bruce C. Nelson, “Revival and Upheaval: Religion, Irreligion, and Chicago’s Working Class in 1886,” *Journal of Social History* 25 (Winter 1991), 242.

On March 2, 1886, the day Sam Jones arrived in Chicago the WSPR held its monthly meeting at the Sherman House, inviting the city's foremost spiritualist and trance speaker, Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond to deliver a trance lecture before the Society for the purpose of observing and investigating her spiritually-inspired powers of discernment firsthand. Questions were put to Mrs. Richmond of which she had no foreknowledge. H. W. Thomas described the proceedings in *Mind in Nature* as "a strange scene; lawyers, doctors, judges, clergymen, scientists, and men and women from different fields in the world of business and literature," gathered together to hear Mrs. Richmond speak, "not from the ordinary resources of learning and experience, but in a wholly unconscious state;...talked through by the spirit of some one who had ceased to live in the body." Judge Henry Booth, a member of the committee investigating spiritualism, questioned Mrs. Richmond about the process by which a disembodied spirit took control of a living body. Her answer that the closest analogy to what occurred was what happened in mesmerism, where mental impression by one person produced thoughts or actions in another person. The analogy was far from perfect, she said, but it offered the best possible explanation for "those who were not familiar with the occult laws of spirit power." Following questions put to Mrs. Richmond from other committee members, she closed with a poem by Victor Hugo selected from the audience. In summing up this investigation of Mrs. Richmond's spiritualistic talents, Dr. Thomas mused about the meaning of the performance and its implications for psychical research. While granting that Mrs. Richmond had "acquitted herself most creditably" and that a number of her answers "revealed a power of discrimination in thought and choice of words that was very gratifying...refreshing and strengthening," when all was said and done, he decided, everything of which she spoke "was largely in the realm of the speculative," with nothing specific or informative that any person of a normal philosophical mind might have said without being in a trance under spirit control. In short, wrote Thomas, "there was nothing convincing" and the demonstration fell short of being anything which could be considered as a scientific undertaking, although it left the estimated audience of one-hundred and

ten men and women who enjoyed such trance performances “with the satisfaction of having spent a very pleasant and not unprofitable hour.”⁷⁷

Among those present at the WSPR meeting witnessing the trance-speaking of Mrs. Richmond was Judge Henry Booth (1818-1898), one of the founders of the Chicago Philosophical Society. Invited by the board of regents of the University of Chicago (1857-1886), also called Chicago University an Old University of Chicago after it closed in 1886, Booth arrived Chicago in the fall of 1859 to help organize the university’s the law department. He was soon appointed dean and for almost a generation, Chicago University was the only law school in Chicago. Beginning in 1870, he served for nine years as a Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County. Judge Booth actively promoted and attached himself to various cultural and reform institutions throughout the city, becoming, for example, one of the earliest members and president of the Chicago Christian Union, later known as the Chicago Athenaeum. He also served as a member of the board of managers of the Washington Home, and was chairman of its business committee.⁷⁸ Booth was a member of the First Unitarian Church and served two terms as president of the Philosophical Society of Chicago, presenting at least one paper for nearly every season it was in session. As one of the founders of the Society for Ethical Culture in Chicago he was elected its first president, an office he held for a number of years. Widely admired during his lifetime, one eulogist,

⁷⁷ H. W. Thomas, “Trance Speaking,” *Mind in Nature* 2 (April 1886): 20-21; “Psychical Research. The Society Entertained by a Speech from ‘Spirit Land.’” *Chicago Tribune*, March 3, 1886, 2; and [No Title], *New York Tribune*, March 5, 1886, 4. For the anecdotal, rather than the statistical and scientific approach by Fallows and the WSPR committee on telepathy, see “Thought Transference. The Subject Talked by the Society for Psychical Research.” *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1886, 2.

⁷⁸ The Washington Home for Inebriates in Chicago was founded in 1863 as a social means of cure for alcoholism, with a branch established in 1869 as the Martha Washington Home for Female Inebriates. Sarah W. Tracy, *Alcoholism in America: From Reconstruction to Prohibition* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 100-101. See also William L. White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* (Bloomington, IL: Chestnut Health Systems/Lighthouse Institute, 1998) for a discussion of the wide variety of treatments for alcoholism; and Katherine Chavigny, “Reforming Drunkards in Nineteenth-Century America: Religion, Medicine, Therapy,” 108-123, in *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000* ed. Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

in a tribute to Booth at the time of his death said that “Few men have left behind them so unblemished a record for purity of character, loftiness of aim, public spirit, and the virtues of private life,” while another affirmed he was “one of the whitest souls that Chicago ever knew.”⁷⁹

One rather remarkable monthly meeting that indicates the extent to which anecdotal storytelling characterized the nature of psychical research in Chicago occurred in December 1885. Following remarks from Dr. Jackson and D. H. Lamberson regarding their experience with spiritualistic phenomena, Albert D. Hager related how he once attempted to “cast out devils,” curing in the process a group of children pretending to be mediums by compelling them to experiment in his presence, and when the children failed to elicit the obligatory raps, Hager scolded them for their mischief. Mr. Hager then informed the meeting that he had become convinced of the truth of human immortality by receiving communications from his deceased wife.⁸⁰ Col. Francis W. Parker followed with a rather bizarre, if not somewhat troubling, story of spiritualism and animal cruelty when he was a young man eighteen years-old. He described how he and his cousin held a séance one evening and called up the spirit of a kitten they had drowned some time before. “And now, ladies and gentlemen,” Parker announced to the gathered members and guests, “I am rather timid about telling this story. It was a long time ago...but I think we at this time distinctly heard a scratching under the table, as if a cat was under it.” Parker related how on another occasion he and the same cousin conjured up Beelzebub, who, according to the *Tribune* reporter in attendance, “manifested his presence by pulling the table away from the two lads

⁷⁹ “No title,” *Pacific Unitarian* 6 (June 1898), 229; “Judge Henry Booth. A Tribute at Steinway Hall, May 8, 1898,” *Cause* 4 (June, 1898), 44; and A. T. Andreas, *History of Chicago from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, vol. 2, (Chicago: The A. T. Andreas Co., 1885), 455-456; and “Judge Henry Booth,” *Chicago Legal News* 25 (September 24, 1892): 28.

⁸⁰ Albert David Hager (1817-1888), a former state geologist of Vermont, was Secretary and Librarian of the Chicago Historical Society from 1877 to 1887. Hager and his wife, Rosa F. Hager, became interested in the reform of alcoholics and served as Superintendent and Matron, respectively, of the Washington Home for the Reclamation of Inebriates in Chicago. “The Obituary Record. Death of Prof. Hager.” *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1888, 2; “Prof. Hager’s Death.” *New York Times*, July 31, 1888, 1.; and “Obituary. Albert D. Hager.” *Washington Post*, July 31, 1888, 1.

with a strength they could not resist.” Still another time the two raised the spirit of a cow that had recently died in their stable, and the cow answered in reply to the question “Do you ever take food?” with affirmative raps. They then placed some food scraps under the table where they were sitting and the scraps disappeared, at which point Dr. Parker placed a bit of chewing tobacco under the table. The *Tribune* accounts states it “was probably removed by Beelzebub, for it cannot be presumed that the cow ate it, and it certainly disappeared. A number of similar stories were told, and these ‘psychical researches’ amused the audience vastly.”⁸¹ WSPR meetings such as these seemed more on a par with attending materializing séances than serious attempts at gathering facts and discerning truths of spiritualism.

Spiritualism was indeed a central focus for the WSPR and its wild, cavalier approach to discussing and investigating spiritualist manifestations would have been viewed by both the American and British SPRs as woefully deficient in scientific protocol, even dismaying to a friendly-disposed psychical researcher like William James and abhorring to a scientific purist such as Simon Newcomb. In addition to inviting spiritualist performers such as Mr. Richmond and sharing outlandish and pointless anecdotal accounts before the membership, the WSPR Committee on Spiritualism would also send representatives to investigate séances. But such ‘investigations’ had more the flavor of a family night out, an evening of entertainment as if going to the movies or attending the theatre. The *Chicago*

⁸¹ “Psychical Research. The Society Meets in Regular Monthly Session—Telling Ghost Stories.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 1885, 2. Francis Wayland Parker (1837-1902), often called “the father of progressive education,” served as superintendent of schools in Quincy, MA (1875-1880) where he initiated curriculum and classroom reform. After a stint as superintendent of Boston’s public schools (1880-1883), he arrived in Chicago and became principal of the Cook County Normal School (1883-1899). He then founded and served as principal (1899-1901) for a private experimental school, the Chicago Institute, which became the University of Chicago School of Education in 1901. “Francis W. Parker,” in June Skinner Sawyers, *Chicago Portraits* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 247; “Col. F. W. Parker is Dead. Educator Passes Away Suddenly at Pass Christian.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 3, 1902, 1; Robert E. Tostberg, “Colonel Parker’s Quest for ‘A School in Which All Good Things Come Together,’” *History of Education Quarterly* 6 (Summer 1966): 22-42; Jack K. Campbell, *Colonel Francis W. Parker: The Children’s Crusader* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967); and Ida Cassa Heffron, *Francis Wayland Parker: An Interpretive Biography* (Los Angeles: I. Deach, Jr., 1934). No biographical account of Parker even mentions his association with the WSPR or his rather bizarre account of childhood dalliance into spiritualism.

Tribune reported one such occasion, praising the WSPR committee members as having “superior intellectual ability,” referring in particular to Dr. Thomas, pastor of the People’s Church, and “men of strong common sense,” referring, in this case, to Col. John A. Elison (1826-1893), the well-known auctioneer, and City Councilman, Alderman James L. Campbell (1832-1916). The two men were dispatched by WSPR in January 1887 to attend a Bangs sisters’ séance, and accompanied by their wives, joined an audience of twenty-three persons for the three-hour materializing séance. The two WSPR members apparently came away impressed by the sisters for although the two men did not “openly profess complete faith in Spiritualism,” they were “inquirers after truth” and could not “discredit the evidence of their senses.”⁸²

The most widely distributed tract associated with the WSPR that discussed the social and cultural implications of spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research was an address delivered by Professor Elliott Coues of the Smithsonian Institute on April 26, 1888 at the First Methodist Church in Chicago, and which was first published in its entirety in the May 12, 1888 issue of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. Entitled “The Signs of the Times,” Coues, invited by Col. Bundy and the officers of the WSPR, offered his observations on prevailing topics of the day, such as the ‘the woman question,’ spiritualism, the astral plane, animal magnetism, and psychical research. The address was soon in such high demand that it was published again in pamphlet form by the Religio-Philosophical Publishing House with a glowing dedication to John C. Bundy. Coues, who in the previous chapter was placed in the

⁸² “Are They Real Spooks? Ghostly Visitants at a Spiritualistic Séance on the West Side.” *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1887, 14; “The Obituary Record. Col. John A. Elison.” *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1893, 5; and “Obituary. James L. Campbell, Former West Side Alderman, Dead.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1916, 15. Col. Elison was the leading partner of the auction firm Elison, Flersheim & Co. and Alderman Campbell, of the 12th Ward, served on the city council from 1869 to 1896 and one term in the state legislature.

context of his leadership role in American theosophy, was, by the mid-1880s, beginning to identify himself more as a spiritualist-leaning psychical researcher instead of a theosophist.⁸³

Coues began his prepared remarks by reminding the audience of the highly-charged and “critical” times in which they lived—a “strange and otherwise inexplicable crisis.... of great, social, intellectual and moral forces,” which had long been stealthily at work” (5).⁸⁴ Attention to Spiritualism, Coues announced, was the most immediate concern of the day and its final disposition more urgent than “any other problem which we are now called upon to solve” (8). Coues asserted his belief in the fundamental truth of spiritualistic phenomena, fully aware that such a declaration amounted to “scientific suicide,” conceding that when news of his allegiance to spiritualism reached the scientists at the Smithsonian, they “will be asking if the remains of my reputation are to follow by express and have a decent funeral. But I had rather be right than in a wrong majority.” (14). The means by which spiritualism would be rendered practical and useful to human welfare, Coues suggested, was through psychical research, for he had “no fear for the result of the investigations now conducted in Chicago [and other cities] by men who are honest, intelligent, and not afraid to follow the truth wherever it may lead” (15). Coues moved on to a lengthy discourse on animal magnetism, “one of the greatest forces in nature,” and the agent he regarded as necessary for achieving success in psychical research, which he defined as “the investigation of the human soul” (26). Animal magnetism provided psychical researchers, Coues insisted, with the means for unlocking the secrets of the soul, providing them a “pass key to every mystery of life and death, and to every secret we may hope to disclose respecting the conditions of the soul’s existence after the death of the body.” (29). Coues described animal magnetism theoretically as “a conveyer of consciousness.....capable of acting without any known medium of

⁸³ While attending to theosophical matters in England during June 1884, Coues was elected to associate membership in the London SPR. Cutright and Brodhead, *Elliott Coues*, 296.

⁸⁴ The address was subsequently published as a 44 page pamphlet with supplementary testimonials and advertising material. In the following paragraph of the main text page numbers will follow quoted sections of Coue’s address which will be cited at the paragraph’s ending.

communication” (33). Animal magnetism, he declared, propelled forces which traversed through the powerful medium of an undetermined substance in which one person’s mind could reached the mind of another. This atmospheric substance or means by which animal magnetism moved from person to person Coues had in earlier writings named “biogen” whereas Theosophists and most other occultists commonly referred to the substance as ‘astral fluid’.⁸⁵ For Coues, this biogen or astral fluid was “the medium of all actual exchange of thought,” accounting for all genuine occurrences of mind-reading, clairvoyance, and telepathy (35). Sounding more like a philosophical occultist than an experimental or investigative scientist,⁸⁶ Coues insisted the biogenic or astral substance was “everywhere” and inextricably bound with animal magnetism, which he regarded as an inherent “element of the human constitution” (38). Coues closed his address by reminding his audience once again they were living in times “revolutionary in thought, in feeling, in belief,” resolving them to resolutely maintain “a steady eye [in order] to discern undimmed the truth that is surely advancing (43-44).⁸⁷

Press coverage of Coues’ talk was generally favorable with the *Tribune* reporting than a capacity crowd, “intelligent and appreciative,” gathered at the First Methodist Church and “listened with deep attention to the explanation of the phenomena of Theosophy and Spiritualism on scientific grounds.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Hudson Tuttle, a well-known spiritualist author, called this all-permeating substance “psychic ether,” which he regarded as “the thought atmosphere of the universe.” Like Coues, Tuttle considered all occult phenomena, including mesmerism, mind-reading, and thought-transference “correlated and explained” by the psychic ether. Hudson Tuttle, *Studies in the Out-Lying Fields of Psychic Science* (New York: M. L. Holbrook & Co., 1889), 5. For overviews of the ether, see Joe Milutis, *Ether: The Nothing That Connects Everything* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and *Conceptions of Ether: Studies in the History of Ether Theories, 1740-1900* ed. G. N. Cantor and M. J. S. Hodge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁸⁶ One newspaper article commented that since his conversion to theosophy, “his dress is careless, his trim beard has grown to almost patriarchal length, [and] his clear blue eye now has the dreamy look of mysticism, the gaze of an opium eater.” “A Notable Theosophist. Conversion of a Smithsonian Professor to Mysticism.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1886, 9.

⁸⁷ Elliott Coues, *The Chicago Address; Signs of the Times from the Standpoint of a Scientist; An Address Delivered at the First Methodist Church, April 26, 1888, under the Auspices of the Western Society for Psychical Research* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1889).

⁸⁸ “Tendency of the Times. Prof. Coues’ Lecture on An Interesting Topic.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 27, 1888, 3.

The Theosophical periodical *Lucifer* seemed pleased that Coues had evenhandedly treated the doctrines of Theosophy and Spiritualism, praising his “beautiful language,...elegance of diction,...and “clearness of expression.”⁸⁹ The journal expressed its gratitude to Dr. Coues for ably presenting the contours of psychical research and for reconciling differences between Spiritualism and Theosophy—two doctrines which, in its view, should be united in the mission for the promulgation “of truths which are at present only dimly recognized by a world which is liable to roughly class both parties together, either as worshippers of a devil, or hallucinated frauds and fools.”⁹⁰

As much as Coues attempted to rally the psychical researchers in Chicago to the cause of scientific occultism, the best days of the Western Society, like the original ASPR in Boston, were already behind them. At its peak in 1886, the WSPR boasted a membership (including Associate members not residing in Chicago) of over one-hundred and fifty men and women of strong occult leanings while monthly meetings at the Sherman House in Chicago averaged fifty to one hundred in regular attendance.⁹¹ Both the American and Western Societies faced a shortage of funding to be able to continue their work. While the Boston-based American group could point to some concrete results in the scientific study of mental functioning, the lack of scientific rigidity by the Chicago group and its cavalier, ‘wild’ dilettante variety of psychical research produced little, if any, contributions of substantive value to the elucidation and understanding of psychical phenomena. William James indicated as much in an 1890 letter to his friend and fellow philosopher Thomas Davidson (1840-1900) discussing the priorities of psychical research: “The only Society worth lifting one’s finger for must be one for *investigation of cases*, not for theoretic discussion—for *facts*, and not yet for *philosophy*.”

⁸⁹ “Reviews: Signs of the Times,” *Lucifer* 4 (April 15, 1889), 172.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁹¹ . “The Faith Cure. Discussed by the Rev. T. E. Greene at the Meeting of the Society for Psychical Research.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 4, 1886, 9.

[Unfortunately] The name of SPR has been sadly discredited by certain literary and spiritualistic societies in western cities.”⁹² Col. Bundy’s *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, while promoting the undertaking of psychical research in various American cities, lacked the standing to maintain a permanent organization with scientific stature in Chicago and the Midwest.⁹³

Richard Hodgson, Secretary of the American branch of the SPR, arrived in Chicago early April 1890 as the guest of Col. John C. Bundy to speak before the WSPR membership at the Sherman House and to invited guests at the home of Col. and Mrs. Bundy regarding the future directions of the newly reorganized American branch of the SPR. His purpose was also to help execute the dissolution of the WSPR and encourage its members to join the newly-constituted American branch.⁹⁴ And thus expired the Western Society for Psychical Research expired, an organization which seems to be a curious and rather unremarkable attempt at the scientific exploration of the occult phenomena. But as an example of the *fin-de-siècle* romanticism of spiritual philosophy and metaphysical speculation, its stands as a prime example of the period’s fascination with the occult and the kind of ‘dabbling’ much of the population engaged in. Devoid of a membership of scientifically trained investigators, excepting the few research-oriented physicians, but loaded with spiritualist-leaning clergy, judges, businessmen, and literary figures, many of whom were also connected with Chicago’s charitable organizations’ social

⁹² Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. 2, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1935), 161.

⁹³ The *R-PJ* proclaimed that societies for psychical research were “the fashion of our age.” “A Psychical Case,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 46 (March 30, 1889): 1. But the undisciplined, scattered approach to psychical research which defined the Chicago society was represented in the masthead of the *R-PJ* for 1889, which read “Harmonial Philosophy, Devoted to Spiritual Philosophy, the Arts and Sciences, Literature, Romance and General Reform.”

⁹⁴ “Spiritualists are Celebrating. Anniversary of the ‘Rochester Knockings’—The Fox Sisters.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 1890, 3; “Gleanings in Local Fields.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1890, 3; and “An Address to the Psychical Society.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1890, 6. One month later, on May 11, 1890, William James wrote John Bundy at the *R-PJ* editorial office expressing his delight “that you are at last reaping some of the fruit of it [the good fight] in the more solid place which your paper holds in the land.” James’ letter was one of many congratulatory letters sent to the *R-PJ* on the paper’s twenty-fifth anniversary. The vast majority of letters came from committed spiritualists. James, *Essays*, 23 & 401, n. 23.2.

reform efforts aimed at individual uplift, the WSPR feebly, though sincerely, attempted to penetrate the occluded realm of psychical phenomena. The American Branch would limp along until its reorganization in New York as a different, if not stronger, society in 1907. The WSPR expired for good although its officers and council members would soon be heard from again. Within a year or two of its dissolution plans were underway and organizational efforts afoot to arrange for a Psychical Science Congress as a Division of Science and Philosophy for the World's Congress Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition. The WSPR was gone, but psychical research in Chicago was far from over.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PSYCHICAL SCIENCE CONGRESS AND THEOSOPHY AT THE PARLIAMENT (I): PLANNERS, PREPARATIONS, AND EXPECTATIONS

Securing the Columbian Exhibition for Chicago

By the late-nineteenth century Chicago was not only the foremost example for Americans of the nation's immense capacity for urban growth, cultural development, and economic achievement, it had also become the premier modern metropolis of the Western world in the minds of many European observers, exemplifying both a boundless energy and an easy accommodation to rapid change. Between 1870 and 1890, Chicago rose in rank from the fifth to the second largest city in the United States, at the same becoming the fourth largest city in the world. Amazingly, among all the large *fin-de-siècle* metropolises, Chicago was the only one founded and settled during the nineteenth century. There was no doubt then, as the famed writer, Henry Loomis Nelson wrote, Chicago was "the new city of the new world."¹ By 1893 Chicago boasted a population of over one million and with its city limits encompassing 183 square miles it was larger in geographic size than any other city in the world. According to Arnold Lewis, in his illuminating study of modernism and the culture of Chicago's Loop, historians and other critical observers "have underestimated or forgotten that Chicago in these years was the Western world's most advanced metropolitan laboratory" and that the city's "weight and value as a barometer of transition at the beginning of the modern period were substantially greater than that of any novel, the entire oeuvre of an avant-garde artist, or any successful scientific or technical experiment of the day." Chicago, in the early 1890s, as Lewis presents it, enjoyed a great deal of international prestige and was hailed by a number of British and Continental writers as the most progressive and forward-looking metropolis in America, embracing change and technology at such a

¹ Henry Loomis Nelson, "The Clubs of Chicago," *Harper's Weekly* 36 (August 20, 1892), 806.

dazzling speed that the city reigned supreme as “the Western world’s urban laboratory of commercial and technological experimentation.”²

In advancing from a provincial city to an urban metropolis, Chicago had achieved what had been required of any great modern city. It’s expansive economic diversity included large agricultural processing centers such as its famous Union Stock Yards and meat packers such as Swift and Armour, a vast rail transportation network, a sprawling garment industry, steel companies, factories such as the McCormick Reaper Works, and an assortment of retail and department stores such as Montgomery Ward’s and Marshall Field’s. Newcomers, including foreign immigrants who made up forty percent of the city’s population, filled positions in all these areas of Chicago’s extensive economic environment. In addition, Chicago boasted as a vibrant cultural and educational complex with museums, theaters, historical societies, an Art Institute, universities, settlement houses, libraries, hospitals, a corps of authors and literary figures, and most famously, a “school of architects...revolutionizing world architecture.”³ At the Columbian Exposition of 1893 all this and more would be showcased for the nation and the entire world.

One major push to land the World’s Fair, originally scheduled for 1892, in Chicago came from Mayor De Witt C. Creiger who called upon the city council in July 1889 to form a group of leading citizens to lobby the federal government on behalf of the city. The city council thereupon provided him with a list of one hundred prominent Chicagoans that the Mayor quickly tripled in size, naming an executive committee to steer the new group. This executive committee became formally known as the

² Arnold Lewis, *An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago’s Loop, and the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 14, 20.

³ Joseph Gustaitis, *Chicago’s Greatest Year, 1893: The White City and the Birth of a Modern Metropolis* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 2; Susan E. Hirsch and Robert I. Goler, *A City Comes of Age: Chicago in the 1890s* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1990); Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1996); and Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 3-7.

World's Exposition Corporation. The State of Illinois lined up behind the project and in August 1889 granted the Corporation authority to raise stock subscriptions in order to secure the Fair. With the Corporation in place and promises of financial support from wealthy Chicagoans, the city seemed on course to secure the World's Fair. But a strong challenge from New York threatened to derail those plans. Fortunately for Chicago, the Corporation had in place a Board of Directors led by Lyman J. Gage, Vice President of the First National Bank, which began its lobbying efforts before Congress a full five weeks before the New York delegation arrived in Washington. A political riff among Republicans, along with embattlements with Tammany Hall, weakened New York's campaign and delayed the arrival of the New York contingent.⁴

Still, New York was mounting a formidable campaign to wrest the Exposition as its own, and the fierce battle between New York and Chicago, fought largely in the newspapers, became "one of the most extensive and acrimonious examples of intercity competition in American history." Heading into the actual vote in the House of Representatives in late February 1890, betting parlors placed Washington's odds at 40-to-1, St. Louis at 8-to-1, Chicago even, and New York at 4-to-5.⁵ In his *Memoirs*, Lyman Gage, Corporation President, recalled the efforts made on behalf of Chicago by the team of lobbyists, including Otto Young, Thomas B. Bryan, E. F. Lawrence, and legal advisor Edwin Walker that he led to Washington with a pledged amount of five million dollars from corporation shareholders. Gage and the group were rather taken back when told by the Chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee that New York had pledged ten million to secure the Exposition and that

⁴ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 42; Francis L. Lederer, II, "Competition for the World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago Campaign," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 65 (Winter 1972): 365-381; Robert D. Parmet, "Competition for the World's Columbian Exposition: The New York Campaign," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 65 (Winter 1972): 382-394; and Stanley Appelbaum, *The Chicago World's Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record* (New York: Dover Publications, 1980), esp. chapter 1, "From Conception to Opening Day," 1-6.

⁵ Richard Junger, *Becoming the Second City: Chicago's Mass News Media, 1833-1898* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 129, 138.

Chicago would have to follow suit, though the Congressional Committee believed it was beyond their reach to do so. Withdrawing to discuss the new challenge, Gage and Otto Young, a wealthy merchant, were determined to press ahead. Returning to the meeting, the two men declared their intent to meet the new amount now demanded and asked for twenty-four hours to wire the Exposition Corporation in Chicago for confirmation that the amount would be raised. In less than twenty-four hours they received a telegram of support signed by over thirty citizens with combined assets of over one hundred million dollars. The issue now seemed settled, and with the New York delegation losing heart, it appeared that Chicago was poised to be selected as the site for the Columbian Exposition. On the eighth ballot in the House of Representatives on February 24, 1890, the final votes were recorded: Chicago, 157; New York, 107; St. Louis, 25; and Washington, DC, 18 votes.⁶ The World's Fair, to be held in recognition of the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, was coming to Chicago.

After the lobbying delegation returned in triumph from Washington, corporation stockholders in April 1890 elected forty-five Chicagoans to serve as a Local Commission Directory to organize, finance, and administer the Exposition. Immediately thereafter the Directory met and chose as officers: Lyman J. Gage, President of the Commission; Thomas B. Bryan, attorney and former president of the Chicago Sanitary Fair, First Vice President; hotel magnate Potter Palmer, Second Vice President; and A. F. Seeberger, hardware wholesaler, Treasurer. As Gage put it, Chicago, the center of the rapidly growing western region of the United States, was now situated to display and project a vast array of “forces—material, moral, esthetic and spiritual—which would shape the form and substance of the future.”⁷

When the World's Columbian Exposition (WCE) opened in Jackson Park, on Chicago's south side, in May 1893, it was the culmination of a string of great nineteenth-century international fairs dating to

⁶ Lyman J. Gage, *Memoirs of Lyman J. Gage* (New York: House of Field, 1937), 79-80; and Junger, *Becoming the Second City*, 139.

⁷ Gage, *Memoirs*, 181; and Lisa Krissoff Boehm, *Popular Culture and the Enduring Myth of Chicago, 1871-1968* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 41-45.

London's Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851. Many believed the success of the Paris Exposition, which had set new standards for scale and display, could not be met by future fairs. Although the Paris Exposition attracted over 32 million people, many of whom climbed the just completed Eiffel Tower, Chicago's World's Fair occupied three times the enclosed space of the Paris Exposition of 1889 and drew an attendance of 27 million people, roughly forty-two percent of the nation's population of sixty-three million, who witnessed spectacular displays of technological marvels and futuristic devices which gave to fairgoers a glimpse of the coming century.⁸ While the Paris Exposition was the first international fair to illuminate the night utilizing electric lighting, the 1893 Columbian Exposition dramatized electricity even more powerfully, with over 90,000 incandescent lamps illuminating the buildings and grounds of the White City, presenting "the most impressive use of electrical energy ever witnessed by man and demanding three times the energy required to light the entire city of Chicago."⁹ Many rural Americans, who attended the Fair in droves, had never seen a light bulb, and the illuminated evening scenery, along

⁸ Lewis, *An Early Encounter*, 167-168. The Paris Exposition of 1889 covered 160 acres while the Columbian Exposition covered 633 acres. For surveys of the Columbian Exposition, see David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979); Robert W. Rydell, "A Cultural Frankenstein? The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893," 141-170, in *Grand Illusions: Chicago's World Fair of 1893* ed. Neil Harris, et. al. (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1993); Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The Chicago World's Fair of 1893: The World's Columbian Exposition* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1992); C. H. Edson, "AESA 1987 Presidential Address—Chicago: 1893," *Educational Studies* 19 (Spring 1988): 1-29; James Gilbert, "Fin-de-Siècle: A Contest of Cultures," *History Today* 42 (July 1992): 33-39; James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias of 1893* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Robert Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World: Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993).

⁹ Judith A. Adams, "The American Dream Actualized: The Glistening 'White City' and the Lurking Shadows of the World's Columbian Exposition," in *The World's Columbian Exposition; A Centennial Bibliographic Guide* comp. David J. Bertuca, Donald K. Hartman and Susan M. Neumeister (Westport, CN and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), xxi. See also Daniel T. Miller, "The Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the American National Character," *Journal of American Culture* 10 (Summer 1987), 19; Chaim M. Rosenberg, *America at the Fair: Chicago's World Columbian Exposition* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing Co., 2008); Robert W. Rydell, John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); and Julie K. Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display: International Expositions in the United States, 1876-1904* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), esp. Chapter 3, "Preventing Fear and Panic: The 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," 42-87.

with the massive display of machinery and gadgets on display in the Electricity Building, must have been awe-inspiring.

The World's Congress Auxiliary: Barometer of Intellectual and Moral Progress

To complement the impressive display of material progress that was to feature the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago jurist and devout Swedenborgian Charles Carroll Bonney (1831-1903) publicly proposed in a letter dated September 20, 1889 which was published in the *Statesman* (Chicago) for October of that year, to host a series of congresses that would feature man's intellectual and moral progress. As Bonney put it, mankind's "material triumphs, industrial achievements and mechanical victories" should not be regarded as the "crowning glory of the World's Fair;" instead, he insisted "something higher and nobler is demanded by the enlightened and progressive spirit of the present age." Bonney envisioned a series of congresses that would "surpass all previous efforts to bring about a real fraternity of nations, and unite the enlightened people of the whole earth in a general co-operation for the attainment of the great ends for which human society is organized."¹⁰ Organized efforts on behalf of the congresses began in earnest on October 30, 1890 with the official establishment of the World's Congress Auxiliary and the naming of the following officers: Charles C. Bonney, President; Thomas B. Bryan, Vice-President; Lyman J. Gage, Treasurer; and Benjamin Butterworth and Clarence E. Young as Secretary and Assistant Secretary respectively. The Auxiliary was also organized with a

¹⁰ Charles C. Bonney, et. al. "A World's Congress at the World's Fair. A Symposium," *Statesman* 6 (October 1889), 1, 2; and "The World's Congress Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition. A Circular," *Friends' Review* (August 13, 1891): 45. For a concise chronology of events relating to the formation of the WCA, see Charles C. Bonney, "Appendix A. The World's Congress Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition," 326-336, in *Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition—Chicago, 1892-1893* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1898); and Thomas B. Bryan, "World's Congress Auxiliary," 619-638, in Trumbull White and William Igleheart, *The World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893* (Boston: John K. Hastings, 1893). Bonney discusses the importance of the Swedenborgianism for his religious faith in Charles Carroll Bonney, "The Genesis of the World's Religious Congresses of 1893," *New Church Review* 1 (January 1894), 74-75. Described by the Rev. John Henry Barrows as "a man of earnest Christian conviction, broad philanthropy and great executive wisdom," Bonney remains an under-studied figure in the history of the World's Fair. John Henry Barrows, "The World's Congresses of 1893," *Independent* 44 (June 16, 1892), 4.

separate but equal Woman's Branch, with Bertha Honoré Palmer serving as President and Ellen M. Henrotin as Vice-President. Others named to the Board of the Women's Branch were Frances Willard, Myra Bradwell, and Dr. Sarah Hackett Stevenson, all of whom, including Ellen Henrotin, were associated in one way or another, with the Psychical Science Congress. On March 25, 1892, in a report of the Committee on Foreign Relations, formal recognition was granted to the World Congress Auxiliary (WCA) by the United States Senate, establishing it as the official agency to conduct international congresses in connection with the World's Columbian Exposition. This act of Congress established the Auxiliary an independent entity, not subordinate to the Exposition Directory in Chicago or the National Commission in Washington.

In addition to its central office and executive board, the WCA provided for local Committees of Arrangement for each congress, appointed by President Bonney and serving as the direct organizational body for lining up speakers and preparing a program. The Committee of Arrangements always consisted of a comparatively small number of men who resided in or near Chicago and who could actively participate in its organizational efforts. There was also a Women's Committee of Arrangements for each congress which worked in conjunction with the men. Each Committee of Arrangements was instructed to form an Advisory Council of eminent persons with some expertise in the subject matter of the particular congress, which would cooperate and assist the Arrangements Committee. One observer, while skeptical that the advisory committees were "to a dangerous degree composed of men with famous names and little enthusiasm," there nonetheless remained enough confidence in them that the summer congresses would highlight "even more distinctly an epoch in the history of thought than in the progress of industry."¹¹ Indeed, the WCA ambitiously proclaimed that its general objective sought to

¹¹ Willis John Abbot, "The World's Fair Congresses," *Christian Union* 46 (September 17, 1892), 491.

“bring all the departments of human progress into harmonious relations with each other” in order to “promote the progress, prosperity, unity, peace, and happiness of the world.”¹²

The WCA, envisioned as a ‘Summer University of the World,’ a ‘Convention of Conventions,’ and a ‘Congress of World Thinkers,’ with the motto “Not Matter, But Mind; Not Things, But Men,” planned to vastly surpass any previous international symposium in both scope of coverage and number of sessions. Sometimes referred to as the “reform congresses,” the World Auxiliary envisioned hosting a broad array of speakers who appealed to *fin-de-siècle* public sensibilities and included “artists and activists, vegetarians and theosophists, suffragettes and single taxers” who “promoted their prescriptions for the ills that plagued society.”¹³ The first congress commenced on May 15, 1893 and the last one ended October 28, 1893. After considerable planning and shuffling, the congresses were eventually formed into twenty Departments with 225 general Divisions holding a total of 1,283 sessions. Many final decisions on Departments and the divisions to be included in each Department were often in flux until just shortly before the congresses were scheduled to open. For example, in the spring of 1893 the projected science congresses of the Science and Philosophy Department slated to be held during the week of August 21-25, 1893 included chemistry, electricity, American Indian ethnology, meteorology, philosophy, psychical research, and zoology. By the time the congresses were underway in late August, the number of science divisions had expanded from seven to eleven.

Anticipating that large crowds would be drawn to the congresses, Auxiliary officers opted to hold them on a site away from the Fairgrounds in Jackson Park at the magnificent newly constructed “Memorial Art Palace,” a massive three-story building, designed by Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, and funded through the Art Institute of Chicago, the Exposition Directory, and the city of Chicago. Located

¹² R. M. Foster, “Philosophy at the Chicago Exposition,” *Philosophical Review* 2 (January 1893), 124-125.

¹³ Dennis B. Downey, *A Season of Renewal: The Columbian Exposition and Victorian America* (Westport, CN.: Praeger, 2002), 133.

near Lake Michigan, just in front of the Auditorium Hotel near the center of the city, the Art Palace would formally be named the Art Institute on November 1, 1893. The Memorial Art Palace contained two large temporary assembly halls that were designed explicitly for Auxiliary Congress use: the Hall of Columbus and the Hall of Washington, each with a seating and standing capacity of 3,000 to 4,000 people each, situated between the two wings of the building. Both large audience rooms would not remain as part of the permanent Art Institute and were disassembled at the closing of the World's Fair. On the east and west sides of the building were two large wings, containing thirty-three smaller meeting rooms ranging in capacity from 300 to over 700. The Art Palace was considered large enough to hold concurrent sessions and was designed to seat a maximum number of 12,000. When the Auxiliary Congresses ended their final sessions in October 1893, a total of 3,817 speakers representing ninety-seven nations, provinces, or colonies, and fifty states and territories of the United States, spoke before audiences totaling over 700,000.¹⁴

Due to the size, scope, and scheduling requirements of the congresses, audience members were not allowed to debate with those who addressed them, nor were speakers to offer commentary on other presentations. Strict regulations were in place to exclude questions and voluntary speeches in order to provide the time allotted to those selected by the Arrangements Committees to give their addresses. Any controversy was therefore disallowed and there was to be no passing of resolutions of approval or censure. Speakers were expected not to attack the views of others, but to present with as much clarity and objectivity as possible, the merits of their own position. "It was assumed," as David F.

¹⁴ David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 238, 284. See particularly his chapter on "The World's Congress Auxiliary," pp. 235-285; Ellen M. Henrotin, "The Great Congresses at the World's Fair," *Cosmopolitan* 14 (March 1893): 626-632; "The World's Fair. Many Interesting Things to Hear as Well as See." *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1893, 6; J. Seymour Currey, *Chicago: Its History and Its Builders; A Century of Marvelous Growth*, vol. 3, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912), 67-68; Neil Harris, "The Art Institute of Chicago, 1893-1993," 6-15, in *Chicago's Dream, a World's Treasure: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1893-1993* ed. Teri J. Edelstein (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1993); "World's Auxiliary Congresses." *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1892, 12; "For Congress Work. Arrangements Making in the Art Institute Building." *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1893, 9; and "Memorial Art Palace Opened. The Building Is, However, by No Means Completed." *New York Times*, May 13, 1893, 5.

Burg, an Auxiliary Congress historian notes, “that those who spoke to the congresses would reach a larger audience through discussions of their addresses in pulpits, newspapers, magazines, and private conversations—a justified assumption.” Though not an open forum for public debate, the Auxiliary Congresses provided “an enormous pulpit upon which was focused the attention of a large part of the world,” with the presentations becoming “widely known, influential, and provocative.”¹⁵

Lyman J. Gage: Civic Leader and Séance Sitter

It would be difficult to find an individual more actively involved both in bringing the World’s Fair to Chicago and in serving as an organizer for the World’s Congress Auxiliary than Lyman J. Gage, who interfaced with nearly all the major social, political, and religious issues of the late-nineteenth century—monetary issues, labor questions, civic reform, religion, and science. Lyman Judson Gage (1836-1927), who would later serve as the 42nd United States Secretary of the Treasury (1897-1902) under both Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt was, as we saw earlier, chosen in 1890 to serve as president of the Board of Directors of the World’s Columbian Exposition, the successful financing of which was due more to him than to any other person. Immediately following the Exposition and the closing ceremonies of World’s Congress Auxiliary, Gage became president of the newly formed Chicago Civic Federation, a reform group pledged to clean up Chicago’s corrupt political system and initiate relief programs for the unemployed and homeless suffering from the Depression of 1893. In fact, most Chicagoans viewed Gage as “the ideal citizen,” with Moses P. Handy writing in 1897 that for the past decade “no movement for civic aggrandizement, no patriotic endeavor, no effort for municipal reform, [and] no great charitable undertaking” had been undertaken in Chicago without the active participation, if not outright leadership, of Lyman J. Gage. Landing his first job in Chicago around 1855 as a day laborer and night

¹⁵ Burg, *Chicago’s White City*, 238. Not everyone was satisfied with the prohibition of public comment. One anarchist periodical in particular railed at the “narrowness and bigotry” at “this thought-suppressing congress.” “Chicago’s Pious Pow-Wow,” *Liberty (Not the Daughter but the Mother of Order)* 8 (October 24, 1891), 2.

watchman in a lumber yard, Gage soon secured a position as bookkeeper for the Merchants' Loan & Trust Co. In a few months he was promoted to teller and in 1860 became a cashier, a position he held for the next eight years. Gage began his association with the First National Bank of Chicago in 1868 as an assistant cashier, becoming vice-president and general manager in 1882 during a major reorganization and in 1891 was named the bank's president. Under his management, the bank acquired the nickname "Gibraltar of Western capital," accumulating a surplus of over \$2,000,000 with deposits "not infrequently greater than those of any other banking house in America."¹⁶ At the time he became vice-president and general manager, he also won three successive terms (1882-1884) as president of the American Bankers' Association. As Secretary of the Treasury, Gage was influential in securing passage of the Gold Standard Act of 1900 which reestablished currency backed solely by gold.

Most of Gage's friends and business associates were struck by his "catholic hospitality to ideas" and his taste for engaging in long discussions pertaining religious and scientific matters. It was well known that Gage was particularly drawn to spiritualism and he enjoyed, for better or worse, a reputation as an earnest investigator of spiritualistic phenomena. An ardent student of psychical science, he was a member and officer (Auditor) of the Western Society for Psychical Research, and held a corresponding membership with the London SPR, keeping its monthly journal and annual proceedings in a central location in his home library. However, somewhat strangely, in the interview published by Moses Handy, Gage denied any relation of the supernatural in the production of spiritualist manifestations. "I do not believe in spiritualism," Gage stated in the article, "I wish I could....For my part the further I look into these things the better I am satisfied that any explanation of them is more

¹⁶ Moses P. Handy, "Lyman J. Gage: A Character Sketch," *Review of Reviews* [New York] 15 (March 1897), 289-290; "McKinley's Secretary of the Treasury: Lyman J. Gage," *Literary Digest* 14 (February 13, 1897): 455; "Lyman J. Gage," in *Unrivaled Chicago, Containing an Historical Narrative of the Great City's Development with Biographical Sketches of Representative Men in Their Several Lines* (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1897), 53; and Hon. Lyman J. Gage, Secretary of the United States Treasury," *Bankers' Magazine* 58 (March 1899): 408-409.

rational and more justified than that of the instrumentality of spirits, of astral bodies or of any supernatural power.”¹⁷ This hardly resonates with the testimony on behalf of spiritualism Gage offered in his *Memoirs* where he speaks of spiritualistic encounters which “brought me a deepening conviction of the reality of the spiritual world, and strengthened my belief in the continuance of consciousness or life after death.” He was known to frequent séances in Chicago, particularly those of a Mrs. Billings who resided on Ogden Avenue and who he believed possessed information about events and people she could not possibly have known except through a supernatural sense. In addition, when vacationing or on business trips to the East, Gage often visited mediums in Boston, New York, and Washington. He wrote that spiritualism had “opened a wide and wonderful door for *knowing* that there is life of the soul after the death of the body,” and that there existed in the spiritual realm, “a great galaxy of future existences, whose beauty we cannot even guess.”¹⁸

William T. Stead, the famed British editor, publisher, reformer, and psychical researcher met with Gage on numerous occasions during his extended stay in Chicago from October 1893 to March 1894 and came away rather impressed with Gage’s devotion to both spiritualism and psychical research. Writing in 1897, Stead remarked somewhat ironically that Gage, “the most popular and influential member of McKinley’s Cabinet,” and who was a known fiscal conservative “should be the man who was more intensely interested in all forms of psychic research than any other man I met in America.” Stead declared that Gage was “by universal consent, far and away the ideal citizen,” and Chicago’s “foremost representative” who showed more interest “in discussing the possibility of Doubles, of Clairvoyance, of Psychometry, and all other phenomena, than in discussing any other subject whatever.” While in Chicago Stead attended a number of gatherings at Gage’s home where former members of the Western Society for Psychical Research entreated him with questions regarding Stead’s investigations of psychical

¹⁷ Handy, “Lyman J. Gage,” 295-296.

¹⁸ Gage, *Memoirs*, 184-189.

phenomena and future articles that might appear in his new occult journal *Borderland*.¹⁹ At the same time Stead shared his impressions of Gage, American newspapers were seizing on widely reported rumors that Gage had consulted a medium prior to his trip to Canton, OH to discuss with the President-Elect his appointment to the new cabinet. The papers mocked Gage as “a firm believer in occultism” and a follower of Madame Blavatsky, and that the medium in question had assured him that the country’s finances would be safe and secure should he accept the Treasury post.²⁰ The story was never confirmed by Gage’s associates and the meeting in Canton went smoothly as William McKinley offered him the Treasury job. McKinley later related to a friend his assessment of Gage by remarking, “I never met a man in my life with whom I was so favorably impressed by a day’s acquaintance.”²¹

Defining Psychology: Hypnotism, Psychical Research, or University Laboratory Instruments

It was just this sort of press attention to matters of spiritualism, psychical research, and the occult that befuddled the reading public attempting to distinguish psychology from psychical research and occultism. For a great number of Americans it seemed there was little or no difference. Joseph Jastrow, a noted pioneer of academic psychology in the United States, in looking back at the closing years of the nineteenth century, remarked that in the public mind a psychologist was “a spook-hunter or marvel-monger, or a psychical researcher.”²² Such was the public perception at the time of the Psychical Science Congress, even as experimental psychology was beginning to secure a footing in American

¹⁹ “Mr. Lyman J. Gage,” *Borderland* 4 (April 1897), 117.

²⁰ “Told Him What Was In the Vault. How Lyman Gage’s Friend Was Converted to Spiritualism.” *Washington Post*, February 1, 1897, 6; “Mr. Gage, It Is Said, Is A Firm Believer In Spiritualism. He Has Investigated Also the Teaching of the Theosophical Cult. *St. Louis Republic*, January 30, 1897, 1; “Is Gage a Spiritualist? Story That He Consulted a Medium Before Going to Canton.” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 17, 1897, 10; and “Spirit Advice Said to Have Been Taken by the New Secretary of the Treasury.” *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver] February 5, 1897, 4.

²¹ Handy, “Lyman J. Gage,” 300.

²² Joseph Jastrow, *Wit and Wisdom: Episodes in the Vagaries of Belief* (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935), 197.

universities. The tension between university experimental psychologists and psychical researchers resulting from their struggles to define, expand, or limit the parameters of ‘psychology’ in the 1880s and 1890s stands as a defining feature of *fin-de-siècle* psychological history. William James, as is well known, was nearly alone among academic psychologists who believed that psychical research had a place in the university psychological laboratory, and was strongly opposed by nearly all his peers for taking this position, often denouncing him in public for his eclectic heterogeneous views.²³

Although it can fairly be regarded as the first international congress uniquely devoted to psychical research, the 1893 Psychical Science Congress in Chicago did not arise in a vacuum. It was rooted in two previous congresses on psychology, the first in Paris in 1889 and the second in London in 1892, both of which demonstrated the conflict between the hypnotism/psychical research wing and the experimental university psychologists. To France goes the credit for initiating a series of congresses highlighting gains in science and intellectual knowledge during the nineteenth century which was held alongside the Paris International Exposition of 1889. Hypnotism, reflecting the status it had attained in medical psychology, was the chief focus of the First International Congress of Psychology held in Paris

²³ See e.g. Jill G. Morawski and Gail A. Hornstein, “Quandary of the Quacks: The Struggle for Expert Knowledge in American Psychology, 1890-1940,” 106-133, in *The Estate of Social Knowledge* ed. JoAnne Brown and David K. van Keuren (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Deborah J. Coon, “Testing the Limits of Sense and Science: American Experimental Psychologists Combat Spiritualism, 1880-1920,” *American Psychologist* 47 (February 1992): 143-151; Paul Jerome Croce “Between Spiritualism and Science: William James on Religion and Human Nature,” *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 42.2 (1997): 197-220; Marcus Ford, “William James’s Psychical Research and Its Philosophical Implications,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 34 (Summer 1998): 605-626; Eugene Taylor, *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999); Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. “Psychology before 1900,” 2-11, in *21st Century Psychology: A Reference Handbook* ed. Stephen F. Davis and William Buskist (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008); Francesca Bordogna, *William James at the Boundaries: Philosophy, Science, and the Geography of Knowledge* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr., “History of Popular Psychology in America.” 22-46, in *Encyclopedia of the History of Psychological Theories* ed. Robert W. Rieber, vol. 1, (New York: Springer, 2012); Andreas Sommer, “Psychical Research and the Origins of American Psychology: Hugo Munsterberg, William James and Eusapia Palladino,” *History of the Human Sciences* 25 (April 2012): 23-44; and Andreas Sommer “Crossing the Boundaries of Mind and Body: Psychical Research and the Origins of Modern Psychology” (PhD diss., University College, London, 2013).

from August 6-10, 1889 under the presidency of Theodore Ribot. Like the 1893 Psychological Science Congress in Chicago, the First International Congress of Psychology was one among a number of congresses representing other sciences. Two Americans who attended the 1st International Congress of Psychology, William James and Joseph Jastrow, represented opposing sides of the emerging divide in American psychology over metaphysics. The full name of this congress was the International Congress of Physiological (to indicate 'scientific') Psychology and it was organized by the French Society of Physiological Psychology, a short-lived organization founded by Charles Richet, a noted Professor of Medicine. But it was Theodore A. Ribot (1839-1916) who took the initiative to organize the congress on behalf of the French Society of Physiological Psychology. The famous neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot was named President, but he apparently did not attend any of its sessions and Ribot was in effect the chief executive of the congress. Four main themes dominated discussion at this First Congress: hallucinations, which included telepathy; hypnotism; heredity; and muscular sensations.²⁴

The content of the program only furthered the ongoing controversies over the proper intellectual domain of psychology. One controversy raged over hypnotism and when a number of British and Continental physicians who practiced hypnosis submitted papers on therapeutic hypnotism, the program committee rejected most of them, and so the physicians decided to hold their own congress. This congress, the 1st International Congress on Hypnotism, which overlapped with the Congress of Physiological Psychology, published proceedings more than twice the length as those of the psychologists. The first session of the psychology congress, on hallucinations, was chaired by Henry Sidgwick, professor of philosophy at Cambridge and President of the London Society for Psychical Research. Sidgwick formed a committee tasked to collect examples of occurrence of hallucinations, regarded at the time as the sensation or extra-sensory perception perceived by one individual at the moment of death of another person, and to undertake a statistical analysis of such reported

²⁴ Mark R. Rosenzweig, et. al. *History of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS)* (East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, Ltd., 2000), 12-18.

hallucinations. Joseph Delboeuf, Professor of Psychology at the University of Liège (Belgium) and the founder of its psychological laboratory, chaired the second session of the congress, which was devoted to hypnotism. Nearly all the presentations of this session were devoted to the two opposed positions regarding the nature of hypnosis, that of the so-called Nancy school led by Hippolyte Bernheim and August Ambrose Liébeault of Nancy, France and that of the Salpetriere hospital in Paris led by Charcot. Francis Galton presided over the session on heredity and William James presided over the session devoted to muscular sensations and reactions. This latter session was held in order to give more attention to the experimental, physiological psychology that had emerged out of Germany a decade earlier. Wilhelm Wundt, the founder of experimental psychology in Germany, frowned upon the extended role hypnotism had played at the First Congress and he and other German psychologists had been visibly annoyed with the British psychical researchers' use of the term 'experimental psychology' to describe their investigations of the paranormal, fearing it challenged the credibility of the new psychology just beginning to establish itself in university departments. Wundt believed that the Second International Congress, named the Congress of Experimental Psychology with Henry Sidgwick chosen as President, and scheduled to be held in August 1892 in London, would simply be a psychical research festival. Sidgwick countered that he hoped German psychologists could appreciate that hypnotism provided new opportunities for psychological experimentation. Finally though, since so many psychologists had expressed their opposition to an emphasis on hypnosis, a special section on hypnotism was scheduled to run parallel with sessions on neurology and psychophysics, while general meetings were devoted to experimental psychology.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid., 19-21; and Marlene Shore, "'Nebulous Penumbra': James Mark Baldwin and the Borderlands of Psychology," in *Thinkers and Dreamers: Historical Essays in Honour of Carl Berger* ed. Gerald Friesen and Doug Owrarn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 106-107.

After choosing London as the location for the next gathering of psychologists, the question of what to name this second international congress received considerable attention. Some psychologists preferred retaining the name International Congress of Physiological Psychology but eventually the Paris delegates opted for the title of International Congress of Experimental Psychology. With Sidgwick elected as President of the second congress and Frederic Myers chosen as First Secretary, the London Society of Psychical Research seemed poised to dominate and control the London proceedings. Over three hundred psychologists, philosophers, physicians, and other interested scientists attended the International Congress of Experimental Psychology which took place at University College on August 1-4, 1892. With nearly fifty papers expected to be presented at the congress, the English organizers created two concurrent running sessions with presentations on neurology and psycho-physics forming one section and papers dealing with hypnotism and related phenomena forming the other session. Included in the latter was psychical research, much to the distaste of Wilhelm Wundt who convinced a contingent of German psychologists to join him in refusing to attend the Congress. Quite disappointed by the boycott of a number of German psychologists, Sidgwick, in his presidential address, hoped that his own narrow approach to psychology had not too greatly affected the scope of the Congress. Sidgwick, in fact, had been studiously careful not to give psychical research the primary position in proceedings of the Congress and had gone to great lengths in order to get the Germans to attend the London Congress. After working to improve his fluency in German, he visited a number of German professors in the spring of 1892 and urged them to participate in the upcoming congress, to little avail. He recalled later that he had attended the 1889 Paris Congress only out of friendship for Charles Richet and was surprised to find himself elected as President of the 2nd congress in London, particularly since his only work in psychology pertained to telepathy and action at a distance. As it turned out, only a few papers at the Second Congress of Experimental Psychology were devoted to psychical research, with a major report being the international survey of telepathic hallucinations which had been planned at the Paris Congress, co-

authored by Sidgwick, William James, and the French psychologist Léon Marillier. One resolution before the Congress, of particular relevance to our study of the psychical science congress, invited American psychologists to organize an extraordinary session in Chicago to be held in connection with the World's Fair. A committee of American psychologists appointed to explore this idea—James M. Baldwin, Henry H. Donaldson, George S. Fullerton, G. Stanley Hall, William James, Lightner Witmer, and William Romaine Newbold—quickly abandoned the idea. It is likely that their decision occurred in tandem with a similar measure being explored by the newly formed American Psychological Association (APA). Not only were the American psychologists in London and the APA concerned about the possible content of such a congress, fearing that once again hypnotism and psychical research might feature prominently, but more importantly, they could not help but be aware that psychical researchers located in Chicago had secured a congress at the Columbian Exposition and thus decided it best not to compete directly with them. Instead, university psychologists chose other venues at the World's Fair to display and demonstrate their laboratory instruments and particular applications of experimental psychology to the American public.²⁶

Psychical Research and the WCA Department of Science and Philosophy

In the meantime, psychical research in Chicago had made rapid headway in becoming a featured attraction at the Columbian Exposition, thanks primarily to the efforts of Col. John C. Bundy. In the fall of 1891, without public fanfare, Bundy secured a place for psychical science with the World's Congress Auxiliary Executive Committee—President Bonney, a Swedenborgian, was most likely sympathetic to psychical research and Lyman Gage, Treasurer, had been a member of the Western Society for Psychical

²⁶ Rosenzweig, et. al. *History of the International Union*, 22-32; and Marlene Shore, "Psychology and Memory in the Midst of Change: The Social Concerns of Late-19th-Century North American Psychologists," in *The Transformation of Psychology: Influences of 19th-Century Philosophy, Technology, and Natural Science* ed. Christopher D. Green, Marlene Shore, and Thomas Teo (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 78-79. The Third International Congress of Experimental Psychology, postponed until 1896, was held in Munich.

Research. This landing of psychical science in the Science and Philosophy Department of the WCA had no doubt contributed to the decision of American academic psychologists to abandon any attempt to organize a congress of their own as they could not hope to compete in drawing to their sessions the crowds expected to gather to listen to the papers of the 'spook hunters.' President Bonney issued a preliminary announcement in October 1891 outlining the general considerations which should be incorporated into the programs and presentations of each division of the Science and Philosophy Department. Each science congress was expected to consider: 1) their origin, development, and present status; 2) current unresolved issues and the methods available for their solution; 3) the relation of their science to all the others; and 4) their science's relationship "to human history and progress, to the problems of social life, to economic interests, to commerce, to the fine arts, and to the political interests of the people."²⁷ The eleven divisions in Science and Philosophy settled upon for the Auxiliary Congress were: Astronomy and Mathematics, Meteorology, Geology, Chemistry, Electricity, Zoology, Pharmacy, Anthropology, Ethnology and Archeology, Psychical Science, and Philosophy.²⁸ The general committee of the Science and Philosophy Department met soon after to discuss arrangements for each science congress.²⁹

Earlier that same month, on October 5, President Bonney announced the names of those who would be serving on the Committee of Arrangements for a Psychical Science Congress. Anyone serving on the Arrangements Committee was required to live in Chicago or the nearby vicinity in order to attend

²⁷ "Scientific and Philosophical. Plans for a Congress at the World's Fair—The Subjects It Will Discuss." *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1891, 12.

²⁸ Pharmacy had been moved from Medicine to Philosophy and Science. Philosophy had no general divisions and was served by just one Chairman and one General Committee. Interestingly, the make-up of the General Committee of Philosophy included a number individuals with ties to occultism, particularly to the Philosophical Society of Chicago, including Henry M. Lyman, Rev. L. P. Mercer, Arba N. Waterman, Paul Carus, and Rev. Dr. H. W. Thomas.

²⁹ "Planning Scientific Congresses. A Meeting for the Purpose Held in the Rooms of the World's Congress Auxiliary." *Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 1891, 15. Col. Bundy, Dr. A. Reeves Jackson, and D. H. Lamberson represented psychical science at this meeting of the Department of Science and Philosophy.

meetings and assist in preparations. Named as officers were Col. John C. Bundy—Chairman, and Professor Elliott Coues—Vice Chairman. Rounding out the committee were Lyman J. Gage, Ernest E. Crepin, Rev. Dr. H. W. Thomas, Dr. A. Reeves Jackson, and D. H. Lamberson.³⁰ All, including Coues, had been members or associates of the WSPR. Bonney thereupon submitted a list of topics and issues to Col. Bundy and the committee to incorporate into their congress program. His list closely resembled the one he had submitted to the Department of Science and Philosophy. In his circular to the Psychological Science Committee, President Bonney requested that presentations address the “origin, development, and scope of psychology, the modern movement under the name of psychical research, and its proper scope, methods, and limitations.” Note that Bonney regarded psychical research as a legitimate branch of psychology, an assumption rejected, of course, by most academic psychologists. In addition, speakers at the Psychological Science Congress were asked to address: a) the relationship of mind, spirit, and matter; b) psychical theories throughout history; c) notions regarding psychical force; d) the nature of the soul; e) physical phenomena attributed to spiritualism; f) telepathy and clairvoyance; g) hypnotism and magnetic healing; and h) immortality as revealed through science and religion.³¹

In just a few months, press notices, both favorable and critical, of the forthcoming psychical congress began appearing in both national and regional newspapers. In January 1892, the *Washington Post* predicted that “Theosophists, Spiritualists, and other followers of mysterious beliefs” would no doubt be pleased over the arrangements of the congress since the “most marvelous accomplishments”

³⁰ Coues announced in the early spring of 1892 that two more Chicagoans had been added to the committee, James H. McVicker, theater manager and owner, and D. Harry Hammer (1840-1904), attorney and justice of the peace. A Republican, Hammer had been appointed Justice of the Peace in 1878 by Gov. Shelby M. Cullom, serving two terms before leaving office. He had extensive real estate holdings throughout the city and held memberships in the Union League, Calumet Club, and the Knights Templar. “Correspondence: Psychical Science at the World’s Fair in 1893,” *Nation* 54 (April 14, 1892): 282; and “Veteran Lawyer and Justice Dead.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 31, 1904, 16.

³¹ “To Discuss Psychical Research. Appointment of a World’s Congress Auxiliary Committee by Mr. Bonney.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1891, 7.

of both movements “will be given for the benefit of spectators.”³² Another newspaper feared that the prevailing atmosphere at the upcoming congress would be wholly unscientific, and since it appeared to be just a “gathering of spiritualists and followers of the Mahatmas,” the proceedings would undoubtedly be “a boom for spiritualism and theosophy.”³³

But for the organizers, the congress provided a platform, as Elliott Coues promised, for an “exchange of thought and expression of opinion that will be of incalculable value.” Coues believed the timing of this first international congress devoted only to psychical research could not be more favorable as “these subjects are now being written about and spoken about throughout the world more than at any previous period of the world’s progress.”³⁴ Considerable agreement in the press appeared on this point. There was clearly “a steadily growing interest in things psychical,” noted one Western paper, so much so that “sometimes it seems that the very air is pervaded by it.” Another paper jokingly emphasized that anyone “who doesn’t know that occultism in some shape or other is winning its way” and “that the number of brainy people who dabble in hypnotism and mesmerism and a score of other isms is largely on the increase and that the time for finding out what they mean and what practical use of them can be made is at hand—the man who doesn’t know all this is so far behind the age that you couldn’t discover him with a Lick telescope.”³⁵ Spiritualism, psychical research, and occult science

³² “Proposed Congress of Occult Science.” *Washington Post*, January 30, 1892, 5.

³³ “Multiple News Items.” *Morning Oregonian* [Portland] April 6, 1892, 4.

³⁴ “Psychical Research. Preparations for a Congress during the World’s Fair—Prof. Elliott Coues Talks.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, March 22, 1892, 1. A number of newspapers in the spring of 1892 were hopeful that the congress would generate knowledge beneficial to human progress. “Psychical Science Congress.” *Washington Post*, March 27, 1892, 4. Similar notices of the upcoming Psychical Congress can be found in [No Title] *Mower County Transcript* [Lansing, MN] April 6, 1892, 4; [No Title] *Knoxville Journal*, April 13, 1892, 2; and [No Title] *Idaho Statesman* [Boise] May 6, 1892, 4.

³⁵ “Psychical Congress. The Government Recognizes the Phenomena of Spiritualism for Investigation. *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver, CO] February 17, 1893, 3; and “Snap Shots at Recent Books. An Ingenious Theory to Account for Manifestations of Psychic Force.” *New York Herald*, May 7, 1893, 16. The James Lick Telescope, built in 1888, was at that time the largest refracting telescope in the world.

pervaded public conversation and references to these subjects could be found in most newspapers and periodicals throughout the country.

Coues hoped to draw from Britain and Europe the most eminent scientific investigators in psychical research to read papers at the Congress. He confidently announced that William Crookes, the noted physicist, and Alfred Russel Wallace, the famed naturalist, would be in attendance. Both men were actively involved in psychical research with Wallace himself a declared spiritualist. Coues expected that over 100 of the “most renowned scientists of the world” would be present to participate in the proceedings and that the total delegation of luminaries from various fields would total over 1,000. Those foreign dignitaries he hoped draw to Chicago included: Henry Sidgwick, Trinity College, Cambridge; Frederic W. H. Myers, London SPR; Baron du Prel, Berlin; Dr. J. U. Hubbe-Schleiden, editor of *The Sphinx* (Munich) an occult periodical; the Rev. W. Stanton Moses, editor of *Light*, the leading spiritualist periodical in Britain; Professor Balfour Stuart, Owen College, Manchester; physics professor William F. Barrett, Dublin; Countess Caroline von Spreti, Possenhofen, Bavaria; Alex N. Aksakof, St. Petersburg; Max Dessoir, Berlin; Eduard Von Hartman, Berlin; Professor Kovalevsky, University of Kharkoff, Russia; Ambrose A. Liébeault, Nancy, France; Cesare Lombroso, Turin; and Theodore Ribot, editor of the *Revue Philosophique*, Pierre Janet, Camille Flammarion, and Charles Richet, all from Paris. In addition Coues expected the following Americans to attend the Congress: the Rev. Minot J. Savage, Boston; William James, Cambridge, MA; Edward D. Cope, Philadelphia; Samuel P. Langley, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.; Bishop J. P. Newman; Senator John M. Palmer; and noted women Ellen Henrotin, Lucy Flower, and Frances Willard, all of Chicago.³⁶ Most of the famous psychologists and

³⁶ “Psychical Research. Preparations for a Congress during the World’s Fair—Prof. Elliott Coues Talks.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, March 22, 1892, 1. A number of newspapers in the spring of 1892 were hopeful that the congress would generate knowledge beneficial to human progress. “Psychical Science Congress.” *Washington Post*, March 27, 1892, 4. Similar notices of the upcoming Psychical Congress can be found in [No Title] *Mower County Transcript* [Lansing, MN] April 6, 1892, 4; [No Title] *Knoxville Journal*, April 13, 1892, 2; and [No Title] *Idaho Statesman* [Boise] May 6, 1892, 4.

scientists on this, including William James, did not, in fact, attend the Chicago congress on psychical research. A significant number did however send papers to be read, and the London SPR commissioned Frederic Myers to read papers on behalf of members unable to attend.

Giles B. Stebbins, a spiritualist of some note who would deliver a paper at the psychical congress was jubilant over the prospects of the forthcoming proceedings, expecting that the answers to questions regarding spiritualism and immortality would finally shed significant, if not definitive, light on the prospects of the human condition. He noted that nearly every letter of acceptance to serve on the Advisory Council was “cordial and sincere.” He cited one letter in particular to Col. Bundy from Frances Willard and Isabel Somerset which read “Lady Henry and I will gladly go on your advisory council. We like you, and admire your championship of occult science. We, too, have souls (!), and would gladly know, as well as gently believe, in their perpetual individual consciousness....Believe us ever yours sincerely, in the love of God and the hope of immortality.”³⁷ Others showed a similar enthusiasm at the prospects of associating with the congress. On April 2, 1892, the noted free-thought lecturer B. F. Underwood wrote to Elliott Coues as follows: “the last few years have led me to believe that the science of the future will enter upon new possessions of incomparable value through the doors of psychical research. I have no doubt that the Psychical Science Congress, under the judicious management of its committee, will prepare the way for, and contribute to this result.”³⁸

³⁷ Giles B. Stebbins, “Psychical Science Congress at the Columbian Exposition,” *Unitarian* 7 (August 1892), 380-381. The letters of support from both Isabel Somerset and Frances Willard to Col. Bundy in August 1892 can also be found in [no author] *James G. Blaine on the Money Question and Other Psychic Articles* (Minneapolis: Aetna Publishing Co., 1896), 19-20. For notices of acceptance from foreign scientists to serve on the Advisory Council as well as those indicating their intention to attend the congress, see “Psychical Science. Arrangements for the Proposed Congress at Chicago in 1893.” *Baltimore Sun*, July 18, 1892, 6; “Coming to the Psychical Science Congress.” *Washington Post*, June 26, 1892, 7; and “To Attend the Psychical Congress.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 1892, 5.

³⁸ “B.F. Underwood Writes to Prof. Elliott Coues.” *Boston Investigator*, May 25, 1892, 6.

As noted in the *Rocky Mountain News*, a Western newspaper published in Denver, the Advisory Council for the Psychological Science Congress overflowed with names that were “almost household words—scholars, scientists and all the titles which the twenty-six letters of the alphabet can be made to stand for.” The list included, in addition to those previously mentioned: William Torrey Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education; the Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott, pastor of Brooklyn’s First Congregational Church; Matilda Joslyn Gage, suffragist; Henry Holt, New York publisher; Rev. Edward Everett Hale, Boston pastor; Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor; Clara Barton, founder and president of the Red Cross Association; Jean-Martin Charcot, French neurologist; Benjamin Orange Flower, editor of *Arena* magazine; Ernst Haeckel, German scientist; Emma Hardinge Britten, editor, author, and noted British spiritualist; John Dewey, professor of education; and perhaps the most widely known American at the time, Thomas Edison.³⁹ But not every name on the Advisory Council was well-known or apparently even recognizably credentialed in psychical research. For example, when it was announced that Hans S. Beattie, ex-Street-Cleaning Commissioner of New York City, had been appointed to the Advisory Council, the *New York Tribune*, while puzzled over “Mr. Beattie’s qualifications for this post of honor” nonetheless hoped that “he will be more successful in his pursuit of psychical science than he was in the pursuit of clean streets for New-York.”⁴⁰

Nor was everyone asked to serve on the council enamored with the prospect of being associated with occult elements of psychical science. Lester Frank Ward, scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey, is a case in point. Ward, while largely skeptical of the claims of spiritualists, had never ruled out the possibility of communicating with the departed. He subscribed to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* and was known to attend séances, mostly out of curiosity. But according to one

³⁹ “Psychical Congress. The Government Recognizes the Phenomena of Spiritualism for Investigation.” *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver], February 17, 1893, 3; and “The Psychological Science Congress.” *San Francisco Morning Call*, February 26, 1893, 16.

⁴⁰ Home News. New-York City.” *New York Tribune*, May 15, 1892, 12; and “Editorial.” *New York Tribune*, May 19, 1892, 6.

biographer, as he progressed in own scientific work on paleontology in the 1880s, Ward became less receptive to spiritualism and distanced himself from any association with the movement and its practices. When Elliott Coues invited him to join the advisory council of the Psychical Science Congress, Ward assumed that the position entailed advising on matters of scientific psychology—the kind of psychology he was watching emerge in university settings. Since he had already accepted a position on the Advisory Council of the Geology Congress, and was quite interested in the “new psychology” identified with Wilhelm Wundt now underway in America, Ward accepted the position on the Psychical Congress advisory council. Horrified however, when he read one of Coues’ public announcements of the occult nature of the congress, Ward angrily wrote Coues demanding his name be removed from the Council’s list. He rebuked Coues for not being forthcoming and hiding the fact that the Congress was no more than “a front group for Spiritualists and Theosophists.” These “religious propagandists,” Ward lectured Coues, would most certainly tarnish the prestige of physical science and confuse the public over what were legitimate and illegitimate pursuits in scientific psychology. A congress promoting telepathy, clairvoyance, and tales of a spiritual afterlife, Ward predicted, would be commandeered by all the “zealots, fanatics, and paranoics of the land, who will convert it into a pretty Pandemonium.”⁴¹

Accompanying Ward’s predilections was a widespread feeling of doubt in the press over whether anything worthwhile would result from presentations at the Psychical Congress. Granting that the time was right for a full and fair public airing of matters relating to human immortality, one editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* predicted that “these psychical people” would only fail to “bring before the eyes of mortals acceptable proofs of the peculiar existence and connections in which they profess to believe,” for thinking persons “are not inclined to consider the chasing of rainbows as a paying pursuit.” The editorial shrugged that if indeed the entire corpus of theory and evidence constituting spiritualism, as

⁴¹ Clifford H. Scott, *Lester Frank Ward* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 152-155; and Edward C. Rafferty, *Apostle of Human Progress: Lester Frank Ward and American Political Thought, 1841-1913* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 215.

was most likely, simply “shadows on the walls of our mentality, no amount of research or acuteness of logic can prove them to be substantial.”⁴² A similar attitude was expressed by a small mid-western magazine who discounted what it regarded as a futile attempt to get at the truth. After quoting a line from poet James Russell Lowell,⁴³ the author mockingly poked at the pretensions of the psychical researchers: “Let them seek to peer into the mysteries of the unknown to understand the phenomena of occult science, let them take up the question of a future life, let human wisdom benefit man, if it can, by such investigation, we are glad that...truth is circling in its own placid round, quietly, noiselessly amid the great tumult and bustle of the world’s activity.”⁴⁴

In a circular for release to the press outlining the topics and scope of inquiry the Psychical Congress would be undertaking, and incorporating the suggestions issued by President Bonney, the Committee of Arrangements listed the following general questions speakers would explore: 1) the general history of psychical phenomena; 2) the value of human testimony regarding the manifestation and frequency of these phenomena; and 3) the origin and growth of Societies for Psychical Research, and the results that have been gained through their investigations. Papers devoted to particular subjects within this framework would include: a) telepathy and action at a distance; b) hypnotism and mesmerism; c) hallucinations, premonitions, and apparitions; d) clairvoyance and clairaudience; e) psychometry and automatic writing; f) mediumship and physical phenomena such as raps and table-tipping; g) the relationship of these phenomena to one another; h) the connection between physics and

⁴² “Psychical Science Congress.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 8, 1892, 28; and “The Psychical Congress. A Chance to Make Clear Some of the Unexplained Phenomena.” *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, May 22, 1892, 4.

⁴³ The line ‘Get but the truth once uttered, and ‘tis like a star new born, that drops into place, and which, once circling in its placid round, not all the tumults of the earth can shake,’ is from Lowell’s poem “A Glance Behind the Curtain.” Nathan Haskell Dole, ed. *Early Poems of James Russell Lowell* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1892), 168.

⁴⁴ “Thoughts on the Columbian Exposition (By Margaret),” *Autumn Leaves* [Lamoni, IA] 5 (November 1892), 485-486. See also “A World’s Psychical Congress.” *Princeton Union* [Princeton, MN] November 24, 1892, 2; and “A World’s Psychical Congress,” *Arizona Republican*, December 14, 1892, 5.

psychics; and i) the implications of psychical science upon human personality, especially upon the question of a future life.⁴⁵

In September 1892, President Charles C. Bonney sent out invitations to numerous individuals to attend inaugural ceremonies for the World's Congress Auxiliary to be held at the Chicago Auditorium at 8:00 p.m. on October 21, 1892, fittingly Columbus Day. The *Chicago Tribune* anticipated the event by heralding it as "the first prominent demonstration made by a most important department of the World's Fair," reminding those with reserved tickets to arrive early as ushers would escort all those in waiting to unoccupied chairs promptly at eight o'clock.⁴⁶ Local newspaper accounts of the inaugural ceremonies were glowing, with the *Chicago Inter Ocean* describing a "brilliant and inspiring audience" of over 3,000 people greeting President Bonney and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* gushing even more, calling the occasion "brilliant beyond all expectations...the brightest point perhaps on the galaxy of World's Fair celebrations." The invocation was delivered by the Rev. Dr. John Henry Barrows, Chairman of the General Committee on Religious Congresses, and welcoming addresses were given by Bonney, Bertha H. Palmer, and Ellen M. Henrotin. The main oration, delivered by the Rev. John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, MN, caused "great enthusiasm" throughout the auditorium. Nicknamed the "consecrated blizzard," Archbishop Ireland "displayed in his oratory the whirlwind of energy that is his characteristic, and that had only a parallel in the whirlwind of applause that greeted him."⁴⁷ The Archbishop opened

⁴⁵ "Psychical Science Congress," *Californian Illustrated Magazine* 2 (June 1892): 158; and "The Psychical Congress of Chicago," *Borderland* 1 (July 1893): 26. A copy of the preliminary announcement from the Committee for a Psychical Science Congress dated January 1, 1893 can be found in the World's Congress Auxiliary Pre-Publications, Programs and Circulars Collection, Box 5, Folder 28, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.

⁴⁶ "President Bonney Issues Invitations." *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 1892; "World's Auxiliary Congresses." *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1892, 12; and "Congress Auxiliary Inaugural. Program for the Ceremonies to Be Held in the Auditorium Tonight." *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1892, 3. Actual tickets to the October 21 WCA Inaugural Ceremonies are held in the World's Columbian Exposition Ephemera Collection, Box 4, Folder 43, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.

⁴⁷ "Has Noble Aims. Controlling Idea of the World's Congress Auxiliary." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, October 22, 1892, 9; "A Congress of Brains. Archbishop Ireland Opens the World's Fair Auxiliary." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 22, 1892, 7; "In Oratory and Song. Dedicatory Ceremonies of the World's Congress Auxiliary." *Chicago Tribune*. October 22,

his address discussing aspects of mental power as if he were before a convention of New Thought delegates. He spoke of mind as “the greatest of things...the causative power in all orderly results.” Mind, he declared, “dominates and moves the unthinking world” and “within the limits of God’s creation, a second creation,” lifting man to “the greater and the nobler” in life. Mental life, he concluded, was “the worthiest of all objects of vision and study.”⁴⁸

The *Tribune* reported that the demand for tickets to the inaugural ceremonies had so exceeded the seating capacity of the Auditorium that hundreds had been turned away from the ticket office. Many prominent local citizens as well as distinguished guests and dignitaries from the United States and foreign nations who did attend were invited to sit on the platform. Many of those associated with the Psychical Science Congress had seats on the stage as the ceremonies began. For example, Ellen M. Henrotin, Frances E. Willard, and Lady Henry Somerset were “among the early arrivals given seats in the front of the platform,” where “they were soon joined by other well-known women.” Joining them on the stage were Dr. Sarah Hackett Stevenson, a prominent Chicago physician and member of the Women’s General Committee for the Psychical Science Congress, the Rev. Augusta J. Chapin, a Universalist minister who would play a crucial role in securing a Theosophical Congress at the Parliament of Religions, and Jane Addams, proprietor of Hull House. Among the men with ties to the psychical congress sitting on the stage were Rabbi Emil Hirsch, the Rev. Dr. H. W. Thomas, Lyman Gage, Bishop

1892, 12; and “World’s Fair Auxiliary. The Intellectual Branch of the Great Exposition.” *Detroit Free Press*, October 22, 1892, 3.

⁴⁸ The World’s Fair Congresses and Their Value to Mankind. Archbishop Ireland’s Oration.” *Advocate of Peace* 54 (December 1892), 208. See also “World’s Congresses Inaugurated. A Notable Gathering at the Auditorium— Archbishop Ireland’s Address.” *Washington Post*, October 22, 1892, 7; “Inaugurating the Congress. Archbishop Ireland on the Work of the Auxiliary Body.” *New York Times*, October 22, 1892, 9; “Intellectual Progress: Archbishop Ireland Opens the Auxiliary Columbian Congress.” *New York Sun*, October 22, 1892, 2; “Columbian Congresses: Inaugurated Successfully—Archbishop Ireland’s Address.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1892, 2; “World’s Congress Auxiliary. The Part of the Fair Inaugurated By Archbishop Ireland.” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, October 22, 1892, 4; “World’s Congress Auxiliary and Archbishop Ireland.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1892, 20; and “Archbishop Ireland on the Progress of Man. Scope of the Work of the World’s Congress Auxiliary.” *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator* (New York), November 12, 1892, 1.

Samuel Fallows, Elliott Coues, and J. H. McVicker.⁴⁹ Coues in particular, played a prominent role in the ceremonies as President Bonney had specially requested his assistance in preparing the inaugural exercises and various programs for a number of Auxiliary Congresses. According to one source, “It is but the simple truth to say that Dr. Coues has secured the co-operation and assistance of more distinguished scientists and famous men and women to work for these congresses than any other one man connected with the Fair.”⁵⁰

Coues became Chairman of the Arrangements Committee after the death of John Bundy in August 1892, and Richard Hodgson, Secretary of the American Branch of the Society for Psychical Research, was named to the committee, becoming Vice-Chairman. With death of A. Reeves Jackson the following November, B. F. [Benjamin Franklin] Underwood (1839-1914), now managing editor the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, was added to the committee, as Secretary. The Committee adopted as its motto ‘Psychics and Physics—Two Sides of One Shield,’ and named the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* as the official organ of the Psychical Science Congress.⁵¹ Both Benjamin Franklin Underwood and his wife Sara Underwood were well-known figures in the free-thinking lecture circuit during the 1870s and 1880s. Mr. Underwood, who served as a lieutenant in the Union Army, was recognized as “one of the most prominent lecturers, debaters, and writers of the Free Thought cause.” The couple came to Chicago in the late 1880s to manage and edit *The Open Court*. When John C. Bundy died, his widow, Mary C. Bundy, became proprietor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* and the Underwoods were called upon to edit the spiritualist weekly, which was also designated to publish papers presented at the

⁴⁹ “Distinguished Men on the Stage. List of Those Who Occupied Places of Honor at the Opening Session.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1892, 12; and “Has Noble Aims,” 9.

⁵⁰ “Auxiliary Congresses. Dr. Elliott Coues Asked to Assist in the Inaugural Exercises.” *Washington Post*, October 12, 1892, 2.

⁵¹ “Psychical Science.” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 14, 1892, 12; and “Literary Notes,” *Independent* 45 (February 23, 1893): 18. *Freethinkers’ Magazine* described the *R-PJ* as occupying “a leading place among the publications devoted to a scientific discussion of psychical and psychological subjects” and believed the congress would “be a great intellectual feast.” “Editorial Department,” *Freethinkers’ Magazine* 11 (February 1893), 128.

Psychical Science Congress. When B. F. Underwood was named to the Arrangements Committee, Sara Underwood was also named to the Woman's Committee of Organization.⁵²

Bundy's death was widely viewed as a blow to the prestige of the upcoming psychical congress. One Minnesota newspaper praised his "unquestioned sincerity and his trained power of scientific reasoning," regarding his death as "a great loss to psychic research in America."⁵³ To honor his commitment in working to guarantee the success of the congress, the Arrangements Committee adopted a resolution placing on record their "sense of grievous loss" to the one man most responsible for placing psychical research among the recognized sciences in the World's Congress Auxiliary, earnestly hoping "that the results achieved by the congress will prove to be worthy of the self-sacrificing work to which he devoted so many years of his life."⁵⁴ A Woman's General Committee was also named following Bundy's death in 1892 with Mary C. Bundy, the widow of Col. Bundy, as Chairman, and Eliza Archard Conner, New York, as Vice-Chairman. Rounding out the committee was: Frances E. Bagley, Detroit; Myra Bradwell, Chicago; Mary E. Coues, Washington D.C.; Mrs. Ernest. E. Crepin, Chicago; Lucy Flower, Chicago; Marcia Louise Gould, Moline, IL; Susan E. Hibbert, Washington, D. C.; Sara A. Underwood, Chicago; Antoinette Van Hoesen Wakeman, Chicago; Lilian Whiting, Boston; Frances E. Willard, Evanston, IL; and Mary H. Wilmarth, Chicago. Sarah Hackett Stevenson and Ellen M. Henrotin both served on the Advisory Council.

In February 1893, Elliott Coues released a general directive in which he proclaimed that spiritualism had "for the first time in the history" been officially recognized by the United States government as a legitimate and proper subject for scientific investigation, serving as "the basis of the

⁵² "Mr. Underwood is Summoned. Wife of B. F. Underwood, and a Well Known Literary Woman, Died this Morning." *Quincy Daily Journal*, March 16, 1911, 7.

⁵³ "A Scientific Spiritualist." *Mower County Transcript* [Lansing, MN] August 17, 1892, 7.

⁵⁴ "Respect for Col. John C. Bundy. It's Expressed in Resolutions Adopted by the Committee on a Psychical Congress." *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1892, 8.

formally recognized branch of science which has become known as Psychical Research.”⁵⁵ Coues regarded this achievement for psychical research as ranking among the “greatest historical turning-points in the evolution of human thought and feeling.” In Coues’s view, the holding of a psychical science congress to investigate spiritualism was one of the most momentous events in modern religious history, standing alongside “the exclusion of the Jesuits from France,...the Reformation in Germany, [and] the establishment of a Church of England.” Coues’ expansive regard for psychical research and its potential for providing a solution to most vexing questions of the day knew no bounds. Perhaps both bluster on the part of Coues and Bonney’s prodding in his circular to the science divisions to provide how each science can address “the problems of social life, to economic interests, to commerce, to the fine arts, and to the political interests of the people,” Coues’ overreaching applications of psychical science to modern social problems seemed stretched. He expected psychical research to bear heavily on the period’s pressing matters, regarding “the labor question, the public school question, the proper place of the scriptures in the light of modern criticism, and above all, the mighty question of the one and true relations of Church and State,” as domains in which psychical research could fittingly be applied. Coues believed these issues must be squarely faced and solved “before the American Republic can be considered to have passed the stage of an experiment.”⁵⁶ Couched in these terms, psychical research faced a daunting task as Coues’ brought it to bear on issues for which it was most likely never equipped to address.

⁵⁵ It was not so much that the government had “recognized” spiritualism as it was that the Central Organization of the World’s Congress Auxiliary was formally recognized by Congress as the sole and proper agency to conduct a series of World’s Congresses in connection with the Exposition. Just because Bonney and the Auxiliary officers granted psychical research a Congress (hardly surprising what with Lyman Gage, one of the Auxiliary officers, and the Rev. L. P. Mercer, pastor of the New Jerusalem Church which Bonney attended, being both former members of the Western Society for Psychical Research) did not mean that any federal body or agency granted some kind of status to spiritualism, which they had not.

⁵⁶ “The Psychical Science Congress,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (February 11, 1893); online at <http://www.spirithistory.com/93psyche.html>.

Securing a Congress for Theosophy at the Parliament of Religions

Theosophy in Chicago, in the early 1890s, was experiencing a boom period, both in membership and in public attention. The *Tribune* reported it was “a word frequently heard at the present time,” and that throughout the city, the Theosophical Society was “strong and rapidly growing.” There were four branches of the T.S. in Chicago at the time, with the main branch holding open meetings every Wednesday evening in the Athenaeum Building, along with a free lecture given on Sunday evening. The officers of this branch were George E. Wright, President; Alpheus M. Smith, Treasurer; and Miss Leoline Leonard, daughter of Mrs. Anna Byford Leonard, Secretary. Mrs. Mercie M. Thirds, Secretary of the Central States Committee, with her headquarters also at the Athenaeum, oversaw the Society’s free reading-room that held a wide range of theosophical and occult books and periodicals, and was often referred to as “the prime minister of the organization.” On the North Side of the city the League of Theosophical Workers, with Mr. R. D. A. Wade as president, held meetings at 769 N. Clark Street and held Sunday evening lectures which were open to the public. A Swedish branch also met in the same hall on N. Clark St. on Sunday mornings, with Jacob Bonggren, editor of the *Swedish-American*, serving as president. In Englewood was yet another branch of the T.S. where lectures were given every Sunday morning in Neuman Hall and weekly meetings hosted at the home of a Mrs. Howard, who had established the branch in Englewood. The *Tribune* writer expressed some surprise that theosophy “should thrive in such a hotbed of Spiritualism as that suburb,” but the reason according to members of the Theosophical Society was “easily explained on the ground that Theosophy antagonizes nothing.”⁵⁷

Most of the credit for securing a seat for theosophy at Parliament of Religions goes to George E. Wright, who worked tirelessly for months preceding the opening of the WCA, seeking for theosophy a

⁵⁷ “Broad In Its Faith. Ethics of Theosophy, the Universal Religion.” *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1893, 47; and Ella Wheeler Wilcox, “Spiritual Phenomena from a Theosophical View,” *Arena* 46 (September 1893): 472-476.

place at one of the World's Congresses, any congress for that matter.⁵⁸ In an article published in the theosophical journal *Lucifer*, Wright recounted, in considerable detail, the steps which had been taken on behalf of attaining a presence for theosophy at the Columbian Exposition. It wasn't until September 1892 that William Q. Judge, president of the American Section of the Theosophical Society, in a business letter sent to Wright's Chicago office, offhandedly mused "Why can't we be represented in the World's Fair?" Taking Judge's suggestion as his cue, Wright immediately called upon Charles C. Bonney, President of the World's Congress Auxiliary, who, while receiving him with great courtesy, evidenced little knowledge about theosophy and its precepts. Bonney informed Wright that he had been "overwhelmed with applications from almost every known sect and cult throughout the world," leaving Wright with the impression that the matter would be dropped. Undeterred, Wright called on Bonney a number of times over the next several weeks, armed with letters from prominent people in Chicago and elsewhere who knew Bonney personally and spoke in glowing terms of theosophy and its doctrines. Bonney seemed favorably inclined with the testimonials and asked Wright to submit a formal application which, he subsequently learned, was forwarded to the Psychological Science Committee chaired of course by Elliott Coues. At that point, Wright again visited Bonney to recount for him the public scandal resulting from the attack Coues had launched on Madame Blavatsky and his subsequent expulsion from the Theosophical Society. After listening to Wright's account of the Coues/*New York Sun* affair and the subsequent libel suit filed by HPB, Bonney withdrew the application from the Psychological Committee and submitted it to the Committee on Moral and Social Reform. Here again a potential conflicting issue arose as the chairman of this committee, Lucy M. Flower, was the sister of Dr. Coues. Wright postponed any further action on the matter until Annie Besant's arrival in Chicago on December 10, whereupon the two of them met with the Women's Committee on Moral and Social Reform at the

⁵⁸ Wright, a relatively unknown figure in the historiography of theosophy, was a dealer in investment securities and secretary of the Chicago Board of Trade. Wallace Rice, *The Chicago Stock Exchange; A History* (Chicago: Committee on Library of the Chicago Stock Exchange, 1928), 18.

offices of Mr. Bonney. While showing the greatest respect for Mrs. Besant, at this time the head of the European Section of the T.S., Mrs. Flower told the two theosophists that her committee was not the proper place for them. However, in attendance at the meeting was the Rev. Augusta J. Chapin, a Universalist minister and Chairman of the Woman's Committee on Religions who seemed taken in with Mrs. Besant. She asked to meet with both Wright and Besant and called upon them the following day at Wright's home, where she confidently stated she could secure a place for theosophy through the Committee on Religions. Both Wright and Besant were encouraged and believed their problem at finding representation in an Auxiliary Congress had been settled. Three weeks or so passed, and without hearing anything back from Rev. Chapin, Wright inquired about the status of theosophy with her committee. She replied that she had not found the time to bring the matter before the committee but would do so soon. Another two weeks went by and Wright wrote to her again, this time apparently irritating her somewhat, and Rev. Chapin reported coolly that the committee could not decide where to place theosophy in the Congress on Religions. Wright now began to doubt her commitment to the cause of theosophy and the winter months soon passed without any progress. After returning to Chicago in early April 1893, following a trip to the south in March, Wright wrote to Rev. Chapin one more time. Her response that Wright must make a formal application in writing before the Religions Committee convinced him that this was just another stalling tactic. He angrily informed her that he had filed a formal application six months earlier and that he now felt betrayed as it had been Miss Chapin herself that had told both him and Mrs. Besant to leave the matter in her hands. Wright thereupon sought out President Bonney to brief him on what had occurred over the previous six months and pleaded for his help in locating an appropriate place for theosophy in the congresses. While anxious to help, Bonney told him there was little time left. Attempts to place theosophy in a Congress with the Ethical Society and the American Philosophical Society were soon abandoned. Wright now feared that he would travel to New York the last week of April to the annual convention of the American Section of

the T.S. having failed to land a place for theosophy in the World's Fair Congresses. Then, just four days before Wright was to depart for New York, he received a message from President Bonney asking him to report to his office. Wright was stunned when Bonney informed him that the Committee on Religions had unanimously agreed to grant the T.S. a separate Congress of its own, to take place during the Parliament of Religions, and that he had been appointed Chairman of the Committee of Organization. Wright could hardly believe what he was hearing as the news "was much more than we had expected or even hoped for." All previous attempts on behalf of theosophy were based on the premise that they would be lumped together with a number of other societies to form a general congress. Now suddenly and inexplicably, theosophy was to have a congress of its own with "facilities and opportunities equal to those enjoyed by any of the great religious denominations." Although Wright wrote that he had "never yet been able to find out by what secret or powerful influence it was brought about," it appears likely that Rev. Chapin interceded successfully on behalf of the theosophists. According to Glory Southwind, Augusta Chapin deserves the credit for arranging the Theosophical Congress as a section within the Parliament of Religions.⁵⁹ Wright described the turnabout in affairs as simply "a remarkable coincidence" and on the following day, with letters from President Bonney and the Rev. Dr. John Henry Barrows, Chairman of Religions' Committee, he departed for New York to attend the Theosophists'

⁵⁹ Glory Southwind, "Augusta Jane Chapin," in *Women Building Chicago, 1790-1990; A Biographical Dictionary*. ed. Rima Lunin Schultz and Adele Hast (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 152-153. Augusta J. Chapin (1836-1905) was the second woman ordained in the Universalist denomination, Olympia Brown being the first. Active in the women's suffrage movement, Chapin was conferred an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by Lombard University, the first ever awarded to a woman in America. For further biographical information on the Rev. Miss Chapin, see also Ernest Cassara, "Augusta Jane Chapin," 320-321, in *Notable American Women, 1607-1950; A Biographical Dictionary* ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, vol. 1, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971); George Huntston Williams, *American Universalism: A Bicentennial Historical Essay* 4th ed. (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Historical Society and Skinner House Books, 2002 [1971]), 38; Anna Howard Shaw, "Women in the Ministry," *Chautauquan* 27 (August, 1898), 491-492; and *A Woman of the Century; Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life* ed. Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore (Buffalo, Chicago, and New York: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 167.

convention and share the good news that the Theosophical Society would now be represented with its own Congress at the Columbian Exposition.⁶⁰

The annual convention of the American Section of the T.S. convened the morning of April 23, 1893 at Aryan Hall at 144 Madison Ave. in New York City where the General Secretary and Head of the American Section, William Q. Judge, reported on the growth and condition of theosophy in America. During the past year, Judge announced, there were nineteen new branches instituted, making a total of seventy-seven branches in the United States. In addition, nearly six hundred new members had been added to the rolls of the American Section. But the most important matter that came before the opening session was the report of George E. Wright, who reported on the steps taken to secure a place for theosophy at the World's Fair. The Religions' Committee had provided two days, Friday and Saturday, September 15 and 16, for the theosophists to hold their Congress. Telegrams were received from the European and Indian Sections promising their full support and Annie Besant had cabled indicating she would be in Chicago on those dates to participate in the Congress. The convention then appointed a Committee of Arrangements and began gathering names of those who could serve on the Advisory Council.⁶¹ As Wright took his seat, "round after round of applause rang out," interrupted only when William Judge, grinning, interjected, "It took my breath away, when I heard Brother Wright stating that the intellectual centre of the United States had moved from Boston to Chicago." When Wright shot

⁶⁰ George E. Wright, "Theosophical Activities. The Parliament of Religions: Incidents of the Congress," *Lucifer* 13 (October 1893): 160-164.

⁶¹ "American Theosophists' Convention. The Sect Will Be Represented in the Religious Congress at Chicago." *Washington Post*, April 24, 1893, 1; and "The Theosophists. Convention of the American Section in New York—Telegram from Mrs. Besant." *Atlanta Constitution*, April 24, 1893, 1. Afternoon and evening sessions were held at Scottish Rite Hall on Madison Avenue and 29th Street. The morning session had about 150 persons in attendance while the afternoon and evening sessions drew nearly 400. The *New York Herald* reported that two-thirds of those in attendance were women, "all of whom wore a far away look and every third one eyeglasses." The paper thought it important to note that a large number of men and women "had broad faces and high foreheads, and that a majority of the men, though wearing beards, were bald headed." "Talked of Karma and the 'Ego'. Theosophists in Annual Convention Discuss Occultism in Polysyllables." *New York Herald*, April 24, 1893, 8.

back “only temporarily,” there was more laughter and applause.⁶² A vote of appreciation was then entered into the record thanking Wright “for his untiring efforts in procuring an opportunity hitherto unequalled for the expositions of the doctrine of Theosophy, and making its traits known to the American people.” The Local Committee of Arrangements was announced as the following: George E. Wright, president of the Chicago Theosophical Society, Chairman; Professor Frederic G. Gleason, Chicago; Judge Edward O’Rourke, Superior Court, Fort Wayne, IN; Judge R. Wesley McBride, Chicago; and Alpheus M. Smith, Chicago Chamber of Commerce. The Woman’s Organization Committee consisted of Mrs. Edwin H. Pratt, Chairman, Mrs. Anna Byford Leonard, Dr. Mary Weeks Burnett, Mrs. General M. M. Trumbull, Dr. Elizabeth Chidester, and Mrs. Mercie M. Thirds, all of Chicago.⁶³

There was one important restriction that the theosophists were required to comply with. In a letter dated April 18, 1893 from the central office of the World’s Congress Auxiliary to George E. Wright, President Bonney informed him that psychical research and related phenomena had been withdrawn from their application and that their presentations within the Department of Religion would be “confined to Theosophy as a Religion and a system of Ethics.” Bonney explained that since the entire range of subject matter under what was “known as ‘Occult Phenomena’” had been assigned to the Psychical Science Congress, he requested that Wright “take the pains to exclude that subject from your address and make it quite clear that the object of your demonstration is to give the world better information than they now possess of the Religious and Ethical principles of your order.” At the New

⁶² The exact remarks by Wright which had prompted the response by Judge were “Where can [we] find a better opportunity to spread the Theosophic idea than right here in this wonderful Parliament of Religions, the meeting-place of the best minds in Europe and America, the intellectual centre towards which in this year of 1893 all the culture of the world will turn,...whose sessions will form a grand historical event, marking the change from the old dispensation of darkness and dogmatism to the new era of light, liberty of thought, and religious expression, and, above all, the spirit of universal fraternity with which the T.S. is animated and of which it is indeed the standard-bearer?”

⁶³ “The Wisdom Religion: Its Followers Meet in Convention.” *New York Tribune*, April 24, 1893, 7; and *The Theosophical Congress held by the Theosophical Society at the Parliament of Religions, World’s Fair of 1893, at Chicago, Ill., September 15, 16, 17. Report of Proceedings and Documents*. (New York: American Section Headquarters, T. S., 1893), 9.

York convention of the American Section of the Theosophical Society which was held in late April, Wright reported on this restriction and the convention voted its approval.⁶⁴ Even with the restriction to steer away from occult subjects, a central concern of theosophy, Wright was more than satisfied with the arrangements provided for theosophy at the Parliament of Religions. Particularly impressed with the liberality of Parliament proceedings, the wide-ranging religions and sects which would be present, and the absence of any promotion of dogma and creed, Wright told the New York delegates how well theosophy blended with the entire thrust of the Parliament. “The whole programme,” Wright declared, “sounds as if it might have been taken from a syllabus of one of the Theosophical Branch...could anything be better?” Wright believed that theosophy would “make a pronounced success of the occasion,” demonstrating to the entire world that the one great ideal pursued by the Theosophical Society, the brotherhood of all mankind, was “already in considerable measure a realized fact, and that Theosophy supplies the true scientific and living basis for right ethics.”⁶⁵

Everything now seemed in place for a dramatic if not spectacular display of progressive occultism—psychical research and theosophy—at the Chicago World’s Fair. It was a significant triumph for both to be situated alongside the great sciences and religions of the nineteenth century which had made significant leaps in knowledge and technical applications, and had converted or brought untold millions to their fold. It is doubtful whether either movement would ever again seem so poised to join the mainstream of scientific practice and religious belief. Psychical research, a young science barely a decade old, explored subject matter considered by one writer “more far-reaching in its human interest

⁶⁴ A resolution adopted at the New York convention stated that the American Section “fully approves the decision to have the Theosophical Society represented on the question of religion and ethics, rather than those relating to psychic laws and phenomena; but at the same time it is hereby declared that this action and the representation of the society in the religious and ethical congress in no way commits the T.S. or any of its members to any form of religious belief nor to any creed or dogma. “The Wisdom Religion,” 7.

⁶⁵ *Theosophical Congress*, 4-9. See also Joy Mills, *100 Years of Theosophy: A History of the Theosophical Society in America* (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 18; and “Theosophists to Be in Congress. Two Days Assigned Them for Discussion of Their Faith.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 24, 1893, 3.

[and] appealing more strongly to our common human nature” than perhaps any other subject or area of knowledge pursued by human beings. “It touches us all alike,” this writer continued “in that we are all under spiritual as well as material laws of being.”⁶⁶ Psychical matters, at this point in time in the minds of many Americans “appear the most important of all investigations, since it is more necessary to know man than the material tabernacle wherein for a little he resides; and the pursuit of these lines of research would seem to be prosecuted with too little rather than too much zeal.”⁶⁷

Some spiritualists in Chicago and across the country were displeased that no arrangements had been made for a Spiritualist Congress in the World’s Congress Auxiliary. One likely reason for the omission is that there was no national organization of spiritualists to represent the movement. Spiritualism up to that time was a loosely organized movement of diverse thought and practices and its lack of coherence and a central society no doubt hindered any effort that particular group of Spiritualists might have made on behalf of an organizing effort to land a congress at the Fair. Another reason certainly was the presence of the Psychical Science Congress, which would examine all the central suppositions associated with spiritualism. A number of prominent spiritualists served on the Advisory Council, and the original chairman of the Arrangements Committee, Col. John C. Bundy, was himself a representative spiritualist, albeit more on the scientific side. Rather than spiritualism being overlooked at the Auxiliary Congress, the notion expressed by many commentators, as we saw earlier, was that spiritualism would run rampant at the Psychical Congress.

Interestingly enough, spiritualists were about to address their lack of national organization. While the Parliament of Religions was still in session, spiritualists from all over the country gathered in Chicago, not as a part of the World’s Congress Auxiliary, but rather to attend the first National Delegate

⁶⁶ “The Psychical Science Congress” *Psychical Review* 1 (May 1893), 333.

⁶⁷ “Progress of Civilization,” *Methodist Review* 75 (January 1893), 130.

Convention of Spiritualists of the United States of America. This convention met at Auditorium Hall on September 27-29, 1893, just ten days after the close of the Theosophical Congress, for the explicit purpose of establishing a permanent national organization which would represent all spiritualists. A near-postmillennial expectancy that the world was on the verge great spiritual revelation was evident in the welcoming address of Chicago's highly regarded spiritualist, Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond, who proclaimed, "we believe that the blessing of the spirit world is upon the assembly here in Chicago; we believe it is the beginning of a new outpouring of the spirit of truth upon the world to mark an epoch that shall one day stand as the beginning of a new truth, or new presentation of the truth to the world."⁶⁸

Spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research all contributed to this *fin-de-siècle* portentous mood that momentous developments and revelations were at hand which were about to change forever the landscape of human experience. Newspaper accounts pointed to the Psychical Science Congress as "one of the most notable features of the series of congresses," an occurrence of great import which "opens a field boundless in possibilities and interest...and at its conclusion the world may be the richer by a careful outline of the advances made in the mysteries of a peculiar science."⁶⁹ In occultism, as well as in technology, industry, commerce, and learning, Chicago truly seemed, in 1893, the great metropolitan laboratory that made it the most modern urban center of the western world. Such was the clarion call for the opening of the Psychical Congress, poised not only to advance hidden knowledge

⁶⁸ *Proceedings, National Delegate Convention of Spiritualists of the United States of America, Held in Chicago, Illinois, September 27, 28, and 29, 1893* (Washington, DC: National Spiritualists Association, 1893), 12. Mrs. Richmond's "Presentation of Spiritualism" which was delivered before the World's Parliament of Religions can be found in Appendix A of the *Proceedings*, 176-187. According to the *Tribune*, Mayor Carter Harrison was scheduled to deliver an address of welcome to the convention, but could not be present. "From Other Worlds. First National Convention of Spiritualists Meet." *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1893, 9.

⁶⁹ "Psychical Science." *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver, CO] August 14, 1892, 12; "Congress of Scientists." *San Antonio Light*, August 21, 1893, 1; "The Unknown World." *San Francisco Morning Call*, August 19, 1893, 6; and "Editorial." *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 28, 1893, 6.

forward, but keen on bringing light to bear to some of the most pressing, social, religious, and ethical questions of the day.

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE PSYCHICAL SCIENCE CONGRESS AND THEOSOPHY AT THE PARLIAMENT (II):
SESSIONS, SENSATIONS, AND SKEPTICS**

The formal opening of the Science and Philosophy Congresses took place on Monday, August 21, 1893, at 10:00 A.M. in the Hall of Columbus at the Memorial Art Palace, before what the *Chicago Inter Ocean* described as “a large gathering of distinguished persons from the principal countries of the world.”¹ Accompanying Auxiliary Congress President Charles C. Bonney to the platform were Elliott Coues and his wife Mary Coues, Ellen M. Henrotin, Richard Hodgson, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Dr. Edmund Montgomery—all of whom were either officers of the Arrangements Committee, members of the Advisory Council, or presenters of papers to the Psychical Science Congress. After an address of welcome from President Bonney, various individuals were called upon to respond, including all chairmen of the various sciences. Prof. Coues, in his response to the welcoming address, reminded the audience that psychical science was the “youngest of all the sciences,” and while it had yet to acquire the necessary status to be placed alongside “the sciences called orthodox,” it nonetheless had achieved considerable historical significance due to its placement in the congresses and its “official recognition at the hands of a great government.”² Dr. Frederic Myers of London, the official emissary of the London SPR, in what the *Inter Ocean* referred to as “an eloquent address” stated that the objective of psychical research was “to reclaim the swamp of superstition and bring it into the domain of science” and that no better hope for its future could be found than in the city that had “reclaimed the swamp of Jackson park.” Myers spoke of an “Anglo-Saxon spirit” that was at that moment encircling the globe with “its greatest intensity” expressed in the two “great cities” of London and Chicago. In an apparent transfer of the mantle of psychical research, Myers offered that “We in London have made such a beginning and we

¹ “Devoted to Science. Many Schools of Philosophy and Physics Meet.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 22, 1893, 1.

² *Ibid.*, and “Congresses on Philosophy and Science,” *Advance* 27 (August 31, 1893): 653.

call now upon you in Chicago to accept from us the torch and make it burn forever more for the illumining of science and for the generations yet unborn.”³

The Psychological Congress in Session: Some Opening Presenters and Papers

The Congress of Psychological Science assembled later that Monday at 2:30 p.m. in Hall 26 which soon became overflowing, requiring its relocation to a larger hall. In the opening address Chairman Coues expressed his belief that psychological science was indeed a true science, securely established upon facts which promised to further reveal nature’s remaining secrets and uncover the myriad mysteries of the mind to which there were seemingly no limits. This address, the keynote of the congress, pointed to a scientific spirit which Coues promised would guide the proceedings. Coues, always the optimist when it came to proclaiming the benefits to be accrued from advances in psychological research, predicted that “It is probably not too much to expect from this congress a marked effect upon human morals and social ethics with even a remedy for many existing ills and wrongs.”⁴ Richard Hodgson, vice-chairman of the congress, followed Coues with a paper titled “Human Testimony in Relation to Psychological Phenomena.” The final two papers of that first afternoon session were devoted to spiritualism, with Giles B. Stebbins of Detroit, presenting “A Brief Critical History of the Spiritualistic Movement in American Since 1848” and Frederic Myers reading a paper by the Rev. Minot J. Savage of Boston titled “Spiritualistic

³ “Devoted to Science,” 12. The roughly forty papers read at the week-long congress from August 21-25 were printed in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* from August 26, 1893 to October 13, 1894. Charles C. Bonney, “Bibliography of World’s Congress Publications,” *Dial* 20 (January 1, 1896), 10.

⁴ “Science Has Its Day. Psychological Congress Convenes in an Overcrowded Hall.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 1893, 9. For the sizable crowds in attendance for the Psychological Congress, see Sara A. Underwood, *Automatic or Spirit Writing, with other Psychic Experiences* (Chicago: Thomas G. Newman, 1896), 37-38. According to one New York newspaper, “From one thousand to three thousand persons were in constant attendance during the time which this congress remained in session. No congress since the opening of the fair had steadily so large an attendance as this one, nor has any congress had such exhaustive reports of its proceedings published in the Chicago journals.” “Now the Crowd is There. Great Increase in Attendance at the World’s Fair.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 3, 1893, 7. See also “Columbian Congresses on Science and Philosophy,” *Science* 22 (September 8, 1893): 135; and Charles C. Bonney, “Appendix A: The World’s Congress Auxiliary of the World’s Columbian Exposition,” in *Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World’s Columbian Exposition—Chicago, 1892-1893* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1898), 332.

Interpretation of Psychical Phenomena.” The evening session met at 8:00 p.m. in the Hall of Columbus, one of the two large halls with a seating capacity for over 3,000 temporarily constructed just for the Auxiliary Congresses. Four papers were read at this session including one by Benjamin B. Kingsbury of Defiance, OH on “Contributions to the Bibliography of Periodical Literature Relating to Psychical Science.”⁵ Both Giles Stebbins and Rev. Savage were well-known American spiritualists, reflecting the pro-Spiritualist flavor that would continue throughout the Congress while Kingsbury was a prime example of the non-scientific presenter, a relatively obscure figure, even in psychical research, that would represent a tendency throughout the Congress which would provoke criticism from outside observers.

The morning session on Tuesday, August 22 opened with Dr. Coues reading congratulatory telegrams sent by numerous dignitaries from around the world including Camille Flammarion, the Royal Astronomer of France and a prominent psychical researcher, William Crookes, a well-known physicist from Great Britain who had been investigating spiritualism since the 1870s, and Lady Henry Somerset of England and her close friend and traveling companion Frances E. Willard, both temperance leaders of world-wide fame who served on the Advisory Council. Telepathy was a featured topic at the morning session with a paper by Frank Podmore of the London SPR on “Experimental Thought-Transference” read by Frederic Myers. Podmore’s paper dealt with the emergence of telepathy as an explanatory concept in British psychical research and the subsequent difficulties investigators encountered in experimentation. Thought transference was also the subject of a paper accompanied with demonstrations by Dr. Alexander Blair Thaw (1857-1937) and his wife Florence Dow Thaw (1864-1940).

⁵ “Science Has Its Day,” 9. Benjamin B. Kingsbury (1837-1915) graduated from Harvard Law School in 1862, moving to Defiance, OH in 1877 where he established a successful law practice. He frequently corresponded with the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in the 1880s about psychical matters. “Our Graduates,” *Shield* 6 (June 1890): 191. For a complete listing of all session presentations at the Psychical Science Congress, see “Proceedings of Scientific Societies,” *American Naturalist* 27 (November 1893): 1029-1030. Nearly all remaining sessions of the week-long Congress would be held in the Hall of Columbus. Two copies of the printed Programme of the Congress on Psychical Science are held in the World’s Congress Auxiliary Pre-Publications, Programs and Circulars Collection, Box 5, Folder 29, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.

Florence Thaw was a well-known portrait painter whose work could be found exhibited in the Belle Arte Gallery in Rome and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D. C. while Blair Thaw was a poet of some repute who frequently contributed poems and articles to the *Hibbert Journal*. Dr. Thaw demonstrated before the Congress some procedures of telepathy by using mental suggestion to send thoughts to his wife while she was in a hypnotic state.⁶

The morning session closed with the reading of two papers by Ludwig Deinhard of Munich, a German occultist virtually unknown today among Anglo-American historians of psychology and occultism and little known even among German historians.⁷ One paper, written by Mr. Deinhard himself and titled "The Question of Phantasmal Apparitions" discussed the manner of bodily movements in the astral plane. The other paper, written by Carl Du Prel (1839-1899), had for its subject: "A Program for Experimental Occultism."⁸ Du Prel, a German philosopher, spiritualist, occultist, is a far better known figure in current historiography⁹ Du Prel, for example, is credited with creatively envisioning the

⁶ On the Thaws see "Alexander B. Thaw, A Writer of Poems. Helped Endow Home for Babies Here and Aided Many Other Charities." *New York Times*, October 6, 1937, 25; A. Blair Thaw, "Some Experiments in Thought-Transference," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 8 (1892): 422-435; and "Mrs. Alex. Blair Thaw. Well-Known Portrait Painter Exhibited in Noted Galleries." *New York Times*, March 6, 1940, 23.

⁷ Ludwig Deinhard (1847-1917), an industrial engineer initially attracted to the spiritual teachings of Carl du Prel (1839-1899), later became a close friend of Dr. Wilhelm Hubbe-Schleiden, editor of *Sphinx*, and to which he contributed numerous articles. He later edited his own journal, *Psychische Studien* [Leipzig]. Deinhard contributed to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in the early 1890s and his impressions of Chicago and the Psychical Science Congress are recorded in Ludwig Deinhard, "Letters from Chicago," *Sphinx* [Braunschweig, Germany] 17 (October 1893): 245-250. The *Sphinx* ran from 1886 to 1896 under the editorship of du Prel and Hubbe-Schleiden.

⁸ Lured By the Occult. Large Attendance at the Psychical Congress Sessions." *Chicago Tribune*, August 23, 1893, 9; and "Psychical Science. Hypnotism and Spiritualism Probe to Be a Drawing Card." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 23, 1893, 8.

⁹ Andreas Sommer, "From Astronomy to Transcendental Darwinism: Carl du Prel (1839-1899)," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 23.1 (2009): 59-68; and Thomas P. Weber, "Carl du Prel (1839-1899): Explorer of Dreams, the Soul, and the Cosmos," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science, Part A* 38 (September 2007): 593-604. Sommer has also given a number of presentations on du Prel. See e.g., "Ellenberger Revisited: Carl du Prel in the History of Dynamic Psychiatry," Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia, June 30, 2009); "Crossing the Boundaries of Mind and Science: Carl du Prel (1839-1899), Psychical Research, and the Demarcation Problem," University College London, June 16, 2010; and "The Last Romantic? Carl du Prel (1839-1899) and the Formation of German Experimental Psychology," British Psychological Society History of Psychological Disciplines Seminar Series, University College London, November 25, 2014.

conjoining of occultists and engineers who would develop varieties of psychical technology such as television. He speculated further on ways in which spiritualists and engineers might begin to “integrate physiology, psychology, and anatomy into [a] program of how technology and spiritualism should mutually advance each other.”¹⁰ Both du Prel and Deinhard, along with psychiatrist Albert von Schrenck-Notzing and editor-attorney Wilhelm Hubbe-Schleiden, were instrumental in forming the *Psychologische Gesellschaft* (Psychological Society) of Munich in 1886, an organization that would help define the contours of psychic research in Germany over the next three decades.¹¹

At the Tuesday evening session Frederic Myers read a paper by the Henry and Eleanor Sidgwick, two leaders of the London SPR, entitled “Veridical Hallucinations as a Part of the Evidence for Telepathy.” In commenting on the paper one newspaper described the eerie evening scenario which set the background for the theme of the paper. First, the writer noted that “night seems to add zest in the psychical gathering at the art palace,” bringing with it “a suppressed flutter and a disposition to neighborly exchange of experiences between adjacent chairs not noticeable at the day meetings.” The reporter further remarked that the reading by Myers of the Sidgwicks’ paper on hallucinations and apparitions at death had produced “a decidedly weird effect” what with the “soft strains of music [coming] from an adjoining hall...accompanying the peculiar, undulatory voice of the speaker, [and] the spluttering of the electric lights which threatened to go out altogether.”¹² A perfect setting, it seemed, for the telling of ghost stories. Richard Hodgson followed that presentation reading a similar paper on “Some Experiments in Thought-Transference and Their Significance” prepared by Dr. A. S. Wiltse, a

¹⁰ Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media* (New York: Zone Books, 2013), 154.

¹¹ Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 40; and Andreas Sommer, “Normalizing the Supernormal: The Formation of the “Gesellschaft für Psychologische Forschung” (“Society for Psychological Research”), c. 1886-1890,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 49 (Winter 2013): 18-44.

¹² “Transfer of Thought. Doings at the Psychical Congress in Chicago—Some of the Experiments of Dr. A. S. Wiltse.” *Boston Advertiser*, August 25, 1893, 5.

physician from Skiddy KS who was best known at the time for a near-death, out-of-body experience (OBE) which occurred in 1889.¹³

Dr. Wiltse first related his OBE account, one of the earliest recorded occurrences of such experiences, in a paper read before the Tri-State Medical Society of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia in Chattanooga, TN on October 15, 1889 and which subsequently appeared in the *St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal*. Wiltse, suffering from a prolonged case of typhoid fever, had been pronounced dead by his attending physician and remained in a state of “apparent death” for about half an hour. He claimed, at the moment of death, to have entered another state of consciousness in which he witnessed “the interesting process of the separation of soul and body,” emerging from his head as a sort of spirit rising from the ground until his soul took the form of his deceased body. As his new embodied soul gazed upon his former but now dead body, Dr. Wiltse began walking out of the room, passing through other bodies of the living as though they were nonexistent. Soon he was afloat in the air “upheld by a pair of hands, which I could feel pressing lightly against my sides” which ushered him across the sky at a rapid rate of speed. Finally, he was dropped down on a road at the edge of a forested mountain range where he faced what a voice told him was the boundary between the eternal world and the one he was about to depart. Once he passed, the voice warned, he could not return to his body. As he began to cross the threshold into the eternal world he was stopped by an invisible hand and became unconscious. Upon waking he discovered he was back in his sick bed, gazing upon the face of his startled physician.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid. Richard Hodgson, in the same *Boston Advertiser* article, referred to Dr. Wiltse as “an untiring searcher and experimenter in the psychic world,” while Frederic Myers stated elsewhere that Dr. Wiltse was “personally known to Dr. Hodgson and myself as a careful and conscientious witness.” Frederic W. H. Myers, “The Subliminal Self,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 11 (1895), 573.

¹⁴ A. S. Wiltse, “A Case of Typhoid Fever with Subnormal Temperature and Pulse,” *St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal* 57 (December 1889): 355-364, 359. Wiltse’s near-death experience is retold in L. Chevreuil, *Proofs of the Spirit World*, trans. Agnes Kendrick Gray (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1920), 268-276; and “Stories of Spirits. Strange Cases of Manifestations by Spooks.” *Bloomington [IL] Leader*, October 30, 1985, 11; and in popular accounts such as Archie Matson, *Afterlife; Reports from the Threshold of Death* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 34-35; and Brad Steiger, *Real Ghosts, Restless Spirits, and Haunted Places* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2003), 245-

The Tuesday evening session also featured a talk by Dr. John E. Purdon M.D. (1839-1925) of Cullman, AL on "Certain Experiments with the Sphygmograph," a presentation described by one newspaper as "perhaps the most remarkable paper read before this congress."¹⁵ The sphygmograph was a pulse-reading/recording instrument which Dr. Purdon claimed demonstrated that the nervous system of one person could in fact act upon the nervous system of another person, even to the point of fostering communication between the spirits of the dead and living persons once a medium was placed *en rapport* with a spirit. The sphygmograph fastened at the wrist with a needle recording the pulse tracings on paper. Dr. Purdon displayed a number of photographs of his twelve-year period of experiments comparing his own pulse rate to those of his subjects. The photographs indicated that the pulse rates of subjects gradually came to resemble his own until both readings were almost identical. Purdon theorized his results proved the existence of a psychic ethereal realm allowing for the transference of mental and physiological attributes moving from one person to another. According to the doctor, the recorded pulse tracings generated through the sphygmograph provided the physiological evidence that bodies and minds could act upon other bodies and minds from a distance without direct physical contact.¹⁶ In a recent article discussing Purdon's work with the sphygmograph, Carlos S. Alvarado, a historian of parapsychology, has indicted that the device had been fashionable in the mid-

247. The case, along with sworn depositions taken from witnesses, including physicians gathered at the deathbed of Dr. Wiltse, is discussed in Frederic W. H. Myers, "Of Indications of Continued Terrene Knowledge on the Part of Phantasms of the Dead," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 8 (1892), 180-194.

¹⁵ "Psychic Mystery. Some of the Results of the Psychical Congress at Chicago." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 17, 1893, 28.

¹⁶ "Mystery of the Sphygmograph," *Current Literature* 14 (November 1893), 407. For Dr. Purdon's early work with mediums and investigations in psychical research, see "Society Proceedings. Tri-State Medical Association, held at Chattanooga, TN, October 15 and 16, 1889," *JAMA* 13 (November 16, 1889): 714-716; John Edward Purdon, "The Psychical Import of Variable Achromatopsia; An Original Research," 383-394, in *Transactions of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama held at Montgomery, April 12-16, 1892* (Montgomery, AL: Brown Printing Co., 1892); and John E. Purdon, "Physical Dislocation and the Theory of Mediumism," *Medical and Surgical Reporter* [Philadelphia] 69 (September 23, 1893): 467-473.

nineteenth century as part of efforts to develop instruments which could provide accurate recordings of physiological process, but that its usage was in decline by the time Purdon began his experiments.¹⁷

Two papers of the week-long congress that were devoted to psychical phenomena in ancient and classical periods were presented by two figures deserving mention here but who are not generally associated with the history of psychical research: the Rev. Dr. William C. Winslow who read “Psychism Amongst the Ancient Egyptians,” and Dr. Alexander Wilder M.D., who presented “Psychic Facts and Theories Underlying the Religions of Greece and Rome.” Rev. Dr. William Copley Winslow (1840-1925) was widely known in Episcopal and archaeological circles both in the United States and in Europe. Dr. Winslow served as rector of St. George’s Church in Lee, MA from 1867 to 1880, arriving later in Boston to take the position of chaplain at the St. Luke’s Home for Convalescents in Roxbury. He was at one time editor of the *University Quarterly Review* and assistant editor of the *New York World*, the *Christian Times*, the *American Antiquarian* and the *American Historical Register*.¹⁸ Rev. Winslow served on a number of Advisory Councils for various Departments of the World’s Auxiliary Congress, including history, philology, and psychical science—contributing papers to the African, Philological, and Psychical Science Congresses. He received the degrees of L.L.D and D.D. from St. Andrews in Scotland and a D.C.L. from The University of King’s College along with an honorary Ph.D. from Hamilton College in 1886. In 1880 Dr. Winslow devoted several months to the study and exploration of Egyptian archeological sites, and was actively involved with the Egyptian Exploration Fund immediately upon its founding, having helped organize an American branch in 1883. Three years later he became the Fund’s honorary treasurer and in 1885 he served as vice-president of the American branch. Archaeologist, historian,

¹⁷ Carlos S. Alvarado, “Note on an Early Physiological Index of ESP: John E. Purdon’s Observations of Synchronous Pulse Rates,” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 29.1 (2015): 109-123.

¹⁸ “Editorial: William Copley Winslow,” *American Antiquarian* 15 (May 1893): 181-184; “Rev. William Copley Winslow is Dead. Prominent in Archaeology and Church Work.” *Boston Globe*, February 2, 1925, A12; “Funeral Services for Rev. Dr. Winslow. Held in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul.” *Boston Globe*, February 5, 1925, A17; and “Rev. W. C. Winslow Dies At Home Here. Minister and Archaeologist Lived Here 45 Years.” *Boston Globe*, February 3, 1925, 24.

journalist, and lecturer, Dr. Winslow was also a Fellow of the Royal Archaeological Society of Great Britain, to which he and George Bancroft were, up to that time, the only Americans elected to an honorary fellowship.¹⁹ He represents a unique type of minister-archeologist not usually associated with psychical research.

Alexander Wilder, M.D. (1823-1908), a philosopher, philologist, and medical historian who read a paper on psychism in ancient Greece and Rome, was a highly regarded leader of eclectic medicine in America.²⁰ Eulogized by colleagues at the time of his death as “the most erudite philosopher it has even been our pleasure to meet in the ranks of the medical profession,” Wilder was a prolific author with his numerous writings appearing in various popular and medical venues.²¹ For example he frequently published articles on occult philosophy in *Metaphysical Magazine* and beginning in April 1907, continuing until the time of his death, he contributed an article every month to *The Word*, a monthly magazine edited by H. W. Percival devoted to theosophy. Dr. Wilder also edited and annotated HPB’s *Isis Unveiled*, receiving gracious acknowledgements from her for his work on her two volume magnum

¹⁹ “Sketch of William Copley Winslow, D.D., L.L.D., PH.D., D.C.L.; Honorary Secretary of the Egypt Exploration Fund,” *Progress* 1 (April 1896): 405; and “William Copley Winslow,” *Biographical History of Massachusetts; Biographies and Autobiographies of the Leading Men in the State* ed. Samuel Atkins Eliot, vol. 2, (Boston: Massachusetts Biographical Society, 1909), n.p. The Egypt Exploration Fund was founded in London in 1883 (one year after the founding of the London SPR) by Miss Amelia B. Edwards, R. Stuart Pool, and Sir Erasmus Wilson. That same year, Dr. Winslow organized an American branch to co-operate with the English society in its work. “Dr. Winslow and the Egypt Exploration Fund,” *Records of the Past* 2 (October 1903): 309-311, esp. 309.

²⁰ “Editorial,” *Eclectic Medical Gleaner* 4 (November 1908): 405-411; and “Doctor Alexander Wilder,” *Metaphysical Magazine* 23 (October 1908): 247-251. A history of medical eclecticism with passing references to Wilder can be found in John S. Haller, Jr., *Medical Protestants: The Eclectics in American Medicine, 1825-1939* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

²¹ “Alexander Wilder,” *Bulletin of the Lloyd Library of Botany, Pharmacy and Materia Medica*, Bulletin No. 12, Pharmacy Series No. 2 (1910): n.p; and Harold W. Percival, “Alexander Wilder,” *Word; A Monthly Magazine devoted to Philosophy, Science, Religion, Eastern Thought, Occultism, Theosophy, and the Brotherhood of Humanity* 8 (October 1908): 16. On Wilder’s mental metaphysics and occult proclivities, see Alexander Wilder, “Magical Diseases,” *American Medical Journal* 31 (November 1903): 519-530; “Telepathy, Spiritism, Hypnotism, and the Case of Mrs. Elenora E. Piper,” *Medico-Legal Studies* 7 (1902): 373-377; “Psychiatry and Psychal Force,” *Ideal Review* 13 (August 1900): 82-88; and “Psychology in Medicine,” *American Medical Journal* 31 (September 1903): 401-413. For his belief in spiritualism see his 1901 letter to the *New York Times* published in “The World of Thought with Editorial Comment,” *Metaphysical Magazine* 23 (December 1908): 387-389.

opus. He was also President of the School of Philosophy, a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Medico-Legal Society, and a host of other philosophic, reformatory, and scientific societies.²² One physician and associate described Dr. Wilder's final moments of life where he "acted like one conscious of an approaching overwhelming ordeal [with] his soul...wrestling with some unseen power." As a spiritualist, Dr. Wilder had written a great deal upon questions of the soul and immortality and this particular friend believed the doctor, as he lay dying, was "testing out in the final struggle as to whether he had correctly solved the mystery."²³ Dr. Wilder is representative of those physicians practicing irregular medicine with proclivities to spiritualism and psychical research, suggesting a link between non-allopathic medicine and interest in occultism.

Another intriguing and largely overlooked figure today who delivered a mid-week paper on "Dreams, Considered from the Standpoint of Psychical Science" was physician, biologist, and philosopher-scientist Edmund Duncan Montgomery (1835-1911). Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Montgomery pursued his education in Berlin and Bonn, earning an M.D. from the University of Wurzburg in 1858. He married Elisabet Ney, a grandniece of Marshall Ney of France who became a well-known sculptor, at Madeira in 1863.²⁴ Montgomery continued to practice medicine at Madeira and

²² Robert A. Gunn, "Alexander Wilder, M. D., F. A. S., His Life and Work, *Metaphysical Magazine* 23 (November 1908): 274-303. According to one flyer, The School of Philosophy, associated with the *Metaphysical Magazine* located on Fifth Avenue in New York, was "a general rendezvous and headquarters for those interested in development of knowledge in all lines of Philosophy, Metaphysics, Occult Research and Psychic Phenomena in any of their branches." Wilder was elected President of the School in 1900. "Advertisement: The School of Philosophy," *Ideal Review* 13 (October 1900): xi; and "Proceedings of the School of Philosophy," *Ideal Review* 13 (November 1900): 372.

²³ G. E. Potter, "Last Hours of Prof. Alexander Wilder, M.D." *Eclectic Medical Journal* 69 (January 1909), 30. Potter placed Wilder alongside "Lowell, Longfellow and Whittier, not as a poet, but as one possessing equally high ideals and purity of character, of thought and kindly action. In strength of mind and erudition he was equal to Tolstoi or Zola."

²⁴ Elisabet Ney (1833-1907) was considered "one of the foremost sculpturors in the world" with a number of her works now displayed at the Texas State Capitol in Austin and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C. She sculptured two famous Texans, Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin, for the Texas Pavilion at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition. Betty Smith Meischen, *From Jamestown to Texas: A History of Some Early Pioneers of Austin County, the Colonial Capitol of Texas* rev. ed. (Lincoln, NE: Writer's Showcase, 2010), 74. See also

Rome until leaving a successful medical practice in 1869 to devote his whole attention to scientific research. In 1870 Montgomery and Ney (she retained her own last name throughout their marriage) emigrated to America where after a two year stay in Thomasville, GA they relocated to Texas where they purchased the Liendo plantation outside of Hempstead. Here Montgomery set up a laboratory to study protozoa and muscle fibers, devoting the remaining forty years of his life to developing his bio-philosophical doctrine of “vital organization,” a philosophy rich in “poetical mysticism” which explicated the chemical processes by which living organisms interacted with the environment, creating further complexity in their physiological evolution.²⁵ Dr. Montgomery was for years a contributor to *Mind*, the *Popular Science Monthly*, and the *Boston Index*, among other journals in this country and Europe.

According to the historian of philosophy Morris Keeton, Montgomery’s notion of “vital organization” can be regarded as “one of the most brilliant philosophic syntheses in the history of American thought.” Publishing articles in American, British, and German journals over the signature “Edmund Montgomery, Hempstead, Texas,” readers began to refer to him as “the cowboy philosopher of Texas” and “the hermit of Liendo.” In exploring the organic foundations of knowledge, Montgomery conceived the human ‘knower’ as a highly complex organism whose psycho-physical integrity was maintained through self-restoration in reaction to environmental influences. Since the human individual reacts to the environment with bio-chemical complexity, knowledge, Montgomery concluded, “must be

Vernon Loggins, *Two Romantics and Their Ideal Life: Elisabet Ney, Sculptor; Edmund Montgomery, Philosopher* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1946); Francis Edward Abernathy, *Legendary Ladies of Texas* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1994), 95-105; Suzan Ledbetter, *Shady Ladies: Nineteen Surprising and Rebellious American Women* (New York: Forge Books, 2006), 179-192; Jan Fortune and Jean Barton, *Elisabet Ney* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943); and Emily Fourmy Cutrer, *The Art of the Woman: The Life and Work of Elisabet Ney* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

²⁵ “Dr. Edmund Montgomery,” *American Journal of Psychology* 22 (July 1911): 475-476; Paul Carus, “Dr. Edmund Montgomery,” *Monist* 19 (October 1909): 631-633; and L. B. Harris and Paul Carus, “Dr. Edmund Montgomery: An Aftermath,” *Monist* 23 (July 1913): 462-472. See also Morris T. Keeton, “Edmund Montgomery—Pioneer of Organicism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8 (June 1947): 309-341; and Ira Kendrick Stephens, *The Hermit Philosopher of Liendo* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1951).

a product of dynamic interaction with environment.”²⁶ Montgomery’s philosophical synthesis was first brought to public attention in 1878 in an article in E. L. Youmans’ *Popular Science Monthly*, a publication known for its coverage of evolutionary thought. His greatest exposure came during the 1880s when he published numerous articles in the *Boston Index* and *Mind*. B. F. Underwood, a member of the Psychical Science General Committee and editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* at the time of the Psychical Science Congress, gave Montgomery extensive exposure in the both the *Boston Index* and *The Open Court*, eventually inviting Montgomery to deliver a paper at the Psychical Congress. Montgomery did not enjoy the exposure he would have received holding an academic position or had he lived in a large metropolis. In addition, his difficult writing style and mystical excursions made reading his varied works cumbersome and distracting, and he was better known among German readers than British or American.²⁷

The Psychical Science Congress closed with an evening session on Friday, August 25, featuring papers by Elliott Coues on “Exhibition of ‘Spirit Photographs’ Known to be Spurious, and of Others which have been Supposed to be Genuine,” and Frederic Myers on “The Evidence for Man’s Survival of Death.” Dr. Myers fascinated the audience with the revelation that he had taken steps to communicate with his friends after his death by placing a sentence sealed in an envelope and which would remain in the possession of the London SPR. After departing from this plane of existence, his spirit would then communicate that sentence to a living medium sensitive enough to receive messages from the spiritual world, and that individual would repeat it to the officers of the organization. At that point, the sealed envelope would be opened, and if the contents were identical with the sentence provided by the

²⁶ Morris T. Keeton, *The Philosophy of Edmund Montgomery* (Dallas: University Press in Dallas, Southern Methodist University, 1950), x, 184, 299.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 303-305, 309. Three works by Montgomery summing up his life’s labors appeared toward the end of his life: *The Vitality and Organization of Protoplasm* (Austin, TX: Gammel-Statesman Publishing Co., 1904); *Philosophical Problems in the Light of Vital Organization* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907); and *The Revelation of Present Experience* (Boston: Sherman, French & Co., 1910).

medium, the ability to communicate with the spirit world would be established, bringing to an end once and for all the question of whether the human personality survived death. Myers urged all those in attendance to follow his example and prepare statements to be relayed to family and friends by a medium following their deaths, making all of them workers in psychical research.²⁸

The Remarkable Case of Mollie Fancher: Psychic Invalid and National Curiosity

One of the more widely-discussed papers of the Psychical Science Congress covered in the national press was read on Wednesday morning, August 23, by Judge Abram H. Dailey, of Brooklyn who reported on the rather curious circumstances surrounding the life of Mary J. “Mollie” Fancher (1848-1916).²⁹ Abram Hoagland Dailey (1831-1907), a former judge of the Fourth District Court of Brooklyn and prominent New York spiritualist, was approached by Elliott Coues who requested him to prepare a paper on the history and peculiar manifestations pertaining to the well-known “Brooklyn Enigma.” Judge Dailey agreed and followed upon on his Psychical Congress paper by publishing a full-length account of Fancher’s life.³⁰ Though nearly forgotten today, Mollie Fancher enjoyed the distinction of

²⁸ “Is It Done By Spirits? Messages Which Are Said to Come From the Dead.” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 25, 1893, 7.

²⁹ For coverage of Judge Dailey’s paper on Mollie Fancher read at the Psychical Science Congress, see e.g. “Her Three Selves. Dr. Myers Tells of a Lady of Triple Personality.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 24, 1893, 12; “Interested in the Psychical. Crowds Attend All the Weird Sessions—Work of Other Congresses.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 24, 1893, 9; and “A Queer Brooklyn Book. Which is Being Prepared for the Chicago Psychical Congress.” *Brooklyn Eagle* March 14, 1893, 5.

³⁰ “Obituary. Abram Hoagland Dailey.” *New York Tribune*, November 3, 1907, 7; “Abram Hoagland Dailey,” 421-422, in *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 9, (New York: James T. White & Co., 1899); “He Has Seen Ghosts. Judge Dailey Sums Up in Favor of Spiritualism.” *Wichita Eagle*, August 12, 1893, 2; and “Judge Dailey on Spiritualism. Beliefs and Achievements of Modern Spiritualism Explained and Indorsed.” *New York Herald*, September 3, 1893, 25. Abram H. Dailey, *Mollie Fancher, The Brooklyn Enigma; An Authentic Statement of Facts in the Life of Mary J. Fancher, the Psychological Marvel of the Nineteenth Century* (Brooklyn, NY: Press of Eagle Book Printing Dept., 1894) remains the fullest, though contested and controversial, account of Fancher’s life. Judge Dailey’s book, published one year after the Psychical Congress, while Mollie was still alive, contains numerous letters from those close to her attesting to her prolonged fasting and psychical powers. The only other full-length monograph on Mollie Fancher is Michelle Stacey, *The Fasting Girl: A True Victorian Medical Mystery* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2002). Stacey, a journalist by training, has provided readers with a more than adequate account although historians would categorize the work as semi-scholarly.

being the most widely-known ‘psychical invalid’ in America throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Her case brought to public attention controversial medical and psychological issues including: the seemingly improbable ability to stave off death following months and years of near-absolute fasting; the much-disputed psychical phenomena of clairvoyance, coupled with the capacity to see and hear the dead; and the perplexing condition of multiple personality disorder, which received increased psychiatric attention at the end of the nineteenth century. Bedridden as an invalid at age sixteen from two bad accidents, and frequently in severe pain, her case, in the late 1870s, attracted the attention of the nation’s two foremost Gilded Age neurologists, William A. Hammond (1828-1900) and George M. Beard (1839-1883), both of whom, without ever examining her for themselves, lent their prestige and authority to a campaign of discrediting Fancher and the claims made on her behalf by her own attending physicians and friends.³¹ Her story deserves some attention here as it reveals the problematic nature of marshaling scientific evidence for extra-sensory perception at the *fin-de-siècle* and for the attention it attracted before, during, and immediately following the Psychological Science Congress.

Born in Attleboro, MA on August 16, 1848 to James E. and Elizabeth Crosby Fancher, young Mollie Fancher received her formal education at the Brooklyn Heights Seminary under the direction of Principal Charles E. West. Professor West later described her as a “sweet girl of delicate organization and nervous temperament...highly esteemed for her pleasing manners and gentle disposition.” By all accounts Mollie was an excellent student but her fragile health, ascribed to an undetermined nervous condition, caused her removal from the seminary prior to the graduation of her class in 1864.

Prescribed a regimen of horseback riding for her nervousness she was thrown from a horse on May 10,

³¹ On Hammond, see Bonnie Ellen Blustein, *Preserve Your Love for Science: Life of William A. Hammond, American Neurologist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For Beard, see Charles E. Rosenberg, “The Place of George M. Beard in Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 36 (May-June 1962): 245-259; and Charles E. Rosenberg, *No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), chapter five “George M. Beard and American Nervousness,” 98-108.

1864. Following her recovery from multiple injuries sustained during that fall, a little more than a year later, on June 8, 1865, her skirt caught on a projecting hook while exiting a street car and she was dragged anywhere, depending on the account, from a few yards to nearly a block over a rough pavement. This marked the beginning of her fifty-year bedridden invalidism. By the following February, in 1866, she suffered from convulsions, losing her sight, vision, and hearing. She then became quasi-comatose (called a trance at the time) and for the next thirteen years took little nourishment, living on just water and small morsels of food.³² According to the testimony of her attending physicians, Samuel Fleet Speir (1838-1895) and Robert Ormiston, who attested to the long-period of fasting, Mollie now possessed clairvoyant abilities, including ‘second sight’ or sightless vision soon after coming out of her first coma or trance. She could reveal the contents of sealed letters that she had never held in her hands, describe events happening at great distances, and locate lost articles.³³ The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* took an interest in the stories and rumors circulating around her home at 160 Gates Avenue and soon other New York newspapers, including the *Sun* and *Tribune*, followed suit. These city papers had a number of reporters gathering and publishing the more remarkable details of her bedridden life such that by the time of the Psychological Science Congress, she had become “the best known psychical freak in the country...a case of world-wide interest to physicians, clergymen, and psychologists.”³⁴

Although paralyzed below the waist and unable to use her arms normally, she allegedly developed embroidery skills by lifting her arms over her head, selling the crocheted items to sight-seers gathering outside of her home. As news of her newly-found psychical abilities spread her home became

³² One writer, rather facetiously, stipulated that “In 1864 she [also] gave up breathing, but—perhaps finding it uncomfortable or perhaps feeling that it was a little too ostentatious—resumed respiration after only ten week of abstention.” Bergen Evans, *The Spoor of Spooks and Other Nonsense* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 94.

³³ “Miss Fancher Makes Merry. The Psychological Marvel Celebrates the Thirtieth Anniversary of Her Living Death.” *New York Tribune*, February 28, 1896, 13; and Abram H. Dailey, “Mollie Fancher’s Nine Years’ Trance,” *Current Literature* 17 (April 1895): 330.

³⁴ “A Psychical Phenomenon. Remarkable Feats of Molly Fancher, of Brooklyn.” *Sioux Valley News* [Correctionville, IA], March 30, 1893, 1; and “She Sees into the Future.” *Galveston News* [Houston, TX], April 23, 1893, 11.

a veritable tourist attraction, with people flocking by the thousands to her doorsteps hoping to catch a glimpse of her or at least purchase a souvenir from the little shop located on the first floor of her home. Referred to by the papers as “the sensation of the day,” P. T. Barnum offered to pay her handsomely if she would allow him to exhibit her in a gold-plated bed, even offering to arrange a luxurious private car for her comfort, but she refused to become a circus exhibition.³⁵ In the early 1890s, as her physiological conditions and overall health improved, her paranormal psychological skills faded and she became a somewhat ‘normal’ invalid. One newspaper account, published in 1938 long after Fancher’s death, suggested that the beginning of an improvement in her physical condition coincided with the death of her aunt, Susan E. Crosby, who had been her caretaker and doorkeeper. The article attributed Mollie’s hysteria to the subconscious influence of this aunt who was “suspected of nothing more than participation as an accomplice in Mollie’s mind-reading acts,” as well as being the “actual maker of the crocheting, embroidery, and wax flowers that were sold to pilgrims as the invalid’s work.”³⁶

In 1878, the astronomer Henry M. Parkhurst subjected Mollie to a test of her extra-sensory perception which he regarded would provide conclusive proof of her clairvoyant abilities. Parkhurst prepared a sealed envelope containing scissored passages of printed material which he had never seen. He only knew that that the cut-up slips of paper were taken, at his suggestion, from some bills at that time being considered before the Maryland constitutional convention. Although precautions were taken to prevent her from opening the sealed envelope, Mollie was allowed to touch and handle it whereupon she communicated that she could read the words ‘court’, ‘jurisdiction,’ and the numbers ‘6’, ‘2’, ‘3’, and ‘4’. Unable at the time to speak or write, we are told that she communicated through the

³⁵ “But One Faculty Left. Remarkable Experiences of Invalid Who Sees With Her Mind.” *San Jose Evening News*, November 21, 1900, 3; and Rodger I. Anderson, *Psychics, Sensitives and Somnambules: A Biographical Dictionary with Bibliographies* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006), 57.

³⁶ Charles Collins, “The Strange Case of Mollie Fancher: Invalid for Half a Century, She Baffled Science with Her Mental Feats.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1938, 13. Another account of Fancher written during this period by a columnist for *The New Yorker* is Herbert Asbury, *All Around the Town* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), chapter four, “The Brooklyn Enigma,” 40-54.

laborious process of spelling out single letters of the alphabet by knocks as they were called out aloud. When the letter was returned to Parkhurst, the seal still intact, he opened the envelope and found to his amazement that she was correct. An account of Parkhurst's experiment appeared in a letter he submitted to the *New York Herald* on November 30, 1878, with an editorial comment describing it as "the most important paper yet called forth by the discussion of the case" and that it was hardly unlikely that Parkhurst, "a man of scientific bent and methodical business habits...could have been deceived." In his 1952 book, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*, Herbert Thurston, called the Parkhurst experiment "Perhaps the most satisfactory evidence preserved to us regarding Mollie Fancher's strange powers of vision and in particular her faculty of reading sealed documents."³⁷

Henry M. Parkhurst (1825-1908), described recently as a "remarkable American astronomer," lived with his wife in Brooklyn, close to the Fancher home, where both were welcome visitors in Mollie's sickroom. Although an amateur astronomer, he enjoyed considerable respect from fellow astronomers and frequently contributed to the *Sidereal Messenger* and *Astronomy and Astro-Physics*. Parkhurst also enjoyed the distinction of becoming the first American 'phonographic reporter'. From 1848 to 1854 he was Chief Official Reporter for the United States Senate, reporting Daniel Webster's speeches and was among the first men to bring women into the profession of stenography. He later became the official reporter for the Superior Court of New York, invented a new harmonic organ, patented a new type of proportional dividers, and published papers on "A New Currency." For nearly forty years Parkhurst published *The Plowshare*, devising an alphabet in which each character stood for a single sound and

³⁷ Herbert Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952), 305-306. Also, in 1878, three years after her nine years' semi-coma had ended, Fancher developed five distinctly different personalities, each which emerged after going into a brief trance. These various personalities were named Idol, Sunbeam, Ruby, Pearl, and Rosebud, by George F. Sargent a friend and business associate of Fancher's who manufactured furniture for invalids. For a brief discussion of Mollie Fancher's multiplex personality, see Franz Hartmann, "Initiation: *The Self and the 'Selves'*. Part II." *Metaphysical Magazine* 2 (November 1895), 339; and Henry Frank, *Psychic Phenomena, Science, and Immortality* 2nd ed. (Boston: Sherman, French & Co., 1916 [1911]), 233-234.

each sound represented a single character. His work in stellar photometry is still acknowledged by astronomers today.³⁸

Both Hammond and Beard brushed aside the testimony of well-respected, but neurological non-experts such as Parkhurst and Drs. Speir and Ormiston. “We have not, in our profession, a more honorable or able body of men than some of the Brooklyn physicians that have been directly or indirectly connected with the case of Mollie Fancher,” Beard acknowledged, “and yet the instincts of the majority both the general practitioners and specialists of nervous diseases reject all their testimony relating to claims of clairvoyance, mind-reading, and prophecy.”³⁹ Samuel Fleet Speir (1838-1895), one of the Brooklyn physicians disparaged by Beard, graduated from the medical department of the University of New York in 1860 with “the highest honors, having won the ‘Mott Gold Medal’ and the ‘Van Buren Prize.’” After studying in Europe for a year and a half, he learned of the application of new plaster of Paris splints which he introduced in the treatment of Union soldiers during the Civil War. After the war he returned home to Brooklyn where he became a surgeon at the Brooklyn Eye and Ear Infirmary, earning “public respect and confidence, and the esteem of his co-practitioners until he had risen to the highest rank of the medical men of Brooklyn.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Stella Cottam and Wayne Orchiston, *Eclipses, Transits, and Comets of the Nineteenth Century: How America’s Perception of the Skies Changed* (New York and London: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 100, 274; and J. A. Parkhurst, “Henry M. Parkhurst,” *Popular Astronomy* 16 (April 1908): 231-239. “‘Phonographic recorders’ wrote down the sounds of the human voice, while stenographers wrote down parts of the words spoken. Each group utilized a complex system of marks.” Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Anti-Slavery: Activist Women on Antebellum Stages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 172, note # 8.

³⁹ Robert W. Rieber, *The Bifurcation of the Self: The History and Theory of Dissociation and Its Disorders* (New York: Springer Science + Business Media, Inc., 2006), 140.

⁴⁰ “Samuel Fleet Speir,” *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 4, (New York: James T. White and Co., 1893), 173; “Obituary,” *Sanitarian* 36 (January 1896): 81; “Obituary,” *Medical Record* 48 (December 28, 1895): 917; and “Samuel Fleet Speir,” 692-694, in *The Eagle and Brooklyn: The Record of the Progress of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Together with the History of the City of Brooklyn from its Settlement to the Present Time* ed. Henry W. B. Howard, vol. 2, (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1893).

Judge Dailey's book on Mollie Fancher met with criticism at the time of its appearance from different reviewers who questioned the value of the evidence marshaled in support of Mollie's clairvoyant abilities, including the much-publicized test of astronomer Henry M. Parkhurst. William Romaine Newbold, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania who wrote extensively on hypnotism and psychical phenomena at the turn-of-the century concluded that the evidence provided by Dailey "will seem satisfactory only to those who are already satisfied of the possibility of clairvoyance. It will do little towards establishing that possibility."⁴¹ Much later, however, there were still defenders of Dailey's book to be found who vouched for the credibility of the testimony found in its pages. Herbert Thurston, for example, while acknowledging that some of the sympathetic observers of Fancher's physical and psychical abilities were "quite likely ...guilty of considerable exaggerations," could not bring himself to believe that Judge Dailey's book "could have been compiled and published if the experiences and faculties laid to her credit were not substantially in accord with facts."⁴²

Like George M. Beard, Dr. William A. Hammond vigorously attacked the claims of Parkhurst, Speir, and others close to Fancher and in 1878, in response to Parkhurst's published account of Mollie's powers of 'second sight,' proposed his own test, offering her \$1,000 if she could read the contents of a sealed letter in the presence of himself and two other New York neurologists of his choosing. Springing to Fancher's defense in the face of this challenge was Epes Sargent, a well-known Boston Spiritualist and writer.⁴³ Brushing aside what he called the "impotent and unscientific antagonism " of the two

⁴¹ William Romaine Newbold, review of Dailey's *Mollie Fancher*, in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 14 (1898-1899), 398. There were a few psychical researchers inclined to accept the testimony of her clairvoyant abilities. See e.g., T. E. Allen, "The Clairvoyance of Mollie Fancher," *Arena* 66 (May 1895): 329-336; and "The Clairvoyance of Mollie Fancher," *Arena* 66 (May 1895): lxxx. Allen was a member of the American Psychical Society of Boston formed in 1893.

⁴² Thurston, *Physical Phenomena*, 305.

⁴³ Epes Sargent (1813-1880) had been the Washington D.C. correspondent for the *Boston Daily Atlas* when he became friends with John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay. Horace Greeley insisted that the 1842 biography of Henry Clay written by Sargent was Clay's favorite. Sargent later became editor of the *Boston Evening Transcript* until he left in 1853 to write plays, poems, novels, and speak at public forums. Glenn M. Reed, "Epes

neurologists, Sargent castigated Hammond for his ill-conceived plan to test Mollie Fancher's clairvoyant powers, arguing that such monetary challenges had been proposed since the telepathic experiments of Mesmer's chief disciple, the Marquis de Puységur, had become well known in 1784. These challenges had always been rejected by physicians or others looking after the clairvoyant subject. "And why declined?" Sargent quizzed, "Because you might as well expect the needle to point true while you are agitating the compass as expect to elicit clairvoyance under the stress and excitement of anxious motive, or under the disturbance produced by the simple presence of an uncongenial person, aggressively disposed." The manifestation of clairvoyant phenomena, Sargent insisted, was "delicate and uncertain" and easily "impaired or spoiled by anything that excites anxiety or irritation, or appeals to cupidity." All serious investigators of such phenomena, he insisted, knew this quite well and it accounted for the reason why physicians having patients displaying clairvoyant abilities refused to subject them to the money test. Quoting Alfred Russel Wallace, the noted naturalist and spiritualist, Epes suggested that the failure to read the envelope's contents, which would surely be the result of a test such as Hammond's, would be equivalent to denying the ability of an expert rifleman, who had on occasion, hit the bull's eye of a target at one thousand yards, to hit it in a one-chance, one thousand dollar challenge. "How can any number of individual failures," Sargent asked, "affect the question of the comparatively rare successes?" Sargent brushed aside Hammond's challenge as unfeasible and impractical charging that failure would prompt the clairvoyance deniers to claim the issue was settled. But in Sargent's view, such a test with the inevitable failure would settle nothing.⁴⁴

Sargent (1813-1880)," in *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* ed. Eric L. Haralson (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), 376. Two of Sargent's works dealing with spiritualism are *Planchette, or, The Despair of Science: Being a Full Account of Modern Spiritualism, Its Phenomena and the Various Theories Regarding it, with a Survey of French Spiritism* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1869); and *The Scientific Basis of Spiritualism* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1881).

⁴⁴ Dailey, *Molly Fancher*, 162-164. On Hammond and Fancher see Stacey, *Fasting Girl*, "Dr. Hammond's War," 102-131. For Epes Sargent's defense of Fancher, see Stacey, 234-239.

Although she claimed to be able to see her departed mother, deceased friends, and even catch glimpses of heavenly scenes, Fancher distanced herself from any association or identification with Spiritualism. A very religious woman, a number of her trusted friends, including two Presbyterian and Baptist ministers, were decidedly opposed to spiritualist doctrine. She denied, for example that the preparation and publication of Judge Dailey's book was undertaken on behalf of furthering the cause of Spiritualism. On numerous occasions she was approached by spiritualists and asked to become a medium for spirit communications but rebuffed all such requests. She confessed that when she came out of her trances she was sometimes "grieved because I have been taken away from brighter and better conditions in another world, than what I find in this." She reported, in Judge Dailey's book, the comforting feeling of her mother and other deceased friends "around me, and in my dreary days of sickness, pain and suffering, and when my spirit is depressed, I can hear her tender voice speaking to me words of cheer, bidding me 'bear up, and be brave, and to endure'."⁴⁵

With the widespread coverage of the Fancher paper at the Psychical Congress and the subsequent press notices of the book by Judge Dailey, the Medico-Legal Society of New York appointed a committee to investigate, in cooperation with Judge Dailey, himself a past president of the Society, the alleged paranormal abilities of Miss Fancher. The committee, chaired by Dr. George Chaffee called one day at the Fancher residence in Brooklyn only to be rebuffed by household staff. At the next meeting of the Society's executive committee Judge Dailey reported on the reasons why the investigating committee was denied permission to examine Miss Fancher. He briefed the committee on the substantial change and improvement in her physical condition, including weight gain and the use of her hands, which had reduced her psychical abilities, diminishing in particular her clairvoyant powers. Dailey, believing the proposed investigation of her psychical powers by the medical committee would be unsatisfactory and damaging to her reputation, had advised against it. The *Medico-Legal Journal* called

⁴⁵ Dailey, *Molly Fancher*, 67-68.

the decision “unfortunate” pointing out that such an investigation “could have done no harm, and....would have had great weight in settling mooted questions in regard to her case.”⁴⁶

On February 3, 1916 she celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of her bedridden life, calling it a “golden jubilee.” At her death, just a week after the fiftieth anniversary of her invalidism, the press treated her sympathetically as one who had heroically endured decades of sometimes extreme suffering, calling her “obscure and beautiful life...a splendid lesson for this tired and restless age.” The *New York Sun*, which had long provided coverage of her remarkable life, lauded her for setting “an example of fortitude and cheerfulness in suffering that heartened and upheld many a weary man and woman.”⁴⁷ Michelle Stacey has aptly described Mollie Fancher as “one of those most intriguing of historical figures: one whose prominence is powerful but brief, and whose legacy lies not in what she herself accomplished but in what she ignited.” Though nearly forgotten today, this bedridden invalid “became a lightning rod for some of the largest intellectual storms of the time.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ “The Case of Mollie Fancher,” *Medico-Legal Journal* 12.1 (1894): 73-74; “Journals and Books,” *Medico-Legal Journal* 12.1 (1894): 524-525; and Dailey, *Molly Fancher*, 256-257.

⁴⁷ “The World’s Greatest Invalid,” *New Age* 24 (August 1916), 357; and “Fifty Years of Spiritual Victory,” *Literary Digest* 52 (February 26, 1916): 507. President Woodrow Wilson received an invitation to the Fancher’s golden jubilee, acknowledging it with his regrets.

⁴⁸ Stacey, *Fasting Girl*, 4. The most balanced account of Fancher and the cultural issues surrounding her life is provided by medical historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg in Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 73-91. A different perspective is taken by Julian Carter who sides with Hammond and Beard regarding the veracity of reports emanating from Brooklyn over Fancher’s condition of simulated hysteria. He writes, “If Beard or Mitchell had had the treatment of her at this point, she would have been fattened up and married off in no time, and her case would be no more than a medical footnote in a treatise on nervous lack of appetite.” Carter also mistakenly calls Fancher a Spiritualist, something Brumberg carefully does not, and describes Fancher’s response to Hammond’s \$1,000 challenge to read words and numbers from a sealed envelope an “insult.” Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 61, 62, & 63.

Ernest Hart and the Mind-Reading Challenge

Prompted in part by the claims put forward regarding Mollie Fancher by Judge Dailey at the Psychical Congress, one episode which irritated congress organizers and which received a fair amount of coverage during the week of the Congress was the challenge thrown down by Dr. Ernest Hart, editor of the *British Medical Journal*, to any mind-reader, telepathist, medium, or clairvoyant to read the numbers and letters of a bank-note he had secured in a wooden pine box. As Hart remains an important figure in connection with the Psychical Congress, some background on his remarkable career is necessary before proceeding to the stir he caused at the congress. Ernest Abraham Hart (1835-1898) became Dean of St. Mary's Hospital at the age of 28, editor of the *BMJ* at 30 and, in spite of some religious discrimination [he was Jewish], president of the Harveian Society in London at the age of 32. When only 20 years old, he was introduced to Thomas Wakley and four years later he became co-editor of *The Lancet*. In 1871 Hart was elected chairman of Parliamentary Bills Committee of the British Medical Association, a position from which he would have enormous influence on British social and health reform initiatives. For example, his interest in poor-law work-houses led to the establishment of the Metropolitan Asylum Board, whereupon he helped draw up the Infant Life Protection Act which significantly reduced the lucrative practice of baby farming. In 1881 Hart was instrumental in organizing the Smoke Prevention Exhibition at South Kensington, and the following year assisted in leading the Smoke Abatement Movement which sought to counter health issues and property damages caused by smoke pollution. According to David Ryde, an English general physician whose brief article remains a useful source, Hart's efforts in reducing the spread of cholera and typhoid through promoting purer drinking-water and cleaner milk in London "find few parallels in English social history." One medical periodical at the time hailed Hart as "unquestionably the foremost public man of his day...in the modern science of 'Preventive Medicine'." It was largely through Hart's ceaseless efforts that the British Medical Association became the widely recognized, powerful professional body it is today. As editor of the *British Medical Journal*

for 32 years until his death, Hart increased the journal's circulation from 2,000 to 21,000 copies and lengthened its content from 20 to 64 pages. Diagnosed as a diabetic in 1883, and in spite of a leg amputation in 1897, Hart remained editor of the journal until his death the following year.⁴⁹

In spite of the impressive medical and social reforms Hart initiated and achieved during his lifetime, his reputation will be forever dogged by the disturbing rumors surrounding the suspicious circumstances of the death of his first wife, Rosetta Levy, whom he married in 1855. Although a coroner ruled her death the result of accidental poisoning, Hart's interference in her treatment, whether intentional or inadvertent, is thought by many to have caused her death in November 1861.⁵⁰ For example, a report in the *Medical Times and Gazette* suggested that Hart interfered with the attending doctor's recommendations to let the illness run its course by administering medicine to suppress her vomiting. The belief that Hart was in some way responsible for his first wife's death underscored the theme of a novel by Julia Frankau, who knew Hart personally, under the synonym of Frank Danby and titled *Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll* (1887). The plot centers on an affair between a woman and a Jewish doctor who murders his wife in order to pursue a relationship with his mistress and their child. The doctor's wife dies on the operating table when he interferes with her surgery, but his hopes are dashed when his mistress departs with a younger man and his daughter dies. The novel, something of a

⁴⁹ David Ryde, "Out of the Past: Ernest Hart—A Forgotten Man," *Journal of the College of General Practitioners* 12 (November 1966): 345-347; and George K. Behlmer, "Ernest Hart and the Social Thrust of Victorian Medicine," *British Medical Journal* 301 (October 3, 1990): 711-713. See also "Death of Ernst Hart. He was Editor of the *British Medical Journal* and a Famous Sanitarian." *Baltimore Sun*, January 8, 1898, 7; "Ernest Hart Dead in London. Editor of the *British Medical Journal* Passes Away." *New York Times*, January 8, 1898, 7; and "Author and Physician. Ernest Hart, Editor of the *British Medical Journal*, Dead at London." *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 8, 1898, 4.

⁵⁰ For details surrounding the death of Hart's first wife, see P. W. J. Bartrip, *Mirror of Medicine: A History of the 'British Medical Journal'* (Oxford: *British Medical Journal* and Clarendon Press, 1990), 78. Bartrip concludes that "We shall never know whether Hart was a murderer. The episode will remain as one of the several mysteries associated with him" (79).

sensation in its day, resonated with the alert reading public who at once recognized the fictional Dr. Phillips as the enigmatic Dr. Hart.⁵¹

The public challenge by Hart to participants at the Psychical Science Congress was issued on the first day of the Congress, appearing in the August 24 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Reflecting that the sessions getting underway at the Psychical Congress presented a “favorable opportunity” for bringing to light “the pretensions made by psychical researchers, clairvoyants, mind-readers, and telepathists, to be able to see otherwise than ordinary mortals see with their everyday eyes,” Hart did not hide his disdain for the humbug he regarded as passing for science at the Memorial Art Palace. He indicated that a lifetime investigating and exposing so-called marvelous phenomena associated with mesmerism and hypnotism had convinced him that “all the alleged phenomena of clairvoyance, telepathy, thought transference, and so-called spiritual communication” were “delusions, impostures, or misinterpreted facts.” Hart announced he would place a bank note for \$1,000 in a sealed pine box that would become the property of any “man, woman, or child, medium, thought-reader, clairvoyant, or telepathist” who, within forty-eight hours of declaring to do so, read and repeat the numbers on the bank draft. In order to declare, Hart also required the demonstrator to deposit \$100 which would then be donated to a city charity. The challenge would remain open until the end of the month. In a mocking tone, Hart stated he would receive the communication of acceptance either “by post or by telepathic agency or by spiritual communication to me or any form of correspondence in which they may be adept and which they may prefer.”⁵²

⁵¹ Mary Elizabeth Leighton, “‘Hypnosis Redivivus’: Ernest Hart, ‘British Medical Journal’, and the Hypnotism Controversy,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 34 (Summer 2001), 108. In 1872 Hart married Alice Marion Rowland, a sister of the social reformer Henrietta Barnett. Alice Rowland had studied medicine in London and Paris and shared her husband’s passion for social reform. She was active in the promotion of Irish cottage industries, and was the founder of the Donegal Industrial Fund. On the Midway Plaisance at the 1893 World’s Fair, she exhibited an Irish Village with handcrafted items for sale.

⁵² “For A Psychic Test. Agnostic Ernest Hart Issues a Challenge to Telepathists.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 24, 1893, 1; and “Challenged to A Test. Dr. Ernest Hart Makes a Liberal Offer to Clairvoyants or Mind Readers.” *Kansas City Star*, August 24, 1893, 3.

When asked about his feelings regarding the challenge, Elliott Coues replied that he would like to see telepathy and mind-reading “tested just as much as Dr. Hart,” but the Psychical Science Congress, he indicated, was not the place to conduct such investigations. Coues regretted that Dr. Hart and others had somehow received the impression “that this is a convention of fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, card-readers, and the like.” Coues emphasized that the gathering of psychical researchers in Chicago was for the scientific consideration of “hitherto incomprehensible phenomena of the mind, just as a congress of doctors might discuss the functions of the liver.” Coues went on to point out that similar challenges had been thrown down over the years and the conditions in which the challenges have always been made “would be likely to end in defeat for the clairvoyant or telepathist.” Richard Hodgson, vice-chairman of the congress, also brushed aside Hart’s challenge by pointing out that the congress was “not in the mind-reading business.” Calling the challenge “ridiculous” and “absurd,” Hodgson insisted that Hart’s conditions doomed the undertaking to failure, emphasizing that the faculty for clairvoyance, “even when it is possessed, is not subject to the will of the possessor.”⁵³ B. F. Underwood, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, the official organ of the Psychical Science Congress, later weighed in on the conditions of such a proposed test: “No person, at the suggestion of an investigator, can read correctly the mind of some other person, even though a large reward be offered.” Skeptics who questioned the existence of psychical phenomena, Underwood explained, did not understand that the exercise of psychical powers depended “upon peculiar conditions that may be present only at some particular time, possibly only once or twice in the lifetime of an individual.”⁵⁴ Clearly, the proponents of psychical science were fully aligned, as they had been in 1878 regarding Mollie Fancher, in their beliefs about the nature of paranormal mental powers and the conditions under which they could be produced.

⁵³ “For A Psychic Test,” 1.

⁵⁴ B.F. Underwood, “Delicate Influences.” *Boston Investigator*, July 28, 1894, 2.

Three days after the initial announcement of the challenge appeared, the *Chicago Tribune*, on Thursday, August 27, reported that Dr. Hart had just received two replies to his challenge. While “smoking cigarettes and sipping lemonade” in the Irish Village on the Midway Plaisance the previous afternoon, Hart was handed a letter offering to take up challenge. The would-be challenger referred to himself as “the humble and unknown author of ‘The Dream of Love and Fire,’” and that like Hart, he had also spent a lifetime studying the curious phenomena being discussed at the Psychological Congress. But the letter-writer objected to Hart’s conditions, describing them as unfair and discriminatory. First, he indicated, anyone possessing psychical abilities “must be by natural law too poor to put up \$100 forfeit,” and second, the terms stipulated by Hart were “calculated to defeat the simple natural law of the ‘positive-passive-negative,’” which the author indicated permeated the atmosphere and environment. The letter was signed ‘Respectfully, Frederick L. Horton.’ Hart confessed that he had never read *The Dream of Love and Fire* and didn’t quite understand the natural law of the positive-passive-negative. He was also struck by the notion that any possessor of clairvoyant powers should be poor by natural law, insisting that if such individuals could see through a pine box or a sealed letter, “why can’t they see through a mountain, the treasures of gold and silver it may contain, and at once form a joint stock company to get the metal out?” If \$100 was too much to put up for the challenge, Hart would instead place a \$10 note in the wooden box, asking only \$1 to be deposited as acceptance of the challenge. The only conditions he insisted upon were that the box be securely sealed and that only he was to know the serial numbers on the bank note. Dr. Hart was then handed another letter of acceptance from H.D. Mugerditchyan, manager of Carl B. King, a mind reader of some repute who had been appearing at different entertainment venues in and around Chicago. The manager wished to form a committee to whom Hart would disclose the bank note number which would then be hidden somewhere on the World’s Fair grounds. Mr. King, the mind-reader, would then pick one of the committee members to hold on to while ‘leading him’ to where the bank note number was hidden. Finding it would then prove,

in the manager's mind, that Carl King was in fact a legitimate mind-reader and should therefore receive the \$1,000. Hart scoffed at the offer: "Ha! Muscle reading. Cumberland told how that was done. It's a mere trick." Hart insisted that he would not tell anyone the numbers on the bank note and that Carl King would have to "read" the numbers on the note sealed in the box. Hart also disparaged Elliott Coues' response to the challenge he had issued to the Psychical Congress, mocking Coues' reply that the congress had nothing to do with "clairvoyants, card readers, and the like." "That is his answer to my challenge?" Hart cried, while "Judge Dailey gravely declares that Mollie Fanchon [sic] has vision which penetrates partitions and walls, and sees clearly what is going on at a distance of 100 miles, and that she can read letters that are still unsealed?" Now becoming indignant, Hart rebuked Coues' charge he had stipulated impossible conditions for the challenge. Hart insisted he had only set conditions "which thought-readers and clairvoyants declare themselves able to overcome." He then extended the time his challenge would be open, moving the chance to accept from the end of August to twelve months.⁵⁵

The whole affair came to a head during the Thursday afternoon session of the psychical congress at the Memorial Art Palace. Elliott Coues was just calling the session to order when Ernest Hart approached the podium demanding to be heard. Accounts in the newspapers vary on exactly what transpired next. According to the *Chicago Herald* (the story subsequently picked up on the wire by the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*) indicates that as Hart approached the podium no one had any idea who he was and simply assumed he was the first scheduled speaker. As he made his way to where Coues was standing, Hart loudly announced that he had something to say to the audience. Chairman Coues,

⁵⁵ "Mindreaders Accept. But Dr. Hart Refuses the Conditions They Ask." *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1893, 5.; and "Chance for Mind-Readers. Dr. Hart is Skeptical and Has \$1000 to Pay for Conversion." *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, August 27, 1893, 9. Frederick L. Horton, *The Dream of Love and Fire* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1888), 42 pages; Frederick L. Horton, *Natural Laws Govern Spirit and Mind Which in Turn Govern Body; A Compilation of Truths that Made the Unbelieving Compiler Believe* (Chicago: by the author, 1908), 38 pages. For so-called "mind-reading" of bank notes incorporating techniques of muscle reading, see Stuart Cumberland, *A Thought-Reader's Thoughts, Being the Impressions and Confessions of Stuart Cumberland* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1888), 305-318; and Charles Gatchell, "The Methods of Mind-Readers" *Forum* 11 (April 1891): 192-197. For the popular home and parlor entertainment variety of muscle-reading called the "willing game," see Richard Hodgson, "Telepathy," *Chautauquan* 16 (January 1893): 409-413; and Cumberland, *A Thought-Reader's Thoughts*, 223-226.

pounding the podium with his gavel and attempting to call the session to order, demanded he sit down until the sessions were underway, whereupon the Congress would hear what he had to say. Hart, becoming angry and shaking his fist at Coues, insisted that he would not wait, claiming that "I have something to say of importance to the public and I am going to say it." Turning to face the audience Hart then denounced anyone associated with the congress or professing a belief in spiritualism as "imposters" and repeated his mind-reading challenge to those in attendance. Once again, Coues insisted that Hart desist, as the congress was about to begin its regular session. But Hart refused to be silent and continued haranguing the audience. Thereupon Chairman Coues sent for Clarence Young, Secretary of the World's Congress Auxiliary, who tried to reason with Hart but to no avail. As heated words began to exchange between the two men, Secretary Young put his hands upon Dr. Hart in an attempt to escort him out of the Hall of Washington. A brief scuffle ensued in which Hart raised his fist close to Young's face and as the *Picayune* described it, "Mr. Young's left eye suddenly came in contact with the worthy doctor's right fist." Coues rushed to assist Secretary Young and Hart was persuaded to leave the hall. The paper described Secretary Young the next day as "carefully nursing a purple spot beneath his left eye." Various newspaper columnists could not resist making witty remarks of the altercation in the context of the congress. One paper wrote "Clearly the secretary was not a mind-reader, or he would have left Dr. Hart alone," while another remarked that Hart's fist had left "an impression on the secretary which the other physical investigators could perceive for several days without the slightest aid from telepathy." Charles Carroll Bonney, President of the World's Congress Auxiliary, expressed regret that such an incident had taken place at one of the congress sessions.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ "Psychical Science and Physical Force. A London Editor Causes a Sensation at Chicago." *New Orleans Picayune*, September 1, 1893, 19; "Sec. Young's Eye Blacked. Dr. Ernest Hart of England Wanted to Talk and Was Finally Ejected from a Chicago Hall." *Boston Globe*, August 25, 1893, 8; "Men of Science at Fisticuffs." *Trenton [NJ] Evening Times*, August 25, 1893, 7; "Light in Dark Places." *Anaconda [MT] Standard*, October 18, 1893, 2; and "Spirits and Table-Moving." *Baltimore Sun*, August 29, 1893, 4.

But a different account of the confrontation at the Memorial Art Palace appeared in the *Chicago Inter Ocean* in which there was no mention of a physical altercation ever occurring. Instead, the *Inter Ocean* reported that it was explained to Hart that the rules for all the Congresses prevented anyone not listed on the program from making speeches or interrupting a speaker. At that point, the paper indicates, Hart was “led off as peaceful as a lamb, and the congress settled down to the calm consideration of hypnotic suggestions and other kindred topics.”⁵⁷ Hart himself, in a letter to the editor of the *Inter Ocean* also denied any physical confrontation between himself and Secretary Young. Hart referred to the alleged encounter as “absurdly ridiculous” and “highly imaginative...even beyond the limits of romance.” He claimed that he had been invited by President Bonney to attend a series of congresses, indicating he had several letters from Bonney and he was registered as a member of the psychical and other congresses. He decided, he said, after reading in the paper of the alleged abilities of Mollie Fancher, to publicly make the offer to her or any others by “the simplest possible test.” Whether or not she could read the bank note sealed in the box Hart expressed no public opinion although his private view was that she could not. As for statements by Coues and Hodgson that the test was “ridiculous and impossible,” Hart answered that if his offer appeared ridiculous it was “only because their profession of being able to read through a pine partition is ridiculous.” Hart also claimed to have left a written letter with Coues to be read before the congress audience and that he had never heard of a congress which did not allow discussion. As for any fisticuffs occurring, Hart wrote “There was no thought on the one side or the other of any physical altercation. The statements published to that effect are absolutely and scandalously untrue.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ “Hart Not Wanted. Politely Ejected from the Psychical Science Congress.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 25, 1893, 12.

⁵⁸ “Dr. Hart Protests. Writes of the Incident at the Psychical Congress.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 26, 1893, 14.

Yet there is reason to question Hart's denial of hitting Clarence Young with his fist if only for his well-known tendency for displaying violent behavior. The British medical historian, P. W. J. Bartrip, in his history of the *British Medical Journal* portrays Hart's relationship with James Wakley, the *Lancet's* second editor, as one of "open hatred [with] constant rumours of libel and even threats of violence" due to Hart's persistent attempt to become joint editor of the *Lancet* and Wakley's insistent refusal to do so. During one "angry altercation" between the two men Bartrip believes it is most likely they came to blows as Wakley "had 'an extremely warm temper, and the editorial room of *The Lancet* was more than once the scene of a personal fracas." If indeed such an encounter unfolded Bartrip believes Hart would have gotten the worst of it as Wakley, a large man, was an accomplished boxer and Hart "a diminutive chain smoker."⁵⁹

Those newspapers that covered the mind-reading challenge generally sided with Hart over the psychical scientists. One Montana paper lauded Hart's credentials as an investigator and discreditor of the type of phenomena being put forward at the psychical congress. Indeed, Hart had previously demolished, in a series of publications in the British periodical *Nineteenth Century*, the claims of the French psychiatrist Dr. Jules Bernard Luys (1828-1897) who believed he had evoked from his subjects 'higher phenomena' through his hypnotic experiments at the Charité Hospital in Paris. The papers presented at the psychical congress only whetted Hart's appetite to destroy once again the rearing of what he regarded as self-delusions, impostures, and misinterpreted facts. The newspaper called the reasons that congress leaders had provided in response to Hart's challenge "unsatisfactory," chiding congress officials for lacking confidence and congratulating Hart for "put[ting them all to flight]."⁶⁰ Even the *New York Times* complained that those gathered at Chicago for the congress had "failed to take

⁵⁹ Bartrip, *Mirror of Medicine*, 64.

⁶⁰ "Dispersed the Philistines." *Helena Weekly Independent*, September 21, 1893, 4. An editorial in the *Tribune* mused that if the clairvoyants could not call upon their talents at will, it was "their misfortune." [No title] *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 1893, 4.

advantage of a great opportunity,” presuming that “in these days of financial stringency there are many clairvoyants who are in the ranks of the unemployed or who experience difficulty keeping the wolf from the door. To these the offer of Dr. Hart should be very inviting.” Since Hart had extended his challenge from two weeks to twelve months the *Times* argued it was more than sufficient time for making “such arrangements with mahatma[s] or other shadowy familiar[s]” to claim the \$1,000 prize that could be used for the further dissemination of occult doctrines.⁶¹

What the newspapers who supported Hart’s challenge to the psychical congress didn’t know was that Hart knew full well the challenge could not or would not be met. He had said so in his 1893 book, *Hypnotism, Mesmerism, and the New Witchcraft*, where he acknowledged the futility of attempting to prove, through tests, the existence of extra-sensory mental powers. In that work, Hart wrote that “there is no use laying down a test...for the clairvoyants....How often, for example, have [they] been asked to read some document or tell the number of a bank note carefully locked up, and always in vain?” Arguing that clairvoyants, spiritualists, and their allies generally protested to the sort of tests he and others favored, he shrugged that there was simply no choice but to “take what they tell you in the way they tell it to you.”⁶² He was also undoubtedly aware of the controversy surrounding the one thousand pound wager put to the famous American mind-reader Washington Irving Bishop in 1883 by MP Henry Labouchère of London. The challenge protocols were almost identical to the format laid down by Hart in Chicago as Bishop was required put up 100 pounds in advance before he attempted to read a bank note number sealed in an envelope. Both Labouchère and Bishop claimed victory during the test but the issue was never resolved.⁶³ One observation to be taken from Dr. Hart’s mind-reading

⁶¹ “Dr. Hart’s Challenge.” *New York Times*, August 29, 1893, 4.

⁶² Ernest Hart, *Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft*, new enlarged ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896 [1893]), 164.

⁶³ For press coverage of this event, held at St. James Hall on June 12, 1883, see “Labouchere’s Bet.” *Nashville American*, June 7, 1883, 6; “The Thought Reading Challenge. Letter from Mr. Labouchere. *Manchester Guardian*,

challenge to the Psychical Science Congress is that he had a penchant for provoking controversy, especially when it came to subjects particularly galling to him, even when he was aware that no satisfactory results could ever be drawn should such a test ever be undertaken.

In support of this contention regarding Hart's proclivity for creating controversy just for the sake of doing so, we need only examine other occurrences which took place during his 1893 stay in the United States. For Hart provoked the ire of more than just the spiritualists and psychical researcher gathered in Chicago.⁶⁴ His attacks on homeopathic medicine further demonstrated his inclination to create controversy and generate hostility. One particularly blatant episode occurred at the Pan-American Medical Congress, held not in Chicago but in Washington, DC. Due to the heterogeneous nature of American medicine in the late nineteenth century, there was no unified Congress of Medicine at the World's Congress Auxiliary. Instead, there were a number of specialized congresses leading off with Medicine and Surgery, followed in order by Homeopathic Physicians and Surgeons, Eclectic Physicians and Surgeons, Dentistry, Medico-Climatology, and Medical Jurisprudence. A separate Congress of Charities, Correction and Philanthropy was also held for hospital physicians, nurses and superintendents of insane asylums, and a Congress on Public Health was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association. Noticeably absent from the congresses was

June 16, 1883, 8; "The Thought-Reading Wager." *New York Tribune*, June 26, 1883, 8; "London Gossip. An Englishman's Notes on English Topics." *New York Tribune*, July 1, 1883, 4; and "Thought Reading. Mr. Bishop's Late Wonderful Manifestation—His Wager with Labouchere." *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 16, 1883, 4. For a discussion of Washington Irving Bishop and his British counterpart Stuart Cumberland, see Roger Luckhurst, "Passages in the Invention of the Psyche: Mind-Reading in London, 1881-84," 117-150, in *Transactions and Encounters: Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* ed. Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonough (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ Hart had also irritated a number of Chicagoans for his criticisms of the water quality being provided to the World's Fair. In addressing the Chicago Medical Society in June 1893, he chastised the Chicago Department of Health for its statistical manipulation in making the city's water supply seem safer than it actually was. Ernest Hart, "Health Conditions of Chicago," *Chicago Medical Recorder* 5 (July 1893): 1-10; "Condemns the Water. Dr. Ernest Hart Says the Source is Contaminated." *Chicago Tribune*, June 20, 1893, 3; and "Open Court," *American Homeopathist* 19 (November 1, 1893): 340.

the American Medical Association, which held its own separate gathering, the Pan-American Medical Congress, in Washington, DC from September 5-8, 1893.⁶⁵

It was at the Pan-American Congress where Hart created a furor when he denounced all physicians who practiced homeopathy and any regular physicians who consulted with homeopaths or assisted them in surgical practice. Hart had been invited by the AMA to speak on medical ethics and stunned many physicians in attendance with his scathing remarks and admonishments to avoid any kind of professional contact with homeopaths, denouncing them as quacks and calling for their exclusion from the profession, insisting that any regular physician who consulted with homeopaths was “irrational” and a “traitor to the confidence of the profession.”⁶⁶ Homeopathic and eclectic medical journals in America exploded with indignation over Hart’s remarks, complaining that he “probably has done more to break down the Code of Ethics than any one else” and described his presentation to the Pan-American Congress “as bold a piece of blatant effrontery and ill-disguised hypocrisy as was ever imposed upon the American people.”⁶⁷ At the time of Hart’s attack homeopathy was a well-established sect in America with over 12,000 practitioners and representatives on all State Medical Examination

⁶⁵ Julie K. Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display: International Expositions in United States, 1876-1904* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), 43-45. Hart had a paper on “Objects of the National Health Society of London,” read in his absence at the Congress of Public Health held at the Art Institute, October 9-14, 1893. “International Congress of Public Health,” *Sanitarian* 31 (November 1, 1893): 431. He was also a featured speaker at the American Medical Editors’ Association’s at its annual meeting held in Milwaukee in late June where he “kindly endeavoured to teach a meeting of a hundred medical journals how periodicals of this class ought to be conducted.” “Mr. Ernest Hart in the United States of America,” *Monthly Homeopathic Review* [London] 37 (December 1, 1893), 715; and “Notes and News,” *Pacific Medical Journal* 36 (July 1, 1893): 455.

⁶⁶ [No Title], *American Homeopathist* 19 (October 1, 1893), 298; “Editorial: The Pan-American,” *Eclectic Medical Journal* 53 (October 1893): 513-514; and [No Title], *American Homeopathist* 19 (December 1, 1893): 366.

⁶⁷ “Run to Cover,” *Eclectic Medical Journal* 55 (May 1895), 334. The journal referred to Hart as “a fraud, a hypocrite, and a mountebank” (334). “The Ethics of Medicine: Prof. Hart, of England, Illustrates Them by Calling Homeopaths ‘Quacks’.” *New York Tribune*, September 8, 1903, 5; and “On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners,” *American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record* 23 (September 28, 1893): 180.

Boards. It was therefore regarded as “a breach of decorum of the first magnitude....to publicly insult a large and honorable contingent of the medical profession of America.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, Hart apparently over-stepped his position as an invited guest of the AMA by showing the same sort stubbornness he had displayed at the Psychical Congress in Chicago. A correspondent from the *Monthly Homeopathic Review* [London] wrote that Hart had to be called to order by Dr. William Pepper, President of the Pan-American Congress for violating the rules of the proceedings by continuing to speak for several minutes after being asked to desist. Hart subsequently proceeded to introduce a resolution before the Convention, when President Pepper had to again call him to order, informing him that he was not a member of the AMA, but simply an invited guest and did not have the privilege to introduce resolutions. The correspondent’s report was at wide variance with Hart’s own account of the reception of his address before the Congress in which he stated that his remarks were received with “great applause and aplomb.”⁶⁹ Hart’s attempts to continue speaking while being called to order by President Pepper at the Pan-American Congress runs parallel with his attempts to speak at the Psychical Science Congress in spite of attempts to silence him by Chairman Elliott Coues. The visit to the United States by Ernest Hart in the summer and fall of 1893 and his attempts to get ‘under the skin’ of psychical researchers and homeopaths indicates the disparity of strength between psychical research and homeopathy. While the homeopathic press united in force to denounce Hart’s interloping attempts to drive a wedge between medical factions in America, the general press in the United States did not come as valiantly to the defense of the pro-spiritualist and clairvoyant-friendly

⁶⁸ *American Homeopathist*, 297.

⁶⁹ “Mr. Ernest Hart in the United States,” 719. William Pepper, Jr. (1843-1898), president of the AMA’s 1893 Pan American Congress, founded the *Philadelphia Medical Times* and edited the journal in 1871. He served as Provost for the University of Pennsylvania from 1881 to 1894 and was medical director of the United States Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876. Dr. Pepper was also the founder of Philadelphia’s first free public library in 1891. Lewis R. Harley, “Sketch of William Pepper,” *Popular Science Monthly* 55 (October 1899): 836-842; and Vincent Lo Re and Lisa M. Bellini, “William Pepper, Jr., M.D. (1843-1898): Portrait of a Nineteenth-Century Medical Educator,” *Journal of Medical Biography* [England] 14 (August 2006): 169-177.

group of psychical researchers gathered in Chicago. The disparity in organizational and journalistic strength of the two groups could not better be illustrated in the escapades of Ernest Hart in Chicago and Washington, DC.

Reactions to the Psychical Science Congress

The Psychical Science Congress was viewed in many minds as a great publicity platform for “spiritualists, clairvoyants, hypnotists and other such theorists” and there is much to be said for this view.⁷⁰ The Congress featured presentations and even demonstrations of spiritualism nearly every day while papers devoted to mesmerism, hypnotism, clairvoyance, and telepathy were much in display. The general reaction of much of the press was that the congress had been underwhelming. As for Coues stated goal of establishing psychical science among the recognized sciences, the *Chicago Inter Ocean* found it to be more like “where the discoveries in electricity were when Franklin succeeded in drawing lightning from the clouds, and before he had so much as put up a lightning rod.” As for the congress itself and its accomplishments, the paper conceded that while there had been a great deal presented regarding “supposed spiritualism and the nourishing of the hope of immortality, the seeker after knowledge and wisdom...must have been disappointed at the barrenness in results.” Better to rely on the teachings and practical results found in Christianity, it determined, for “the ample and satisfactory proof of the reality of the invisible world [and] the everlasting rock of spiritual truth.”⁷¹

A different perspective was offered by Frederic Myers, one of the foremost Congress participants, who took away a positive view, regarding the Congress as “successful” and finding

⁷⁰ “Psychical Science at Chicago.” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 27, 1893, 16.

⁷¹ “Philosophy and Psychic Research.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 27, 1893, 24. Similar perspectives judging the results of the Congress as “disappointing” along with its sessions, “some of [which] must have made the judicious grieve,” can be found in [No Title], *Interior* 24 (September 21, 1893), 4; “Psychic Science,” *Advance* 27 (August 31, 1893): 650; “The August Congresses,” *Dial* 15 (September 1, 1893): 107; and “The Psychical Congress at Chicago,” *Congregationalist* 78 (August 31, 1893): 27.

encouragement in the “growing interest taken in our studies in a city which has a perhaps unique claim to represent the future of the Western world.” Referring to audience attendance as “unexpectedly large” Myers expressed satisfaction at the turnout of several hundred to a thousand persons attending each session, especially when considering the unpleasant conditions in the Hall of Washington with its “bad acoustic properties, and exposed to the almost continuous noise of a large adjacent railway station.”⁷² This temporary hall, one of two constructed for the World’s Congress Auxiliary, was situated just “a few feet away from the snorting, bell-ringing engines and rumbling freight trains of the Illinois Central Railroad.”⁷³ According to his recent biographer, Myers had unsuccessfully attempted to convince Charles Richet and Oliver Lodge to attend the Chicago Congress, even offering to pay their expenses from the coffers of the London SPR. Myers was concerned about the attention that “vulgar American Spiritualists” would steal at the Congress and wanted to offset their presence with a number of prominent psychical researchers associated with the London group. Still, even with numerous Spiritualists appearing on the program, Myers was overall quite pleased with the outcome of the Congress, writing his wife Eveleen about his impressions on speaking before a large audience on “The Evidence for Man’s Survival of Death” at the final session of Friday evening’s gathering: “Last night over 1000 people came and sat in absolute stillness while I held forth about immortality etc. & then cheered me, and rushed up to me, & shook hands, & blessed me, & joined the SPR, & said all kinds of things

⁷² Frederic W. H. Myers, “The Congress of Psychical Science at Chicago,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 6 (October 1893), 127-128. Richard Hodgson reported that the Congress sessions “undoubtedly attracted a great deal of attention, and the papers and the proceedings were very extensively noticed in the American press.” Hodgson quoted in William T. Stead, “The Other World from the New World; or Psychical Study in America,” *Borderland* 1 (April 1894), 303. A Dallas newspaper reported that a Mrs. J. D. Shaw, a Spiritualist and “lady student of occultism,” believed that the Psychical Science Congress had been “the largest and most successful of the congresses held in Chicago.” “The Thipp Séance. Materialized Forms Appeared, Talked to the People Present and Disappeared.” *Dallas Morning News*, May 19, 1896, 5.

⁷³ Arthur H. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 392.

which I won't repeat."⁷⁴ Myers returned home to London convinced that Chicago would become the next psychical capital of the Western world, even supplanting London as the center for Anglo-American psychical research.

But Myers's favorable impressions of the Congress were not fully shared by the English occult press, particularly William Stead's *Borderland* magazine. According to Stead, "With the exception of Mr. Myers' and one or two other papers, the Psychical Congress seems to have been rather dull." Although "several papers of considerable value [were read]," Stead thought that most of papers presented "were hardly up to the level of the occasion."⁷⁵ Stead's verdict did not coincide with the view of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, the official journal of the Congress, which proclaimed that the Congress had been "a grand success, surpassing...the most sanguine expectations." As far as the papers which were presented, the *R-PJ* stated "there was not a [single] dull one with most of them [rather] able and brilliant."⁷⁶ Stead's editorial assistant at *Borderland*, Miss Ada Goodrich-Freer gave the *R-PJ* the benefit of the doubt in its gushing review of the Congress, but was quick to add that the proceedings should "have been much better." She particularly regretted the lack of internationally known speakers of the caliber that had presented papers at the 1892 Second International Congress of Experimental

⁷⁴ Trevor Hamilton, *Immortal Longings: FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death* (Exeter, UK and Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2009), 184. According to Miss Abbey Judson, a Spiritualist from Minneapolis writing in *Light of Truth*, Myers' closing paper on 'The Evidence for Man's Survival After Death' "struck the deepest note of anything that was presented to the Congress....It was thrilling to feel that many in the audience hung breathlessly to his words, to know whether they survive the death of the body, and whether their departed ones are still within call." "Mr. Myers at Chicago," *Borderland* 1 (October 1893), 101. On Miss Judson's spiritualistic activities see "Spiritualists' Anniversary." *St. Paul Globe*, March 23, 1891, 3; and "Minneapolis Dots." *St. Paul News*, July 3, 1891, 4.

⁷⁵ "Myers at Chicago," 101; and "The Chicago Congresses," *Review of Reviews* [London] 8 (October 15, 1893), 360.

⁷⁶ X' [Ada Goodrich-Freer], "Psychical Science at Chicago: Notes of Some of the Papers," *Borderland* 1 (October 1893), 160. B. F. Underwood (1839-1914) and his wife Sara A. Underwood (1838-1911) served as editor and assistant editor respectively of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* during the Psychical Science Congress. Editor Underwood claimed that the circulation of the *R-PJ* had increased considerably following the publicity the Chicago papers provided by the Congress. The *R-PJ* advertised itself at this time as "the best of the modern thought of the day presented [with] editorials on the topics of advanced thought [including] psychical research, free discussion, future life, and progressive ideas." [No Title], *Notes and Queries* 13 (March 1895): 96.

Psychology held in London, although she conceded that a number of American speakers in Chicago may have been more widely recognized in the United States, enjoying greater distinction than what the readers of *Borderland* might have been aware. Yet she still expressed disappointment with the quality of the presentations, noting that even the papers read on behalf of English and European scientists were already quite well-known to any reader familiar with the *Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research*.⁷⁷

An overall favorable impression of the Congress was given by one prominent American theologian and religious periodical editor, the Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Herben. A Methodist Episcopal minister, Stephen Joseph Herben (1860-1937) graduated from Northwestern University in 1889 and was ordained shortly thereafter. The following year he became associate editor of *The Epworth Herald*, a position he held for fifteen years until he was named associate editor of *The Christian Advocate*. A longtime friend of Thomas Edison, Dr. Herben conducted the funeral services held for the famed inventor in Rosedale Cemetery, West Orange, NJ on October 21, 1931. According to Rev. Herben, the Psychical Science Congress “was one of the most interesting, if not the most profitable, of the many congresses held during the summer in the World’s Fair city.” Dr. Herben based his judgment on what he called “the number of prominent men and women it drew to Chicago...the character of the topics discussed, and its immense popularity.”⁷⁸ An article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* agreed with his assessment, referring to the Congress, replete with its sessions on psychical research, as “the greatest and most important ever held.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “Psychical Science at Chicago,” 161. Goodrich-Freer may well have been referring to such Americans mostly unknown in psychological and psychical circles who were discussed earlier in this chapter—William C. Winslow, Alexander Wilder, and Edmund Montgomery.

⁷⁸ Stephen J. Herben, “A Psychical Congress,” *Christian Advocate* 68 (December 14, 1893): 804; and “Rev. Dr. S. J. Herben, Editor, Dies at 76.” *New York Times*, February 23, 1937, 27.

⁷⁹ “Psychic Mystery. Some of the Results of the Psychical Congress at Chicago.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 17, 1893, 28.

Not nearly as impressed as Rev. Herben with the Congress and its sessions was the well-known anti-Mormon author and journalist J. H. [John Hanson] Beadle (1840-1897). John Beadle's letters from Salt Lake City to the *Cincinnati Commercial* subsequently published as *Life in Utah* (1870) brought him national recognition in the late 1860s. He later settled in New York City where he joined the staff of editors and correspondents of the American Press Association.⁸⁰ In writing of the Psychological Congress, Beadle described it as "a very remarkable affair—so interesting that it was actually painful." He pointed to the devotion of various speakers, "men and women of profound learning," who "soared after the infinite and dived after the unfathomable and strove to draw aside the veil which hides the impenetrable and the intangible." Beadle surmised that he could "afford to wait elsewhere for these grand results," leaving the Art Institute and strolling over to the Midway Plaisance to enjoy the entertainments and distractions, "as I generally do when I grow weary of science and high art."⁸¹

Theosophists Triumph at the Parliament

If the Psychological Science Congress, apart from its drawing power and popular interest, seemed to have under-achieved in the high expectations that Elliott Coues and other organizers hoped would immediately follow upon the conclusion of the Congress, the Theosophists, just a few weeks later, were to meet with far greater success, in the verdict of the press, with their own special Congress. This Congress, held on September 15 and 16, with a special evening session assigned for September 17, was organized as a separate but inclusive section of the World's Parliament of Religions, and brought the theosophical message of universal brotherhood and unity of all religious faiths to increased public

⁸⁰ One reviewer described *Life in Utah* as "the most complete and valuable history of Mormonism which has ever been written." *The Class of Sixty-One (University of Michigan) and Something about what "the Boys" have been doing during Forty Years from 1861 to 1901* comp. Henry M. Utley and Byron M. Cutcheon (published by the authors, 1902), 174; [No Title]. *Washington Post*, January 19, 1897, 6; "Death of John H. Beadle." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 17, 1897, 16; and "John H. Beadle." *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 1897, 7.

⁸¹ J. H. Beadle, "A Chance to Soar. Men of Learning Attend the World's Congresses." *Mower County [Lansing, MN] Transcript*, September 6, 1893, 7.

attention and consideration. Stripped of its occult content by President Bonney, who disallowed the Theosophists from expounding upon occult philosophy and practices (he believed such matters had been sufficiently explored at the Psychical Science Congress), the Theosophical Congress would be offering no presentations devoted to astral travel or secret Masters. Instead, they were limited in presenting Theosophy solely as a religion and system of ethics. Still, George E. Wright, chairman of the Local Committee of Arrangements, believed that Bonney had gone out of way to show consideration for the Theosophists. One incident in particular stood out in Wright's mind as a demonstration of courtesy and fairness that the Swedenborgian Bonney had shown to Theosophists. Wright had returned to Chicago in August 1893 following an extended summer vacation. When he called at Bonney's office to discuss some details of the upcoming Theosophical Congress, the Auxiliary Congress President profusely apologized for what had just taken place at the Psychical Science Congress and assured Wright that he had rebuked two speakers for their discourtesy displayed towards the Theosophical Society. Not knowing what Bonney was referring to, Wright inquired about what had happened whereupon Bonney apologized once more for the papers delivered by two members of the London SPR—William Emmette Coleman and Walter Leaf—which had been highly-charged attacks on theosophical doctrine and its leadership. Wright had not even heard about the two papers and reassured Bonney that the matter was “utterly insignificant,” that “the principal stock in trade of the Psychical Research Society consisted of abuse of the Theosophical Society,” and that it would be “cruel to deprive them of their principal topic on such an occasion, especially as all such attacks [have] failed to injure us.”⁸²

⁸² George E. Wright, “Theosophical Activities. The Parliament of Religions: Incidents of the Congress,” *Lucifer* 13 (October 1893), 162. The two papers hostile to theosophy delivered on August 22 at the Psychical Science Congress were William Emmette Coleman's, “A Critical Historical Review of the Theosophical Society,” and Walter Leaf's, “Madame Blavatsky and M. Solovyoff.” Coleman, a Spiritualist, had long been a critic of Madame Blavatsky. Leaf was a member of the British Society for Psychical Research, and in 1895 published an English translation of Vsevolod Sergyeevich Solovyoff's *A Modern Priestess of Isis*. On Leaf's involvement with psychical research, see *Walter Leaf, 1852-1927; Some Chapters of Autobiography, With a Memoir by Charlotte M. Leaf* (London: John Murray, 1932), 97, 155-156.

Parliament managers assigned the two-day theosophical sessions to Hall 8, one of the smaller halls with a seating capacity of around 500 people located on the main floor of the Art Institute. Congress officials were doubtful about the theosophists being able to even fill that particular hall. But on the morning of Friday, September 15, Hall 8 was nearly packed to capacity an hour before the session was scheduled to open and extra chairs were brought in to the room. As the 10:00 A.M. opening hour approached the hall was now overflowing with scores of additional people trying to squeeze themselves in. It was at that point that the Lutheran Congress, which was just getting underway in the adjacent Hall 7, offered to switch halls with the Theosophists. Hall 7 had a capacity of 1,500 but when the announcement was made, there was such a rush for seating that in a matter of minutes it too was completely filled. Audiences throughout the Friday sessions continued to grow, and on Saturday adjacent halls had to be used to supplement the regular sessions. As a result of the overflowing crowds, Parliament managers made available to the Theosophists the Hall of Washington for an additional session Saturday evening. As throngs of eager listeners packed the Hall of Washington that night, Parliament officials decided to hold another special session the next evening on Sunday. All told, there were three sessions on Friday, three more on Saturday, September 16, and the one Sunday evening session on September 17.⁸³ Wright estimated the crowd on Saturday night to be at around 3,000, and since the extra session on Sunday evening had only been announced on Saturday, he expected a much

⁸³ For press coverage, most of it quite favorable, of the proceedings of the Theosophical Congress, see "Blavatsky Is Here. Not in Body, but in Spirit, at the Theosophical Congress." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, September 16, 1893, 1; "Talked on Theosophy. Mrs. Anna [sic] Besant Explains That Religion." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 16, 1893, 4; "Talks on Theosophy. Christianity Roasted by Some Speakers." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 17, 1893, 5; and "Idea of Theosophy. Mrs. Annie Besant and Other Bright Lights Expound It." *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 1893, 1. For further coverage, see "Congress of Theosophists," 926-928, in *Neely's History of The Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition* ed. Walter R. Houghton, 3rd ed. (Chicago: F. T. Neely, 1893); "The Theosophists' Congress," in *The World's Congress of Religions; The Addresses and Papers Delivered Before the Parliament. And an Abstract of the Congresses Held in the Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A., August 25 to October 15, 1893, Under the Auspices of the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. John W. Hanson (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Co., 1894), 1193; and William Q. Judge, "Presentation of the Theosophical Society," 1517-1522, in *The World's Parliament of Religions; An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, ed. John Henry Barrows, vol. 2, (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893).

smaller crowd. Instead, Wright was amazed to see “every seat in that vast audience room occupied, and hundreds of people standing in the aisles and along the walls.”⁸⁴

On the morning of Friday, September 15, 1893, George E. Wright opened the first session of the Theosophical Congress with a rhetorical question: “Can we or do we fully appreciate the importance of this occasion?” Referring to the hundreds of participants at the World’s Parliament of Religions as “makers of history,” Wright proclaimed that “no event in ancient or modern times” had “such great direct benefit to the human race.” He announced that that the world was now entering “a new era, an era of liberality in thought, in investigation, in religion.” And of course the theosophists saw themselves in the forefront among those who were paving the way for liberality in thought and religious truth. As William Q. Judge, head of the American Section of the Theosophical Society and presiding Chairman of its Congress put it, Chicago and the Parliament had become “the intellectual centre towards which in this year of 1893 all the culture of the world will turn,” bringing into its fold a “new era of light, liberty of thought, and religious expression, and above all, the spirit of universal fraternity with which the Theosophical Society is animated and of which it is the standard-bearer.”⁸⁵ The featured speaker of the morning session was Annie Besant (1847-1933), a leading spokeswoman of Theosophy and forceful public speaker who delivered a talk on “Theosophy as a System of Truths Discoverable and Verifiable by Perfected Men.” She told her captivated audience that Theosophy, as religion, philosophy, and science

⁸⁴ Wright, “Theosophical Activities,” 162. George E. Wright was the author of *On the Outer Rim; Studies in Wider Evolution* (Chicago: Alfred C. Clark, 1897); and *Practical Views on Psychic Phenomena* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920).

⁸⁵ *The Theosophical Congress held by the Theosophical Society at the Parliament of Religions, World’s Fair of 1893, at Chicago, Ill., September 15, 16, 17. Report of Proceedings and Documents.* (New York: American Section Headquarters, T. S., 1893), 15, 102. A printed copy of the Programme for the Theosophical Congress can be found in the World’s Congress Auxiliary Pre-Publications, Programs and Circulars Collection, Box 4, Folder 47, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.

embodied complete truth: "A perfect knowledge of spiritual things, a perfect knowledge of intellectual verities, [and] a perfect knowledge of scientific facts."⁸⁶

By, far, the star attraction of the three-day Theosophical Congress was Mrs. Besant, who as the head of the English Section of the T. S. and Madame Blavatsky's direct successor was the best known leader of theosophy at the time.⁸⁷ Her first visit to Chicago had been the previous December where she was the guest of Mrs. and Mrs. George E. Wright. Asked about the state of theosophy in America, Mrs. Besant replied that she was "pleased to observe a marvelous improvement...in the attitude of the American mind toward theosophy [in that] ridicule and laughter have given place to solemn and labored argument." During that first stay in the city, she gave two lectures before large audiences at Central Music Hall on the evenings of December 9 and 10, 1892. On the first night, she was introduced by the Rev. Dr. Hiram W. Thomas who described her as a "distinguished writer and lecturer, and a worker in several philanthropic enterprises."⁸⁸ When she arrived in the city the following September to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25; and "Theosophical Congress Opened. Annie Besant, William Q. Judge, and Others Speak in Hall 7." *Chicago Tribune*, September 16, 1893, 13.

⁸⁷ On Annie Besant, see Gertrude Marvin Williams, *The Passionate Pilgrim: A Life of Annie Besant* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931); Nethercot, *The First Five Lives*; Catherine Lowman Wessinger, *Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism, 1847-1933* (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant; A Biography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mark Bevir, "Annie Besant's Quest for Truth: Christianity, Secularism and New Age Thought," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50.1 (1999): 62-93; Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Miriam Wallraven, "'A Mere Instrument' or 'Proud as Lucifer'? Self-Presentations in the Occult Autobiographies of Emma Hardinge Britten (1900) and Annie Besant (1893)," *Women's Writing* 15.3 (2008): 390-411; and Kurt Leland, comp. *Annie Besant on Psychic and Spiritual Development* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books-Theosophical Publishing House, 2013).

⁸⁸ "Mrs. Besant to Talk on Theosophy. Two Lectures to Be Delivered in Chicago by Mme. Blavatsky's Follower." *Chicago Tribune*, November 30, 1892, 9; "Mrs. Besant's Theories and Faith. Hypnotism and Mesmerism as Explained by Theosophy." *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1892, 2; "Wisdom of the Past. Modern Discoveries Justify the Ancient Alchemists." *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1892, 1; "Mrs. Annie Besant, Theosophy's Most Ardent Follower Is in the City." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, December 10, 1892, 1; "In Theosophic Light. Mrs. Besant Lectures on Mesmerism and Hypnotism." *Chicago Tribune*, December 11, 1892, 4; "Her Hypnotic Force. Mrs. Besant Lectures on Mesmerism and Theosophy." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, December 11, 1892, 2; and "Mrs. Besant's Vagaries." *Chicago Tribune*, December 11, 1892, 28. She returned to Chicago in June 1897, "more fragile looking than when here in 1893 to attend the Parliament of Religions." It was her fifth visit to the United States and her third to Chicago. "Thinks Debs Will Fail. Annie Besant, Theosophist, Says No Socialist Colonies Succeed." *Chicago Tribune*, June 27, 1897, 13; and "Mrs. Annie Besant and Her Mission," *Current Literature* 22 (July 1897): 14-15.

participate in the Theosophical Congress, one biographer, Arthur S. Nethercot, noted that her arrival was “properly heralded in the papers as the due of such a famous speaker. People jammed into the T. S. headquarters in the Athenaeum Building on Van Buren Street to meet her” with the public “seemingly athirst for the message of Theosophy.”⁸⁹ Mrs. Besant was one of the speakers at the Saturday evening session of the congress in the Hall of Washington which drew a crowd of over 3,000 attentive listeners. Nethercot believes that it was the overwhelming response to her Saturday night presentation that prompted the Parliament managers of the Parliament to suggest holding an extra session on Sunday, something to which the Theosophical leaders gladly agreed, and to which they were once again assigned the great Hall of Washington, accommodated now with extra balcony seating.

One of the more remarkable anecdotes of the Congress occurred during that Sunday evening session. William Judge was in the middle of delivering his opening address to a packed audience in the Hall of Washington when the Rev. Dr. John Henry Barrows (1847-1902), pastor of Chicago’s First Presbyterian Church and Chairman of the General Committee on the Congress of Religions (or the World’s Parliament of Religions) entered the Hall and approached George Wright, asking him if he could interrupt Judge for an important announcement. When taking the podium, Rev. Barrows explained to the audience that the Hall of Washington had originally been reserved for the Presbyterian evening session but that they were now meeting in Hall 7. The problem was that there was hardly any audience present in the Hall and Barrows assumed that the Presbyterians must have come to the Hall of Washington by mistake and asked them to rise and follow him to Hall 7. According to Jerome Anderson, editor of the *Pacific Theosophist*, Rev. Barrows “marched out with a great deal of confidence but not a single person followed him, and when the doors opened to let him out twenty-five or thirty came into

⁸⁹ Nethercot, *The First Five Lives*, 392; “Mrs. Besant to Discuss Theosophy. Leader of a New System Arrives in Chicago—Her Delight in the Congresses.” *Chicago Tribune*, September 14, 1893, 9; “Theosophy at the Fair. Preparing to Explain Their Religion.” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 10, 1893, 10; and Annie Besant, “What Theosophy Is,” *Outlook* 48 (October 14, 1893): 665-666.

an already over-packed hall.”⁹⁰ George Wright later wrote that the audience had at once “recognized the situation, and a smile passed over the broad sea of upturned faces.” But before the Hall could erupt into applause, Wright indicated that Chairman Judge “calmly resumed his discourse at the place where he had been interrupted.” Mrs. Besant was the final speaker of that remarkable evening, delivering a presentation on “The Supreme Duty.” Her talk ended with another great ovation as large numbers from the audience crowded up to the platform to shake hands with Annie Besant, William Judge, and the other speakers, with one woman walking around them all for a time because she “‘wanted to feel their vibrations’.”⁹¹

One member of the T. S. named A. Marques, writing from Hawaii, hailed the Theosophical Congress as “the most triumphant, wonderful success ever obtained by any system of philosophy in its incipient stage.” The Chicago press, in his mind, with its widespread coverage of the proceedings, had done much to foster that view, even giving the impression theosophy had attracted “more public attention than the whole parliament,” helped no doubt, he thought, by the attacks of the two physical researchers in August, unexpectedly benefitting the Theosophists “better than the cleverest advertising.” The exuberance of this writer over the packed galleries who gathered to hear Annie Besant, Isabel Cooper-Oakley, and Henrietta Muller from the English Section, along with Professor Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti, a noted Brahmin scholar, and Hevavitarana Dharmapala, a Buddhist representing the Indian section of the T. S., led him to declare that “even if the entire building had been one vast room, the Theosophical Congress would have filled it.” This writer observed that Theosophy “has received an incommensurable impulse, such as its warmest friends could not have dared to

⁹⁰ Joy Mills, *100 Years of Theosophy; A History of the Theosophical Society in America* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 19.

⁹¹ Nethercot, *First Five Lives*, 393; and Wright, “Theosophical Activities,” 162. William Judge, Vice-President of the T. S., called the Congress “an entire and extraordinary success.” Grace F. Knoche, “A Salute to William Quan Judge,” reprinted from *Sunrise* magazine, April/May 1986 at www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-gfkwij.html

anticipate,” and that even in faraway Honolulu, advertisements were now appearing posted by local theosophists wanting to form public study groups, and Mr. Marques expected that a formidable number of people would be interested in learning more about the ‘wisdom religion’.⁹²

The three day congress and the resultant press coverage undoubtedly helped make theosophy better known to thousands of people across America.⁹³ Chicago in 1893 had provided a showcase and a vast public platform for the exposition and examination of spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research. All three varieties of progressive occultism enjoyed considerable exposure due to presentations of some of their most important leaders and spokespersons. In a certain sense, the 1893 Congresses were the pinnacle of popular interest in Chicago for the three movements. While all three survived deep into the twentieth century and beyond, none would be able to sustain for long the level of public attention they drew at the World’s Congress Auxiliary, where their leaders seemed poised, at least in their own minds, to lead them into the mainstream of science, religion, and public philosophy, with promises of great things to come once discoveries in the occult domain had brought practical results to pressing social and economic concerns. One of the striking features of the whole progressive occult movement in Chicago, climaxing in the Psychical and Theosophical Congresses, was the presence of upper-middle-class women in both organizational and programmatic roles. The next chapter will discuss the women who made up the Woman’s Committee of Organization for a Psychical Science Congress, focusing on two women in particular—Frances Willard and Lilian Whiting—who demonstrated a penchant for occultism. The particular blending of spiritual uplift with social reform proffered by these women constituted the essence of progressive occultism at the *fin-de-siècle*. But as the transatlantic

⁹² A. Marques, “Theosophy at the World’s Fair.” *Honolulu Bulletin*, October 30, 1893, 1 & 4.

⁹³ Ferenc Szasz, “The American Quest for Religious Certainty, 1880-1915,” in *The American Self: Myth, Ideology, and Popular Culture* ed. Sam B. Girgus (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 99-100. Michael Gomes has called the Theosophical Congress “the high point of recognition for the Society.” Michael Gomes, *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 16.

dispute between Willard and Ida B. Wells over perceived positions on lynching will show, the question of race haunted progressive women's stance on social justice.

CHAPTER SIX: SPIRITUALIZED FEMINIST REFORM, WOMEN'S OCCULT PURSUITS, AND 'PROGRESSIVE' POSITIONS ON RACE

Advanced Feminine Spirituality and Cultural /Political Progressivism

In his 1888 address to the Western Society for Psychical Research hosted at the First Methodist Church in Chicago, Elliott Coues listed the 'woman question' foremost among his "Signs of the Times." Coues had just arrived in Chicago from Washington DC where he had attended the inaugural meeting of the International Council of Women (ICW), held at Albaugh's Opera House, Washington DC from March 25 to April 1, 1888.¹ Coues called the five day women's conference "the most deeply significant spectacle it has ever been my lot to witness." As he listened to the addresses of numerous, prominent women leaders, Coues indicated he could sense something powerful permeating the atmosphere of the proceedings, an invisible yet perceptible presence of "that strange thing which some of us know as psychic force or spiritual power." These psychic forces, emanating from the female speakers, Coues insisted, were intrinsically important features of higher spiritual manifestations which could no longer be dismissed as just fanciful indulgences of the imagination. For Coues, the 'woman question', as it was called at the time, derived its strength and momentum from these spiritual and psychical forces which he believed would bring success and triumph to the numerous causes women were actively pursuing at the time. An advanced feminine spirituality, derived from the harnessing of occult, psychical forces

¹ The ICW gathering had been called together by the National Women's Suffrage Association in recognition of the 40th anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention. Patricia Ward D'Itri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement, 1848-1948* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999); Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and *Report of the International Council of Women, Assembled by the National Woman Suffrage Association, Washington D.C., March 25 to April 1, 1888* (Washington, DC: National Woman Suffrage Association, 1888). On Seneca Falls and its pivotal place in the woman's movement, see *The Birth of American Feminism: The Seneca Falls Woman's Convention of 1848* ed. Virginia Bernhard and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1995); Judith Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks," *Journal of Women's History* 3 (Spring 1991): 9-37; Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

would undergird moral progress and social reform, bringing humankind to a more blissful state of mental and spiritual development.²

Coues was hardly alone in his assessment of the prevailing spiritual underpinning of the ‘woman question’ and the social harvest it would reap when applied to the larger questions of politics and economics pressing American society. Others were quick to recognize the prominence of spiritual forces in the woman’s movement, with one theosophist ascribing the movement’s quickening pace to “the great wave of occult influence which has of late years swept through the world—Christian Science, Faith Cure and many forms of psychic force [which] have asserted their control.” For this writer, a member of the Esoteric Section of the American branch of the Theosophical Society, “the sleeping soul...which represents the feminine,” was not only extending its benevolent hand to help others, but had brought to a suffering humanity “the spirit of life that pervades all things and moves the world.”³

For over thirty years now, beginning with the pioneering work of Janet Oppenheim, Diana Basham, and Alex Owen, through the more recent contributions of Christine Ferguson and Tatiana Kontou, historians of mysticism and metaphysics have pointed to the strong and vibrant affiliation between Victorian women and the occult. Roger Luckhurst has emphasized this inter-relationship by pointing to “the novelty of psychical concepts [which] helped the self-definition of the New Woman,

² Elliott Coues, *The Chicago Address; Signs of the Times from the Standpoint of a Scientist; An Address Delivered at the First Methodist Church, April 26, 1888, under the Auspices of the Western Society for Psychical Research* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1889), 5-7. A similar sentiment touting psychical and spiritual strength in women can be found in Joseph Rodes Buchanan, “The Cosmic Sphere of Woman,” *Arena* 1 (May 1890): 666-681. The term “the Woman Question” appeared in print for the first time in October 1866 in an Atlantic Monthly article entitled “Various Aspects of the Woman Question.” See Dennis A. Norlin, “The Term ‘the Woman Question’ in Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse,” *Bulletin of Bibliography* 49 (September 1992): 179-193.

³ Elizabeth Hughes, *Hertha; Or, The Spiritual Side of the Woman Question* (Los Angeles: E. Hughes, 1889), 1. One theosophical journal, in praising this book, claimed that it showed “in a most able manner the nature of the part which woman is called upon to play in restoring to equilibrium the unbalanced natural forces which are the cause of the evil and misery which surround us.” “Reviews,” *Lucifer* 4 (July 15, 1889), 439. For connections between Theosophy and women, see Charlotte Despard, *Theosophy and the Woman’s Movement* (London: Theosophical Society, 1913); Diana Burfield, “Theosophy and Feminism: Some Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Biography,” 28-45, in *Women’s Religious Experience* ed. Pat Holden (London: Croom Helm, 1983); and Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

herself a novel object.”⁴ One woman, writing in an occult journal published in Chicago in 1895, described the ‘new woman’ as spiritually energized and “filled with the impulse toward progress. She is the woman who wants *to know*. She wants the truth [and] she knows that only by knowing and living the truth can the life of the race be elevated.”⁵ Truth, from this perspective, of course, would be derived from spiritual or occult sources and it is indeed well-known that large numbers of women sought truth from these sources in the second half of the nineteenth century through a plethora of metaphysical activities and adventures. Moreover, as Tatiana Kontou has recently suggested, the secularized public lives of and the inner occult or spiritual yearnings of these advanced, progressive women became intertwined and even indistinguishable as they pursued their particular crusades for women’s rights and social reform.⁶ As this chapter will show, the occult and the secular particularly blended in the lives of two women associated with the Psychical Science Congress—Frances Willard and Lilian Whiting, both of whom served on the Women’s Arrangements Committee. A deep spirituality and intense interest in psychical matters guided both women in their respective public callings. In the case of Frances Willard, a spiritualized feminist perspective and progressive vision became evident as she embraced ever more ambitiously sweeping reform undertakings. Ultimately, however, her feminist spirituality fell short when it came to her speaking out as forcefully against racial injustices as she did when opposing the evils associated with alcohol consumption and sexual impurity. Racial exclusion

⁴ Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 225; and Ellen Battersby, “Shaped by Victorian World: Yesterday’s Proceedings at the Yeats International Summer School,” *Irish Times*, August 11, 1993, 3.

⁵ Alice Fox Miller, “The New Womanhood,” *Flaming Sword* 9 (June 1895), 104; and “What Is She to Be? Guests of the Sunset Club Discuss ‘The Coming Woman.’” *Chicago Tribune*, March 29, 1895, 12. See also “Woman’s Hour—The Spiritual Era,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 41 (September 11, 1886): 4.

⁶ Tatiana Kontou, “Introduction,” in *Women and the Victorian Occult* ed. Tatiana Kontou (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 3. As Alex Owen has reminded us, “Occultism facilitated the articulation of a spiritualized feminism that should not be underestimated.” Alex Owen, “Spiritualism,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* ed. Bonnie G. Smith, vol. 4, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 132.

stood as a dominant feature at the Columbian Exposition as the Board of Lady Managers, composed of a number of women associated with the Psychological Science Congress, openly discriminated against African American women. In short, spiritualized white feminism—the highest expression of an advanced progressive womanhood—equivocated or floundered on the question of race.⁷

One early twentieth-century writer viewed feminism as a “psychic awakening,” with the woman’s movement in all its multi-faceted expressions symbolizing the “spiritual revolution sweeping the sisterhood of the earth.” Above all else, this author regarded the woman question as spiritual, a generating of “the psychically creative forces of women for [the] advancement...of a spiritually perfected race.”⁸ Although this work did not appear until 1915, it reflected a prevailing sentiment shared by women actively involved with the myriad phases of the metaphysical movement. For example, in a published response to a paper on “The Ethical Influence of Women in Education” read at the Women’s Congress in Chicago, Anna Byford Leonard, a prominent Chicago theosophist and activist in reform circles, stated that it was now “self-evident...that the unfolding of the spiritual nature...is the

⁷ One historian has defined ‘feminist’ as “anyone who exhibits consciousness of, discomfort concerning, or even anger over institutionalized injustice toward women as a group by men as a group, and who advocates the elimination of injustice by challenging such notions, through efforts to alter prevailing ideas and/or authority that uphold male prerogatives.” Sylvia Hunt, “‘Throw Aside the Veil of Helplessness’: A Southern Feminist at the 1893 World’s Fair,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 100 (July 1996), 48. Similar definitions can be found in William L. O’Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), ix-x ; Gerda Lerner, “Woman’s Rights and American Feminism,” *American Scholar* 40 (Spring 1971), 237; Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism; The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (Autumn 1988): 119-157; and Janet Z. Giele, *Two Paths to Women’s Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). The term ‘feminism’ first came into use at the end of the nineteenth century, according to Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990), 3; and Karen Offen, “On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist,” *8 Feminist Issues* (Fall 1988): 45-51.

⁸ Florence Guertin Tuttle, *The Awakening of Woman; Suggestions from the Psychic Side of Feminism* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1915), 7, 16, 27. Mrs. David G. Downey, wife of a book editor for the Methodist Episcopal Church, reportedly said after reading Mrs. Tuttle’s book, “Thank God that one woman has written what every woman feels.” “Book Notices,” *Methodist Review* (January-February 1916), 160.

most necessary factor in evolution,” and that women were “best fitted” to assist in this development.⁹ Just a decade later, a Boston clubwoman wrote that the leading feature of a female led, advanced society was the discovery and application of “secret, occult, more recondite, finer forces” to be found “in the midst of which we live” and utilized properly in propelling society forward. This advancement could only be brought about by women through the “development of the positive feminine moral force in her spirit and her life.”¹⁰

The Woman’s General Committee for the World’s Auxiliary Congresses, sometimes referred to as simply the Woman’s Branch, was led by its able and versatile vice-president Mrs. Ellen M. Henrotin, who oversaw all organizational matters on behalf of the president, Bertha H. Palmer, the wife of hotel mogul and leading Chicago businessman Potter Palmer, who was more fully engaged with the construction of the Women’s Building located on Exposition grounds and in determining exhibition allocations for various women’s organizations to be displayed inside the building.¹¹ Mary Wilmarth, Lucy Flower, Sarah Hackett Stevenson, Myra Bradwell, and Frances Willard—all of whom were associated in one form or another with the psychical science congress as well as being prominent figures in local and national progressive reform—were also members of the Woman’s General Committee for the World’s Auxiliary Congress. A Woman’s Committee for a Psychical Science Congress was named in August,

⁹ Anna Byford Leonard, “Discussion of Mrs. Galpin’s Paper,” in *The World’s Congress of Representative Women; An Historical Resume for Popular Circulation of the World’s Congress of Representative Women, Convened in Chicago on May 15, and adjourned on May 22, 1893, under the Auspices of the Woman’ Branch of the World’s Congress Auxiliary* ed. May Wright Sewall, vol. 1, (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1894), 117.

¹⁰ Clara S. Carter, “The Woman-Question,” *Club Woman* 10 (May 1903), 298. The idea that metaphysical and occult interests both stimulated and served alongside women’s reform interests during this period is presented in Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Catherine Tumber, *American Feminism and the Birth of New Age Spirituality: Searching for the Higher Self, 1875-1915* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

¹¹ “Women Ready for Work. World’ Congress Auxiliary Committee Appointed.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 9. Myra Bradwell and Frances Willard were also on the Board of Lady Managers for the Columbian Exposition, as was Ellen Henrotin, who served on the Advisory Council of the Psychical Science Congress. Bradford and Willard were members of the Women’s Local Arrangements Committee for the Psychical Congress. “Women and the Fair. Personnel of the Board of Lady Manager.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1890, 30.

1892, the very moment the Men's Committee of Arrangements was dealing with the death of its Chairman, Col. John C. Bundy. The Woman's Committee was a Who's Who of professional women and reform activists, many of whom were prominent members and leaders of the Chicago Woman's Club (CWC). Named to the Woman's Committee were: Mary C. Bundy, wife of Col. Bundy and daughter of Stevens S. Jones, founding editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*,—Chairman; Mrs. Eliza Archard Conner, noted newspaper journalist from New York City,—Vice-Chairman; Mrs. Frances E. Bagley, widow of former Gov. John J. Bagley of Michigan; Myra Bradwell, legal editor and one of the nation's first female attorneys; Mary E. Coues, wife of Elliott Coues, who shared her husband's penchant for spiritualism and psychical research; Mrs. Ernest E. Crepin, whose husband served on the men's organizational committee; Mrs. Lucy Flower of Chicago, sister of Elliott Coues and a prominent social reformer who helped establish the first Juvenile Court in America and would later become the first woman elected to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees; Mrs. Marcia Louise Gould, of Moline, IL, president of the Illinois Woman's Exposition Board; Mrs. Susan E. Hibbert of Washington, D. C., a close friend of Elliott and Mary Coues; Mrs. Sara A. Underwood, who presented a paper on automatic writing at the Psychical Science Congress and, along with her husband B. F. Underwood, edited the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* on behalf of Mrs. Bundy; Lilian Whiting of Boston, famed journalist and New Thought writer whose paper at the Congress was read by her friend, the actress and journalist Kate Field; Mrs. Antoinette Van Hoesen Wakeman, Chicago newspaperwoman and club activist; Frances E. Willard, America's most famous and beloved woman leader; and Mrs. Mary H. Wilmarth, friend and associate of Jane Addams who was well-known in reform circles throughout Chicago.¹² Prominent Chicago women listed on the Advisory Council were Ellen Martin Henrotin, who oversaw all women's

¹² "Respect for Col. John C. Bundy. It Is Expressed in Resolutions Adopted by the Committee on a Psychical Congress." *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1892, 8; and "Psychical Researchers Act. Arranging for An Interesting Congress to Be Held Next June." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, October 27, 1892, 5. The Woman's Committee was named at this October 26 meeting of the men's committee.

organizational committees for the World's Congress Auxiliary, and Sarah Hackett Stevenson, a well-known physician and reformer who happened to be president of the Chicago Woman's Club at the time of the Columbian Exposition. This was a remarkable group of women that found themselves drawn to progressive occultism and whose reform efforts reflected a deep spiritual motivation. One newspaper, in commenting upon the appointment of this woman's committee, pointed to the contribution that women would make at the Congress, noting that "their psychic faculties are usually more highly developed than those of men and they take more interest in the subject."¹³

As we saw in the opening chapter of this study, progressivism has more recently been conceptualized by historians not just as a conglomerate of political and social reforms but also as a constellation of religious and scientific movements with spiritualized underpinnings that directly impacted the thought and activity of various culture planes in seeking the higher life. As one historian has put it, progressivism can be regarded "as a developing body of *ideas*" that can be located "from the mid-1880s onward."¹⁴ Hence, occult science becomes a critical force in this expanded notion of progressivism. In women's progressivism, spirituality, whether rooted in occult notions of psychic forces or more conventional approaches found in traditional Christianity, was essential to how women perceived and coped with reality. This spirituality of women, more than any other aspect of women's live, enveloped the entire "domain of freedom, creativity, and wholeness," where women brought together their "most basic commitments."¹⁵ Women throughout America, as they began to organize more fully in gendered reform societies, injected an inspired spirituality into a host of localized urban

¹³ "Woman's Psychic Faculties." *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, November 19, 1892, 3; reprinted in *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* [Honolulu], December 30, 1892, 5. One committee member favorably observed with that of the more than one hundred congresses to be held at Chicago during the World's fair, the Psychological Science Congress was "the only one that has women as members of its advisory board." Eliza Archard Conner, "Woman's World in Paragraphs." *Arizona Republican*, October 20, 1892, 3.

¹⁴ Eldon J. Eisenach, "Introduction," in *The Social and Political Thought of American Progressivism* ed. Eldon J. Eisenach (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), xi.

¹⁵ Carol Ochs, *Women and Spirituality* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 27; and Helen M. Luke, *The Way of Woman: Awakening the Perennial Feminine* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

issues, with localization understood, according to historian David P. Thelen, as the “central fact about the progressive movement.”¹⁶

Beginning in the 1880s no local urban center in America could boast a greater host of reform undertakings led by women than Chicago.¹⁷ At the heart of the city’s reform efforts lay the Chicago Woman’s Club, the nation’s premier women’s club and the organization that served as the linchpin for training leaders and developing an impressive network of city-wide female organizers and lobbyists.¹⁸ Julian Ralph said of the organization, “I do not believe that in any older American city we shall find fashionable women so anxious to be considered patrons of art and of learning, or so forward in works of public improvement and governmental reform as well as of charity,” while William C. King concluded that the “amount of good accomplished by these women in reform work...is enormous.”¹⁹ Particularly was the vibrant spiritual impulse evident in the reform work of Chicago’s numerous progressive

¹⁶ David P. Thelen, “Progressivism as a Radical Movement,” in *Main Problems in American History* ed. Howard H. Quint, Milton Cantor, and Dean Albertson, 3rd ed., vol. 2, (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1972), 154.

¹⁷ Frederic C. Jaher wrote that “In Chicago, even more than in Boston and much more than in New York, upper-class women participated in municipal reform,” while Henry F. May noted that women, culture, and reform were most “closely linked” in Chicago. Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 508; and Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence; A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 102.

¹⁸ On the Chicago Woman’s Club, see Mary H. Krout, “Woman’s Kingdom. The Chicago Women’s Club and What Its Has Accomplished Since Its Organization.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, October 5, 1889, 11; “Club Women’s Work. Progress They Have Made During Late Years.” *Chicago Tribune*, September 26, 1897, 48; Jennie Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Woman’s Club in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen and Co., 1898), 62-73; and *Annals of the Chicago Woman’s Club for the First Forty Years of Its Organization, 1876-1916* comp. Henriette Greenbaum Frank and Amalie Hofer Jerome (Chicago: Chicago Woman’s Club, 1916).

¹⁹ Julian Ralph, “Chicago’s Gentle Side,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 87 (July 1893), 287; and William C. King, *The World’s Progress As Wrought by Men and Women in Art, Literature, Education, Philanthropy, Reform, Inventions, Business and Professional Life*. (Springfield, MA: King-Richardson Publishing Co., 1896), 691. See more generally Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman and Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980); Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U. S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); and Linda J. Rynbrandt, *Caroline Bartlett Crane and Progressive Reform: Social Housekeeping As Sociology* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999).

feminists.²⁰ Lacking the right to vote, but virtually central to the heart of social and political reform in the early years of the progressive movement, women were the crucial force in agitating for urban reform, with some historians even proclaiming that progressivism was, at its heart, a woman's movement.²¹

Frances Willard, Spiritualized Reform, and the Lure of the Occult

No American woman in the final two decades of the nineteenth century better represented the combination of spiritualized reform with active interests in occult pursuits than Frances E. Willard (1839-1898) of Evanston, Ill. In 1871 Miss Willard was named president of the Evanston College for Ladies (sometimes called Northwestern Female College) and two years later became dean of women and professor of esthetics when the college merged with Northwestern University. The appointment of Charles Henry Fowler as the new University president forced Willard to resign in 1874 as she had broken off an engagement for marriage with him some years earlier and was uncomfortable with the new arrangement. Willard then became national secretary of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU or simply Union), becoming its president in 1879. Organized in 1873, the WCTU soon became the largest women's organization in the country, with a membership in 1897 at over two million. Frances Willard viewed the Union as a powerful vehicle for the spiritual, emotional, and mental self-

²⁰ Eleanor J. Stebner, *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1919* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and Maureen A. Flanagan, *Seeing With Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002). On the cooperative efforts of Jane Addams, Lucy Flower, and Sarah Hackett Stevenson, see Anne Meis Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance: Gender, Delinquency, and America's First Juvenile Court* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), Erik Schneiderhan, "Jane Addams and Charity Organization in Chicago," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 100 (Winter 2007): 299-327; and Lana Ruegamer, "The Paradise of Exceptional Women: Chicago Women Reformers, 1863-1893," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1982).

²¹ Elisabeth S. Clemens, "Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women's Groups and the Transformation of U.S. Politics, 1890-1920," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (January 1993): 755-798; and Suzanne Lebsack, "Women and American Politics, 1880-1920," in *Women, Politics, and Change* ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 35-36.

development of its members. With a legendary capacity for oratorical motivation, Willard led the organization and large numbers of its membership into areas of social and political concerns which ranged far beyond the narrower interests of temperance.²² Under the “Do Everything” policy, first outlined in her 1881 WCTU presidential address, social purity and suffrage became major reform efforts for the Union while her attempts to lead members into more radical movements such as socialism, organized labor, and occultism were met with resistance.²³ Behind every reform initiative undertaken by Willard laid a strong spiritual motivation. Indeed, it was this vibrant spirituality, derived from both conventional Methodism and psychical, occult movements which shaped Willard’s progressive outlook.²⁴ In her autobiography, *Glimpses of Fifty Years*, Willard related a spiritual experience that provided the direction and inspiration for her reform career. In 1876 she believed that she received a

²² For Willard’s emphasis on building up the spiritual strength of Union members and the powerful effects of her oratory in doing so, see Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States* (Westport, CN and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 156; Patricia Bizzell, “Frances Willard, Phoebe Palmer, and the Ethos of the Methodist Woman Preacher,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36 (Fall 2006): 377-398; Richard W. Leeman, *“Do Everything” Reform: The Oratory of Frances E. Willard* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1992); Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); and Nan Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

²³ Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, “Frances Elizabeth Caroline Willard,” 968-974, in *Women Building Chicago, 1790-1990: A Biographical Dictionary* ed. Rima Lumin Schultz and Adele Hast (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001); Alissa Saufley, “Frances E. Willard (1839-1898),” 511-512, in *Philanthropy in America; A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* ed. Dwight F. Burlingame, vol. 2, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004); Ian R. Tyrrell, “Frances Willard and Temperance,” 511-521, in *American Reform and Reformers; A Biographical Dictionary* ed. Randall M. Miller and Paul A. Cimbala (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996); John Kobler, *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1973), 123; and Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 29. On the resentment of the WCTU membership for Willard’s proclivities toward socialism, populism, and occultism, see Harrison John Thornton’s review of Mary Earhart, *Frances Willard* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1944) in *Revista de Historia de America* 21 (June 1946), 97.

²⁴ Willard’s recognition of woman’s spiritual essence in propelling reform is discussed in Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard; A Biography* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 158; Timothy A. Hickman, “Gendering Modernity: Frances E. Willard’s Politics of Technological Sentimentality,” 285-305, in *Becoming Visible: Women’s Presence in Late Nineteenth-Century America* ed. Janet Floyd, Alison Easton, R. J. Ellis, and Lindsey Traub (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010); *The Ideal of the “New Woman” According to the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union* ed. Carolyn De Swarte (New York: Garland Press, 1987); and Catherine A. Faver, “Feminist Spirituality and Social Reform: Examples from the Early Twentieth Century,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 21 (Spring-Summer 1993): 90-105.

message directly from God instructing her “to speak for woman’s ballot as a weapon of protection” that would guard the home and the family from “the tyranny of drink.”²⁵

Frances Willard was not merely the head of the temperance movement in America; by the late 1880s she was the recognized leader of the entire woman’s movement. She stood as the most prominent figure at the 1888 International Council of Women discussed earlier in this chapter—allowed more speaking time than any other woman leader present. There she was selected president of the newly formed National Council of Women and that summer Willard became president of the Chicago Women’s League, the first local group of the National Council of Women. No woman in America was engaged in a wider variety and volume of reform work or had aroused the consciousness of women across the nation as she had. In 1888 Frances Willard also read Edward Bellamy’s utopian socialist novel *Looking Backward*, and in 1889 she became an associate editor of *The Dawn*, a journal promoting Christian Socialism. Bellamy’s novels sparked a Nationalist movement, drawing large numbers of women into its fold. By 1891 there were nearly two hundred Nationalist clubs active in cities across America. Willard became an enthusiastic supporter of Bellamyite Nationalism, proselytizing its cause at Union meetings although she brought into the Nationalist fold only her most devoted followers in the WCTU.²⁶ The climax of Willard’s ambitious national social program came in the early 1890s when she hoped, against all odds, to create an independent political reform party composed of a coalition of trade unions, farmers’ alliances, the Prohibition Party, the Populist Party, and all women’s organizations. Her

²⁵ Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years; The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago: H. J. Smith & Co., 1889), 351.

²⁶ Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Sylvia Strauss, “Gender, Class, and Utopia,” 69-90, in *Looking Backward, 1888-1888; Essays on Edward Bellamy* ed. Daphne Patai (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); and Franklin Rosemont, “Free Play and No Limit: An Introduction to Edward Bellamy’s Utopia,” 26-37, in *Popular Culture in America* ed. Paul Buhle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). On Willard and Nationalism see Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, 200-202; and Catherine Tumber, “Edward Bellamy, The Erosion of Public Life, and the Gnostic Revival,” *American Literary History* 11 (Winter 1999): 610-641. On the importance of theosophy in the Nationalist movement see Arthur Lipow, *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 225-231; and “*The Nationalist*,” *Lucifer* 4 (July 15, 1889), 440.

efforts came to naught at the Populist Party convention in St. Louis when Southern delegates balked over women's suffrage and a majority of the delegates from Northern and Western states rejected calls for prohibition. Yet even in defeat, Willard deserves credit for attempting "the most sweeping politically progressive endeavor ever undertaken by an American woman."²⁷ Shortly after the collapse of her attempt to form an independent political party, her mother, Mary Hill Willard, died in early August 1892 and the following year, while still grieving over the loss and recuperating from an illness at the English residence of her close friend Lady Henry Somerset, she and Lady Henry both joined the Fabian Society, a British socialist organization, and the London Society for Psychical Research. Too ill to travel back to the United States for the twentieth annual National WCTU convention at Chicago's Columbian exhibition, she dispatched Lady Henry to the United States to read her speeches in her behalf. Willard finally returned to the America in 1894 after spending one and a half years in England at Lady Henry's estate.

In the summer of 1893 as the Columbian Exposition and the World's Auxiliary Congresses were getting underway, Frances Willard was scheduled for delivering addresses at five different congresses—Woman's, Education, Religion, Psychical, and Temperance—but due to illness and her recuperating stay in England, she was unable to make an appearance at any of the congresses. Elliott Coues, chairman of the Psychical Science Congress, sent Willard a form letter on WCA stationary with the heading "Department of Science and Philosophy, Division of Psychical Research" asking her to present a paper and she had promised to address on the congress on its opening day, August 21, 1893. Willard's interest and knowledge on occult subjects had impressed Coues when the two had met in Chicago in the late 1880s and the form letter he sent Willard with the line asking invitees "to prepare an Address on the

²⁷ Jean H. Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 177-178. On the collapse of Willard's efforts to organize a wide-reaching reformist political party at the 1892 St. Louis Industrial Conference, see Caroline De Swarte Gifford "'The Woman's Cause is Man's'? Frances Willard and the Social Gospel," 21-34, in *Gender and the Social Gospel* ed. Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003) and Jack S. Blocker, Jr., "The Politics of Reform: Populists, Prohibition, and Woman Suffrage, 1891-1892," *Historian* 34 (August 1972): 614-632.

subject of” was crossed out and Coues had handwritten “any subject you may elect.” Willard first began her occult explorations following the death of her sister and father in the early 1860s, which had caused her much brooding and dwelling on the hereafter, prompting her at one point even to write the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* of a psychical incident reported to her by a childhood friend who claimed to have seen an apparition of her deceased sister Mary. She took up, in turn, in the late 1860s and 1870s, Swedenborgianism, phrenology, astrology, and spiritualism. But by the late 1880s her greatest areas of interest in the fields of mysticism, metaphysics, and the occult were New Thought, Theosophy, and psychical science, with psychical research fascinating her most of all. Determined to incorporate psychical research into her WCTU “Do Everything” reform policy, she was stopped by Anna Gordon, her personal secretary and intimate friend. Still, on numerous occasions, Willard reported on advances in psychical research at Union national conventions, and as stated earlier, both she and Lady Henry had joined the British SPR in November 1893.²⁸

That same year, Willard responded to a request by William T. Stead for opinions regarding his new occult quarterly, indicating that she had “always been sympathetic towards the scientific study of the phenomena with which you propose to deal in the projected magazine called *Borderland*.” Her interests in theosophy grew while in England, particularly as *The Woman’s Signal*, edited by Lady Henry, featured frequent articles in the 1890s about Annie Besant and other theosophical leaders. Willard wrote in her autobiography that although she had been “warned repeatedly against” delving into the study of mind-cure, New Thought, and psychical science by “excellent and trusted friends,” she refused to see in “theosophy and occult studies...the danger that many do,” adding that any opposition on her part to the spiritual movements underway seeking to unseat the reigning mentality of materialism would be a form of “disloyalty to God and to humanity,” since that, “by nature I am progressive in my

²⁸ Mary Earhart, *Frances Willard; From Prayers to Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 284-294; and Walter F. Prince, “Peculiar Experiences Connected With Noted Persons,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 15 (August 1921), 389 ff. Mary Willard (1843-1862) died of tuberculosis at the age of nineteen.

thought.” Mary Earhart, Willard’s first biographer has correctly placed all of Willard’s occult interests alongside and intrinsically related to her reform agenda. Earhart emphasized that “there was a connection in all these views to which she subscribed. From transcendentalism to theosophy, from vegetarianism to temperance, from mysticism to spiritualism, and from brotherhood to co-operative society—all were but circles within a circle.”²⁹ Throughout her travels across the country on organizational tours on behalf of the Union, Willard continually met local WCTU leaders who shared her myriad interests in spiritualism and the occult.³⁰

In early 1892, both Willard, who served on the women’s organizational committee for the psychical congress, and Lady Henry, who was staying with Willard in Evanston at the time, had responded to Col. John C. Bundy’s call to serve on the Advisory Council for the Psychical Science Congress. Responding to Bundy’s invitation, Willard wrote that she and Lady Henry would “gladly go on your advisory council. We like you, and admire your championship of occult science. We, too, have souls (!), and would gladly know, as well as gently believe, in their perpetual individual consciousness.”³¹ Though unable to be present for any Congress sessions, Willard and Somerset sent a letter of congratulations to Elliott Coues which he read at the opening ceremonies of the Psychical Congress. In that letter the two temperance leaders wished Coues “every success” and predicted the congress would “be of inestimable value,” in furthering the reaches of psychical research into the depths of the unknown. Willard also mentioned in the letter her membership in both the American and British

²⁹ Earhart, *Frances Willard*, 295, 307; Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years*, 636, 692; and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, “‘My Own Methodist Hive’: Frances Willard’s Faith as Disclosed in Her Journal, 1855-1870,” 81-97, in *Spirituality and Social Responsibility: Vocational Vision of Women in the United Methodist Tradition* ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

³⁰ For Southern temperance leaders who either shared or admired Willard’s affection toward psychical science, New Thought, and the occult, see Caroline E. Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land; A Southern Matron’s Memories* (New York: The Grafton Press, 1901), 149-152; and Monica Maria Tetzlaff, *Cultivating a New South: Abbie Holmes Christensen and the Politics of Race and Gender, 1852-1938* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 99-101.

³¹ Giles B. Stebbins, “Psychical Science Congress at the Columbian Exposition,” *Unitarian* 7 (August 1892), 381.

societies of psychical research, declaring that she had “never been one of those who hold that there are subjects which we are forbidden to investigate” and that “for this reason, I have always been sympathetic toward the investigation from a scientific point of view, of all psychical phenomena.”³²

Around the figure of Frances Willard we find a deep spirituality serving as a driving factor in her progressive reform program and a strong commitment to spread spiritual strength and vitality among WCTU membership as well as the wider society. Moreover, in Willard we find her pervasive interest in spiritualism, New Thought, theosophy, and psychical research as a comfortable companion to a heart-felt devotion she maintained toward her traditional Methodist faith. Occultism for Willard then, was neither something apart from her worldview nor a quaint or eccentric pastime. Occultism rather was an integral makeup of the progressivism Frances Willard projected to the world and as with her Methodist faith, blurred any distinction between her private thoughts and her public persona. Following the 1891 WCTU National Convention, Lilian Whiting described Willard’s temperament “as delicately susceptible as that of an Aeolian harp; one can hardly think in her presence without feeling that she intuitively perceives the thought. She has the clairvoyance of high spirituality....If ever a woman were in touch with the heavenly forces it is she.”³³

By the mid-1890s Willard was suffering not only from a deep despondency over her mother’s death, but also had contracted pernicious anemia, a condition which results from the body’s inability to absorb vitamin B12 from the stomach and intestine. Although easily treated today by vitamin injections, the disease was, in the nineteenth century, usually fatal and it seriously impacted her health and left the

³² [no author] *James G. Blaine on the Money Question and Other Psychic Articles* (Minneapolis: Aetna Publishing Co., 1896), 19-20.

³³ Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 152; and Lilian Whiting, *Women Who Have Ennobled Life* (Philadelphia: The Union Press, 1915), 188. Whiting further credited Willard with a “luminous spiritual insight that disclosed to her the real character with the unerring accuracy of the Rontgen ray,” (188) while Susan B. Anthony once remarked that Willard “was a bunch of magnetism possessing this occult force. I never approached her but what I felt my nerves tingle from this magnetism.” Judith E. Harper, *Susan B. Anthony; A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 239-240.

formerly energetic woman constantly fatigued. A loss of appetite and the appearance of sores in her mouth and on her tongue severely restricted her lecture schedule, hampering her ability to speak fluently and quickly. In early 1898, Willard contracted influenza and after an appearance at the WCTU convention, she died in a New York hotel on February 17, 1898, shortly before she was scheduled to once again travel to England to rest at Lady Henry's estate. Her funeral "reached epic, near-Lincolnian proportions" as two thousand admirers attended a large service at Broadway Tabernacle in New York. A special railroad car transported her body to Chicago where additional thousands of mourners stood at stations as the train passed by. In Chicago, Willard's body lay in state at the WCTU Temple Building, which had been built after she had moved the national headquarters to Chicago in the mid-1880s. An estimated twenty thousand people braved inclement weather to get a last glimpse of this beloved national leader of the woman's movement. Finally, there were concluding services at the First Methodist Church in Evanston, where she maintained an active membership. Willard's remains were cremated and per her wishes, the ashes were placed in her mother's grave.³⁴ Frances Willard was, at the time death, the most famous woman in America and a household word whose portrait graced many a home.³⁵ Matilda B. Carse, an instrumental figure in the construction of the WCTU Temple in Chicago, called Willard at the time her death, "the most unique woman this century has produced," with Lady Henry adding "We shall not see her likes again."³⁶

³⁴ Baker, *Sisters*, 178-180; and Gifford, "Frances Elizabeth Caroline Willard," 974. One Chicago paper reflected "No woman in America was better known, none more universally loved—as the champion of the cause of women she was foremost in the world." Baker, *Sisters*, 180.

³⁵ Bordin, 154; and Caroline De Swarte Gifford and Amy R. Slagell, "Introduction," in *Let Something Good Be Said: Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard* ed. Carolyn De Swarte Gifford and Amy R. Slagell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007) xxiii. On Willard as a "household word in thousands of families," see "Women and the Fair. The Personnel of the Board of Lady Managers." *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1890, 30.

³⁶ "Chicago Leaders in Eulogy. Associates of Frances E. Willard Speak of Her Characteristics as a Woman." *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1895, 5; "Death of Frances Willard." *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1898, 12; and "Frances Willard. A Noble Life." *New York Times*, April 23, 1898, BR271. For tributes to Willard, see Anna A. Gordon, *Frances E. Willard; A Memorial Volume* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publishing Association, 1898).

Even in death, Willard remained a reformer as she insisted, much to the opposition of Lady Henry, Anna Gordon, and others that her remains be cremated. The first cremation in America occurred some twenty years before Willard's death, on December 6, 1876, as a modern innovation instituted by American theosophists. It was introduced as a means of social sanitation and reform and its link to spiritualism, theosophy and unorthodox Asian religions would be long-lasting. These occultists believed that through burning the body, the soul, now more purified, could be more easily released on its journey, and they even referred to the act of cremation as the "spiritualization of the body."³⁷ Even after her death, a number of spiritualists claimed to be in touch with the deceased reform leader. For example, Cora Richmond, pastor of Chicago's leading spiritualist church, gave a platform address in which she reported to have received a message from Willard's recently departed spirit while a California medium provided Eben L. Dohoney, a lecturer on phrenology and temperance advocate from Texas, a letter from Willard, written in her hand two years after she had died, in which she reflected on the work both she and Dohoney had accomplished together during one of Willard's Southern tours on behalf of the WCTU.³⁸ Many decades later, it was even reported that Willard had been reincarnated in a female child born one hundred years after her birth in 1839. The child's parents (who remained anonymous) first became aware of possible psychical peculiarities in the girl when they took her, as an infant, to

³⁷ Stephen Prothero, *Purified By Fire: A History of Cremation in America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2001), 87-88. On Willard's decision to embrace cremation as a gesture in furthering progressive reform, see James Albert Clark, *A Theosophist's Point of View* (Washington, DC: Press of the Pathfinder, 1901), 189; and Bordin, *Frances Willard*, 4.

³⁸ A. W. G., "From Chicago," *Christian Register* 77 (March 3, 1898): 253; and James D. Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 1. For the Willard letter, see Eben Lafayette Dohoney, *The Constitution of Man in the Physical, Psychical, and Spiritual Worlds* (Denver, CO: Reed Publishing Co., 1903), 217-218.

Edgar Cayce for a psychic reading in 1939. Only afterwards with subsequent developments in the girl's character and life did they become convinced that she was Frances Willard incarnate.³⁹

The Color Line and the Limits of Spiritualized Reform

As the Board of Lady Managers for the Columbian Exposition went about organizing exhibitions for the Woman's Building as well as planning for the Congress of Representative Women, which convened on May 15, 1893, the opening day of the World's Fair, various organizations of African American women repeatedly petitioned the Lady Managers for representation at both the Woman's Building and the Woman's Congress, to little avail. There were no exhibits in the Woman's Building sponsored by black organizations and while six African American women eventually delivered papers at the Woman's Congress, five were scheduled with other multinationals in a symposium on women's international progress and were thus cast as foreigners. Their participation in the Woman's Congress, along with their muted criticism of mistreatment by whites, must be viewed within the racist ideology that pervaded the Chicago World's Fair as a whole.⁴⁰ Black Americans were represented at the Midway Plaisance and other Fair venues in roles that were either designed to portray them as uncivilized or as handmaidens to the rising civilization of white America, which the Columbian Exposition was designed to showcase. One illustrative example of the derogatory manner African Americans found themselves portrayed occurred when the flour milling firm of R. T. Davis paraded Nancy Green, a fifty-seven-year-

³⁹ Jeffrey Furst, *The Return of Frances Willard; Her Case for Reincarnation* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1971).

⁴⁰ Rima Lumin Schultz, "Introduction," in *Women Building Chicago*, xxxi; Allison Berg, *Mothering the Race: Women's Narratives of Reproduction, 1890-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 19; and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 220. The presence of black women at the Congress of Representative Women is discussed in Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-6; and Temple Bryonny Tsenes-Hills, "I Am the Utterance of My Name: Black Victorian Feminist Discourse and Intellectual Enterprise at the Columbian Exposition, 1893," (PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 2004).

old former slave serving as a housekeeper for a Chicago judge, as its advertisement in the Food Building for their new self-rising Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix. Green, in accepting to cast herself in the stereotyped role of a southern plantation mammy, flipped pancakes, sang songs, and told nostalgic plantation stories, all in appropriate costume while a company representative distributed buttons of her image depicting the slogan "I'se in town, honey." This performance, a hit with fairgoers and even winning a prize for the milling company, was "exactly the kind of role exposition directors imagined for African Americans in their dazzling White City."⁴¹

So deliberate was the exclusion of African Americans from what came to be called the White City that Ida B. Wells, a noted journalist in African American circles, and Frederick Douglass, the nation's most distinguished African American, edited, published, and distributed ten thousand pamphlets entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*.⁴² *The Reason Why*, published on August 30, 1893, just five days after the closing of the Psychological Science Congress, presented the grievances of African Americans in relation to the World's Fair. Wells, headquartered in the Haitian Building with a desk provided to her by Douglass, stood in sharp contrast to the portrayal of African American women at the Fair. By handing out copies of the pamphlet to passers-by which

⁴¹ Robert W. Rydell, "Editor's Introduction: 'Contend, Contend!'" in Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Irvine Garland Penn, and Ferdinand L. Barnett, *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition; The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature* ed. Robert W. Rydell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), xix. On Nancy Green and her portrayal as Aunt Jemima, see Maurice M. Manning, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville, VA: 1998), 72-78; and Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

⁴² For the exclusion of African Americans from the World's Columbian Exposition see Elliott M. Rudwick and August Meier, "Black Man in the 'White City': Negroes and the Columbian Exposition, 1893," *Phylon* 26 (Winter 1965): 354-361; and Ann Massa, "Black Women in the 'White City,'" *Journal of American Studies* 8 (December 1974): 319-337; Jeanne Madeline Weimann, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1981), 110-124; Robert W. Rydell, "The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: Racist Underpinnings of a Utopian Artifact," *Journal of American Culture* 1 (1978): 253-275; and Anna R. Paddon and Sally Turner, "African Americans and the World's Columbian Exposition," *Illinois Historical Journal* 88 (1995): 19-36. Black women were also excluded from the numerous organizational committees of the World's Congress Auxiliary. On the efforts of black women's organizations to seek representation at the Fair, see Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 15-20. For a more representative and dignified African American participation in subsequent expositions, see Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2012).

enumerated the educational, artistic, and musical accomplishments of blacks since Emancipation, Wells and the other authors of *The Reason Why* were scripting their own Fair exhibit of African American contributions to civilization.⁴³

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), journalist, agitator, and public speaker, was born in Mississippi to parents who were slaves. She received her formal education at Shaw University (now Rust College), a Reconstruction-era institution run by white missionaries for the education of freed slaves. By 1891, Wells was writing for an impressive number of African American papers, serving as a correspondent for the *Detroit Plaindealer*, *Christian Index*, and the *People's Choice*. In addition, she was the editor of the "Home" department of *Our Women and Children* and a regular contributor to the *New York Age*, *Indianapolis World*, *Gate City Press*, *Little Rock Sun*, *American Baptist*, *Memphis Watchman*, *Chattanooga Justice*, and the *Fisk University Herald*. In 1892, while living in Memphis TN, where she was editor and co-owner of an outspoken paper, *Free Press and Headlight*, three of her friends, black male grocers, were lynched for their successful business enterprise which came at the expense of a nearby white grocer. While in New York where she was speaking out forcefully against this racial terror, the offices of the *Free Press* were raided and burned and she herself was threatened with bodily harm should she ever return to Memphis. In 1895, Wells married Ferdinand Lee Barnett, lawyer and founder and publisher of the *Chicago Conservator*, the first black newspaper in Chicago, and one of the contributors who had assisted her and Frederick Douglass in publishing *The Reason Why*. Chicago remained her home until her death in 1931.⁴⁴

⁴³ James C. Davis, "'Stage Business' as Citizenship: Ida B. Wells at the World's Columbian Exposition," 189-204, in *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945* ed. Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ Rebecca Roth, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), 509-510, in *Philanthropy in America; A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Dwight F. Burlingame, vol. 2, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004); Eleanor Flexner, "Ida Bell Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)," 565-567, in *Notable American Women, 1607-1950; A Biographical Dictionary* ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, vol. 3, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard

While speaking out against exclusion from the Columbian Exposition, Wells was also active in establishing in 1893 the first African American woman's club in Chicago, the Ida B. Wells Woman's Club, named in her honor by a vote of acclamation. Its motto was "Helping Hand" and its stated objective was "Elevation of Woman, Home, and Community." The Chicago Woman's Club, remaining effectively the exclusive domain of white women, admitted only one black woman in the early 1890s, Fannie Barrier Williams, who remained the only African American in the club for the next thirty years.⁴⁵ Being effectively barred from the all-white Chicago Woman's Club, black women were forced to organize separately to protect their own gendered interests, one the greatest being sexual respectability. Protecting African American girls and young women from sexual exploitation from both white and black men soon emerged as the foremost issue of newly federated black women's clubs. In doing so, they were assailing the stereotype of the "loose black woman," and uplifting the race by promoting values of wholesome home life.⁴⁶ Wells became an instrumental figure in both women's club activities and women's suffrage as 'the woman question' became, as it had for white women's clubs, an increasingly crucial issue for black women's organizations.⁴⁷

University Press, 1971); and Mildred Thompson, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman, 1893-1930* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1990).

⁴⁵ For African-American women's clubs in Chicago see Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the Century Chicago* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996); Claudette L. Tolson, "The Excluded and the Included: Chicago, White Supremacy and the Clubwomen's Movement, 1873-1915," (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2008); and Anne Meis Knupfer, "For Home, Family, and Equality: African American Women's Clubs," *Chicago History 27* (Summer 1998): 5-25.

⁴⁶ Lebsack, "Women and American Politics, 1880-1920," 45; and Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁴⁷ Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9; Martha S. Jones, "'Make Us a Power': African American Methodists Debate the 'Woman Question,' 1870-1900," 128-154, in *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power, and Performance* ed. R. Marie Griffith and Barbara Dianne Savage (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Wilson Logan, *"We Are Coming": The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Evelyn

On two occasions, once in September 1893 and again on January 1, 1894, Wells invited the noted occultist and civic reformer, William T. Stead, to speak at her newly organized woman's club. Both gatherings were held at the Bethel AME Church where Stead exhorted the women to fight racial prejudice and injustice wherever they confronted it. It would be interesting to know what discussions Stead might have had with Wells and other club members regarding spiritualism and psychical research but we will most likely never know. What we do know, in retrospect, that there was a missed opportunity for white clubwomen to invite black women as equals in the quests for reforms which all women pursued and shared. Ann Firor Scott has reflected over this "road not taken." She concludes that "If the white clubwomen had seen this opportunity to cross the racial divide and set up integrated federations, the history of the nation for the next century might have been very different;" but unfortunately "there was no white woman leader, however 'progressive' she considered herself on this issue, who was completely emancipated from the pervasive racism of the time beyond the level of *noblesse oblige*. Many had not come even that far."⁴⁸

The path not taken in the forging of a reform alliance between white and black women's groups is even more unfortunate considering that black women were just as steeped in a vibrant spirituality as were their white counterparts. This shared spirituality would have eased the way considerably for white women leaders to cross the color line and join hands with black organizations should they had been so inclined. As Emilie Townes has observed "both Black and white spiritualities provided the framework for

Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

⁴⁸ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 219, note # 39; and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade," 148-161, in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington, The University of Kentucky Press, 1991). On how the development of a new national solidarity among whites following the Civil War came at the expense of race, see Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

women's participation in social and moral reform in the public realm." Both black and white women's organizational leaders, Townes notes, expressed a deep appreciation for their own moral and spiritual development and "expanded it to their families, and ultimately...to the larger society through associational work and moral reform societies as well as preaching and exhorting."⁴⁹ Steeped in spirituality and a deep faith derived from her membership in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Wells, angered at the rising tide of murders of black men at the hands of southern whites, launched a vigorous anti-lynching campaign that gained momentum from 1892 to 1894 and clashed with two spiritually-minded white women who had been closely affiliated with the Psychological Congress—Frances Willard and Lady Henry Somerset.⁵⁰

Wells anti-lynching campaign conducted throughout Great Britain becomes important for our discussion particularly as it clashed with the public positions taken on race by Francis Willard, forcing Willard on the defensive. Willard's racial bias and timidity over speaking out forcefully against lynching serves as the prime example, along with that of Auxiliary Congress leaders in their exclusion of black women's groups, of the failure of advanced progressive, spiritual feminism in dealing with the issue of race. Wells spent two tours in Britain, the first in 1893 for three months, and a longer, more successful five-month campaign in 1894, running from February to June. Before departing on the first trip she had

⁴⁹ Emilie M. Townes, "Black Women," in *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing* ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 158. "Spirituality, domesticity, and social reform," Townes writes elsewhere, "were intricately linked for the African-American woman who was religious." Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 70. See also the recent valuable work of Diana L. Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).

⁵⁰ On Wells' anger and spirituality in seeking redress from racial injustice see Emilie M. Townes, "Because God Gave Her Vision: The Religious Impulse of Ida B. Wells-Barnett," 139-163, in *Spirituality and Social Responsibility: Vocational Vision of Women in the United Methodist Tradition* ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1993); Michelle Wallace, "Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," 220-230, in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* ed. B. Guy-Shetfall (New York: New York Press, 1995); Patricia A. Schechter, "'All the Intensity of My Nature': Ida B. Wells, Anger, and Politics," *Radical History Review* 70 (Winter 1998): 48-77; and Rochelle Brock, *Sista Talk: The Personal and the Pedagogical* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 25.

determined, through her investigative journalism, that less than thirty percent of all lynchings involved even the *accusation* of rape. Her findings went far in undermining the rape myth as the prevailing reason for the lynching of black men and instead exposed lynching for the racial terror it was. African American women were Wells's strongest supporters in her anti-lynching campaign, backing her on the demolishing of the rape myth and her criticisms of Frances Willard.⁵¹

Wells arrived in England in April 1893, the guest of Catherine Impey (1847-1923), editor of *Anti-Caste*, a reform-minded journal denouncing racism and notions of white superiority. Along with Isabella Mayo, a Scottish philanthropist, Impey, with membership in the Society of Friends and numerous contacts in the press, planned an extensive speaking tour for Wells. A new organization was formed, the Society for the Recognition of the Universal Brotherhood of Man (SRUBM) in which Impey and Mayo brought in a writer named Celestine Edwards who took charge of the new society. Edwards thereupon started a new paper named *Fraternity*, the first issue appearing in July 1893 and which became the official organ of the SRUBM. During this first trip to Britain, Wells' accounts of the abhorrent events transpiring at lynchings shocked and horrified her audiences and on numerous occasions she was asked what Frances Willard, the greatly admired reform leader who was also in England lecturing at the time, was doing to stop this brutal, vicious practice. Wells, who never brought up the name of Frances Willard at her speaking engagements but when asked, answered truthfully and in good faith that Willard had not only done nothing to stop the murders but had actually professed her support of Southern claims about the menace of black rapists. Wells was referring to an October 23, 1890 interview of Willard published in the *New York Voice* under the heading: "The Race Problem: Frances Willard on the Political Puzzle of the South." Willard had given the interview for the *Voice*, a WCTU publication, after a successful Southern tour on behalf of the Union which had culminated in a warm welcome by Southern

⁵¹ According to Joel Williamson, the myth of the black rapist was relatively new as the notion that black men raped white women became prevailing in the South only in the late 1880s. Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the America South Since Emancipation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 117, 183-184.

members at the national convention held in Atlanta in October 1893. English audiences could scarcely believe what Wells was telling them so on her next visit to England she carried with her a copy of the published interview.⁵²

Willard began the 1890 interview by stating that she was devoid of any racial prejudice, having been born in an abolitionist family, but she insisted that Southerners would never accept race equality and that blacks might want to consider returning to Africa. She categorized most black men in the South as illiterate alcoholics who multiplied “like the locusts of Egypt” and who constituted a threat to white women, the very argument that was being used in the South to justify lynching. Such was Willard’s take on the ‘race problem,’ a view that prevailed at the time, even among those in the North who otherwise considered themselves progressive. Willard further opined that it had been a mistake to grant suffrage to African American men so soon after emancipation. Willard shared this view with a number of leaders of the women’s suffrage movement who believed it had been a mistake to support suffrage for freedmen since it seemed to have only hindered their own cause for securing voting rights.⁵³

Before embarking for England on the second speaking tour, Wells secured a position from William Penn Nixon, editor of the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, as a correspondent for the paper, sending back regular reports on activities related to her antilynching campaign in Britain. In this capacity Wells became one of the first African American women to serve on the staff of a white owned and edited

⁵² For standard accounts of Wells’ antilynching campaign in Britain, see the section “The Dispute between Ida B. Wells and Frances Willard,” in Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), 198-212; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1984), chapter 1, “‘To Sell My Life as Dearly as Possible’: Ida B. Wells and the First Antilynching Campaign,” 17-31; and the section “Wells’ Two British Tours: 1893 and 1894” in Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 60-67. The extensive literature on Wells and her antilynching campaign, including the transatlantic controversy over race and gender between Willard and Wells, is reviewed in William F. Pinar, *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, and the Crisis of Masculinity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), Section Three—Women and Racial Politics, 419-532. The most recent work to deal exclusively with this subject is Sara L. Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).

⁵³ Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 200-201.

newspaper. On her second trip, Wells not only quoted from the *New York Voice* interview, she gave a copy to Celestine Edwards, editor of *Fraternity* to be published in his magazine. She then informed Florence Balgarnie of her intention to publish the article in *Fraternity* whereupon Balgarnie, a member of the British Temperance Union, became alarmed over the reaction she feared would come from Lady Henry. At the time of the two Wells tours, Frances Willard was the guest of Lady Henry Somerset, president of the British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA).⁵⁴ Balgarnie requested Wells to hold off until she could speak with Lady Henry. When she phoned Lady Henry to advise her about what was to transpire, Lady Henry angrily told her that if the article appeared in print, she would do everything in her power to see that Wells and her speaking tour in Britain would be finished, demanding the name of the editor and the paper. The article subsequently went out in *Fraternity* and shortly afterwards an article appeared in the *Westminster Gazette*, the leading London daily paper, with Lady Henry interviewing Frances Willard. Entitled "White and Black in America—An Interview with Miss Willard," the article attempted to discredit the message that Wells was spreading in England. After accusing Wells of race hatred, Lady Henry asked how it was possible that Willard, born into a family of abolitionists, could now be portrayed as condoning lynching. "Oh," Willard laughingly replied, "I am like the eel of whom the legend is, that he was skinned so often that he learned to like it." Continuing in a more serious vein, Willard insisted, "It is needless for me to say that neither by voice or pen have I ever condoned, much less defended any injustice toward the colored people. To do so would violate every instinct of my nature and habit of my thought." Willard then defended herself by noting that Wells was misrepresenting her statements since the 1890 interview in the *New York Voice* had been concerned only with the topic of Negro voting rights, which in reality, was not wholly true. Somerset dutifully agreed, indicating "It is hardly fair, I think, to quote an interview four years old, and which did not touch

⁵⁴ The article appeared as "Mr. Moody and Miss Willard," *Fraternity* (May 15, 1894): 15-16. On Isabella Somerset see Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Lady Henry Somerset* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1923).

the subject of lynching, as indicative of your opinion under present circumstances.” Willard concurred and concluded the interview stating “I should be sorry to have my words thus construed but I think that British justice may be trusted to guard my reputation in that particular as in all others.”⁵⁵

Wells immediately responded in writing and her letter to the editor appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* the day following the Willard interview by Lady Henry. Wells chided Willard for “laughingly cracking a joke” after being asked about lynching and for being more concerned about her reputation than the plight of the Negro in the South. “With me,” she angrily asserted, “it is not myself nor my reputation, but the life of my people which is at stake, and I affirm that this is the first time to my knowledge that Miss Willard has said one single word in denouncing lynching.” After stipulating that Willard was “no better or worse than the great bulk of white Americans on the Negro question,” she expressed gratitude for the impact of British public opinion was registering on northern American racial attitudes and thankfully noted that it “has already begun to move Miss Willard.” Wells wrote in her autobiography that while her dispute with Willard was “very much to be regretted from one point of view,” it had served as an example to the British people of a pointed attempt by “two prominent white women...with undisputed power and influence in every section of their respective countries, seeming to have joined hands in the effort to crush an insignificant colored woman who had neither money nor influence nor following—nothing but the power of truth with which to fight her battles.” A patronizing tone can indeed be detected throughout the interview by the two temperance leaders. Lady Henry had portrayed Wells as a race hater by citing an example of her disdain for whites Wells had expressed some years before. But the editor of the *Westminster Gazette* rallied to Wells defense by denying that Wells had expressed any racial hatred. Well’s had indeed threatened Willard’s reputation and as her English

⁵⁵ *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 202-208. The editor is Ida Wells’ youngest daughter. See also *Ida B. Wells, The Light of Truth; Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader* ed. Mia Bay (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

audiences were struck by her demeanor and poise, attempts by the southern white press to destroy her own reputation were viewed as suspect.⁵⁶

Gail Bederman has written how Wells appropriated the notion of an 'advanced white civilization' exhibited at the Columbian Exposition for her own ends in exposing the unmanly response of Northerners to the savage barbarism of Southern lynching. In other words, according to Bederman, Wells successfully put forward the position that Northern white men could both assert and reclaim their manliness, which was being assailed in the years following the Civil War, by putting a stop to lynching. While the first British tour in 1893 received little notice in the Northern press, her second tour in 1894 received considerable publicity. Wells returned to an America that was fully aware that their indifference to the vicious Southern practice had "the rest of the world's Anglo-Saxons doubt[ing] whether white Americans were either manly or civilized." Wells's campaign had rallied British press and social reformers to her cause, with a number of major Protestant denominations even drafting resolutions to forward to their counterparts back in the States, demanding to know what was being done to stop this Southern scourge. The manner in which Ida B. Wells roused British public opinion to condemn lynching, establish antilynching committees, and dispatch fact-finding teams to America is an indication of her superb skills as a speaker, publicist, and agitator.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Crusade for Justice*, 208-211; and Linda O. McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 210-215. Wells' discussion of her conflicts with Willard can be found in Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894* (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895), Chapter VIII: "Miss Willard's Attitude," 138-148.

⁵⁷ Gail Bederman, "'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells's Antilynching Campaign (1892-94)," 407-432, in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History"* ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn, NY: Carson Publishing, Inc., 1995), esp. 416-420; and Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 45-76. Willard and Wells, both skilled publicists, have been considered pioneers in the use of public relations in bringing about social reform. J. Suzanne Horsely, "Inequity's Siamese Twins': Frances Willard's Alignment of Temperance and Sexual Reform," 125-141; and Frances Ward-Johnson, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett and America's First Anti-Lynching Campaign," 143-160, both essays in *Women's Use of Public Relations for Progressive-Era Reform: Rousing the Conscience of a Nation* ed. Dulcie Murdock Straughan (Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

In 1894, Wells attended the WCTU national convention in Cleveland where she hoped to win sufficient support to bring an anti-lynching resolution to convention floor. But once again, she met with resistance from Willard, who continued to link lynching with the rape of white women and girls. In her presidential address, Willard spoke of “unspeakable outrages” and “atrocities worse than death” committed against “maidenhood, and womanhood” which provoked the “lawlessness” of lynching. She dismissed as wholly repugnant the notion that white women were engaging in voluntary sexual encounters with black men, charging that by suggesting such an outrageous notion, Wells had “put an imputation upon half the white race in this country.” Willard simply could not bring herself to abandon the rape myth as it would have undermined the notion of white feminine purity she had worked so hard to become the standard for all women in the WCTU to unite behind. As far as Willard was concerned, simply condemning lynching was enough; the rest was incidental—a mere matter of “rhetorical expressions,” as she told Wells, when the two met privately at Cleveland. Wells wrote in *The Red Record* that while she had “no quarrel with the WCTU,” she was disappointed that “an alleged friend who, through ignorance or design misrepresents in the most harmful way the cause of a long suffering race, and then unable to maintain the truth of her attack” could excuse herself “as it were by the wave of the hand, declaring that ‘she did not intend a literal interpretation to be given to the language used.’”⁵⁸

Thus did segregation and racial violence stand as significant factors underlying the “psychical crisis” faced in in the context of an African American feminist spirituality. Richard Hofstadter first

⁵⁸ “Draw No Color Line,” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, November 17, 1894, 5; Wells, *A Red Record*, 89; Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 110-111; and Mildred I. Thompson, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman, 1893-1930* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 55-61. For discussion of the role of rhetoric in the Willard-Wells dispute, see Maegan Parker, “Desiring Citizenship: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Wells/Willard Controversy,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 31 (Spring 2008): 56-78; and Anita August, “Rival Radical Feminists Frances Willard and Ida B. Wells: The Rhetorical Slugfest of Two Nineteenth-Century Queen Bees over Lynching,” (PhD diss., University of Texas, El Paso, 2009).

referred to the large “constellation [of issues] that might be called ‘the psychic crisis of the 1890’s.’”⁵⁹ This constellation of “psychic crises” relating to religion, war, race, economic depression, and political unrest bristled in the cultural environment of the 1890s and the struggles faced by African American women to gain recognition and a place within the white woman’s reform apparatus constituted one element of this widespread psychical crisis. Race, as we have seen, was the rupture that brought about the ‘psychical crisis’ in the woman’s movement as a whole, subverting what should have a natural alliance of all women in bringing about social, economic, and political equality. The failure of white women leaders such as Frances Willard to wholly embrace African American women in organizational alliances (the WCTU admitted black members but allowed Southern states to create segregated chapters) diminishes what otherwise stands as a brilliant progressive record, cautioning us once again about giving in to whiggish impulses and placing heroic halos around revered historical figures. A shared vision of spirituality and reform could not overcome deep divisions that were the result of the color line, and any idea that black and whites would enjoy equal status in the WCTU and other women’s organizations was sacrificed on the altar of Northern/Southern reunification. Silence or inaction on the growing problem of racial violence was a failure of progressive occultism in the 1890s, particularly as progressive occultism rested on the ideal of advanced spirituality, individual paths to perfection, and universal brotherhood. Unfortunately, ‘Do Everything’ did not include doing everything on behalf of African American men and women.

The disgruntled feelings among feminist reformers in the 1870s and 1880s that women’s rights had somehow taken a back seat to civil rights had gone a long way in causing white leaders to view

⁵⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 148. For a perspective of the crisis of crowd racism which links the attendees of the World’s Fair with Southern lynch mobs, see Mary Esteve, *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter four, “Vicious Gregariousness: White City, the Nation Form, and the Souls of Lynched Folk,” 118-151.

suspiciously the rising demands of African American women, both at the Chicago Columbian Exposition and across the nation as whole. As evolutionist ideas of advanced white civilization took hold during these decades, noted women's historian Louise Michele Newman has perceptively captured in explicit fashion how white women's rights advocates assumed new roles that rested on a racial premise that reinforced their already existing culturally superior position in American society. The late-nineteenth century evolutionary discourse that prescribed specific categories for the 'Negro' and 'Anglo-Saxon' races created a cultural space within the white woman's movement to move forward, annexing cultural ground fitting their perceived reserved place as both moral guardians and spiritual torchbearers for an advancing civilization. Newman has detailed how even the advanced spirituality of white women was viewed as an evolutionary development that would be passed on from generation to generation, in effect perpetuating white superiority. In short, Newman determines that *fin-de-siècle* feminism, both in foundational premises and in the inner workings of the movement itself, cannot be regarded as egalitarian. Racism penetrated the heart of feminist theory and practice while feminism itself emerged in the context of divisions over race and the new anxieties posed by immigration and imperial expansion.⁶⁰

Ida B. Wells stands as a spiritually-oriented feminist and race reformer of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries who understood the importance of women "living as self-determining

⁶⁰ Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. 23-42 & 181-184. Newman correctly points out that this hardly a problem faced only by white feminism, but by any white person or group seeking progressive change. See also Vron Ware and Les Back, *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Nancie Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991). Black perspectives on feminism, past and present, are discussed in Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830-1920," 17-27, in *The Afro-America Woman: Struggles and Images* ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1978); Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," 3-24, in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible:" A Reader in Black Women's History* ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn, NY: Carson Publishing, Inc., 1995); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) and Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," 21-56, in *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* ed. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997).

persons with spiritual creative power.” Regarded by historians as “a spiritual freethinker and intellectual insurgent,” Wells, like Frances Willard, wrote in her journals of her religious faith and spiritual inclinations. I have argued in this chapter that spirituality and social change were intrinsically connected in *fin-de-siècle* progressive reform with the aim of promoting individual advancement and social equality. As a whole, spirituality generated and supported a creative impulse or agency that gave rise to the approaches which progressive women, both black and white, took in addressing pressing social concerns that impacted their lives. As a creative and self-generating force, spirituality led these women to not only to transform social institutions but also themselves. In this fashion, the private/public divide in women’s lives became erased as they pursued reforms which both uplifted the home and impacted the wider society. While fully aware of the numerous difficulties faced by women in their quest for equality, Wells put race above gender as the need to address the oppression of African Americans seemed far more pressing.⁶¹

The ghosts of lynched victims continue to haunt the collective imagination in disturbing ways and we can only imagine the hushed silence amidst a paper at the Psychical Science Congress delivered by an African American on “Phantasms of the Lynched,”—to imagine only because it never occurred to organizers to solicit a paper on spiritualism from a black American or to even include one on either the men’s or the women’s arrangements committees. Psychical science at Chicago in 1893 was a white affair only—black spiritualists of any stripe could not be found. Perhaps it was just inconceivable to congress organizers to solicit black speakers since the presumed backward evolutionary condition of the

⁶¹ Winnie Tomm, *Bodied Mindfulness: Women’s Spirits, Bodies and Places* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995), 3, 10-11; Marla F. Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003), 84; and McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled*, 211. See also Christopher Waldrep, “Ida B. Wells, Higher Law, and Community Justice,” 37-52, in *The Human Tradition in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* ed. Ballard C. Campbell (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Books, 2000); and Angela D. Sims, *Ethical Complications of Lynching: Ida B. Wells’s Interrogation of American Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). A chapter is devoted to Wells in Cecelia Tichi, *Civic Passions: Seven Who Launched Progressive American (and What They Teach Us)* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 240-274, and she is also featured in Karenna Gore Schiff, *Lighting the Way: Nine Women Who Changed Modern America* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005).

'Negro race' precluded them from participating in the rigorous and demanding discipline of psychical research or having any understanding, much less possession of higher psychical faculties such as telepathy and clairvoyance, to which the psychical scientists were so enamored. What point would there be then to seek out a black presenter at the Psychical Science Congress? While no direct evidence exists supporting an underlying suspicion of an African American capacity for contributing anything of value to the psychical congress, there are indirect inferences that allow the argument and suggest that this indeed was the case. For example, in her 1890 interview in the *New York Voice*, Frances Willard bemoaned that the "planation Negro who can neither read nor write, whose ideas are bounded by the fence of his own field and price of his own mule should be entrusted with the ballot. We ought to have put an educational test upon that ballot from the first."⁶² With this attitude explicitly expressed by Willard, it is not a great leap to conclude that the voodoo and conjure practiced by "illiterate blacks" in Southern states would not have been welcomed as an example of the types of advanced occultism that was being showcased at Chicago. Such primitive occult practices derived from West African and slave plantation traditions could only have been situated alongside the entertainment exhibitions located on the Midway Plaisance, not as a scheduled session at the Psychical Science Congress located at the Memorial Art Palace.

Regardless, race itself became an occult or hidden presence at the Psychical Science Congress. Whether or not any African Americans gathered in the audience to hear papers will most likely never be known. Surely, some of the week-long sessions drew interest from the black community, but we are only surmising their presence. Their absence and invisibility from participation in planning and presenting sessions in Chicago on psychical science was as unnoticed at the time just as the public excitement in the psychical congress itself has now long been forgotten. That no African-American men or women were involved with the congress does not dismiss them from our consideration nor should it

⁶² *Crusade for Justice*, 207.

distract us from recognizing the vibrant spirituality with which black feminist reformers displayed in confronting white feminists who claimed both a higher spirituality and advanced progressive outlook. To fail to acknowledge the voices of black feminist spiritual reformers who challenged white supremacy and exclusionism at the Chicago Exposition would be to once again exclude them from World's Fair and render them silent and invisible.

Lillian Whiting and the Unfolding of Psychological Utopia

The final morning of the Psychological Science Congress featured a paper by Lillian Whiting (1847-1942) on the "Possibilities of a Future Life, And That Which Is to Come" which was read by her close friend, the famed actress and journalist Kate Field, whose "charm was given to its reading by [her] witty comments."⁶³ In flowery rhetorical prose, Miss Whiting's paper thrilled the audience as she unveiled glimpses of the advancements that humankind that would soon acquire from developments in psychical science:

There is no possibility of doubting that humanity is on the threshold of a life so much higher and more potent than the present, that to enter on its realization will make a new heaven and a new earth....Mental and psychic power will assert their sway. The entire scenery of life will be transformed. Unsuspected stores of energy will be liberated. Mankind will live in exaltation and enthusiasm....The psychic transformation that is drawing near will give far more wonderful results than any of the splendid conquests of science in the past. The moment we come into the realm of spirit all things are possible....It seems not impossible that this earth may be the theater of a new life—of newness of life on a plane heretofore undescribed—and which if conceived of at all has been believed, could only wait the experiences of soul—after the change called death. But let humanity once come into the actual realization that the human race is a race of spirits,—of spirits dwelling in temporary physical bodies; that those bodies...need not limit the power of spirit, but be used for spiritual power to work through—and life is altered at once. This is the transformation of energy that is drawing near.⁶⁴

⁶³ End Their Sessions. Psychological Scientists Also Finish Their Conference." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 26, 1893, 9.

⁶⁴ "Psychic Existence is Ecstatic. The Perfection of Humanity Said to Be Rapidly Approaching." *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1893, 8; "Psychical Scientists Also Finish Their Conference. Optimistic Paper by Miss Lillian Whiting Is Read by Miss Kate Field." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 26, 1893, 9; "On Rather Weighty Topics. Possibilities of a Future Life Considered in a Paper by Miss Whiting of Boston at a Chicago Congress." *Boston Daily Globe*, August 26, 1893, 12; and "Psychic Mystery. Some of the Results of the Psychological Congress at Chicago." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*,

Much of what Lillian Whiting's paper at the Congress suggested for the psychical future of mankind was reworked in her book, *The World Beautiful*, published the year following the Congress. She again stressed the significance of psychical science as a subject with far-reaching implications for mankind and the widespread interest the subject held for forward-thinking people. "It is these matters," Whiting wrote, "that are now those of chief concern to the public in general," holding that in psychic science was to be found "the most important truth in the life of this century," and the establishment of its "true place is in the practical working force of daily life." One reviewer of the book scoffed at the "far too confident expectations of a new psychic force," but Benjamin O. Flower, writing in the *Coming Age*, viewed the publication "well fitted to uplift the reader" and praised Whiting's "deeply spiritual quality" which made her works so appealing that he regarded her as foremost among "twentieth century teachers of the higher life."⁶⁵

Whiting herself was born in a spiritually-charged family environment in Niagara Falls, NY. Her father, Lorenzo Dow Whiting, for twenty years a State Senator from Illinois, was a direct descendant, on his mother's side, of Cotton Mather, and his paternal ancestry traced back to the Rev. William Whiting, the first Unitarian minister at Concord, MA in the early years of the seventeenth century. Her mother, Lucretia Clement Whiting, was also descended from generations of Episcopal clergymen in Massachusetts. While still an infant her parents moved to Tiskilwa, IL, a small farming town where Lorenzo and Lucretia Whiting served as principals in the town's public schools. Mr. Whiting also served as editor of the *Bureau County Republican*, a position which propelled him to the State Legislature and then on to the State Senate. Inheriting from her mother "the temperament of the mystic and the

September 17, 1893, 28. One reviewer commented that the paper "mixed a good deal of rhetoric and sentiment, forgetting that rhetoric and sentiment are lighter than feathers in the discussion of the deep and mysterious things of science." Stephen J. Herben, "A Psychical Congress," *Christian Advocate* 68 (December 14, 1893), 804.

⁶⁵ Lillian Whiting, *The World Beautiful. First Series* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), 158; "The World Beautiful." *Literary World* 25 (December 1, 1894), 429; and Marion Daniel M'Connell, "Lilian Whiting and Her Books," *Alkahest: A Literary Magazine of the South* 7 (February 1901), 5

visionary” and from her father a love of books, literature, and thought, Lilian Whiting glided easily toward a career in journalism. In 1876 she moved to St. Louis, working as a journalist for a number of newspapers until she went to Boston in 1880 to accept a job of literary editor of the *Traveller*, a position she held until that paper was sold in 1890. Her first local assignment for the *Traveller* was to interview the author, lecturer, and actress Kate Field, with whom she formed a lasting attachment. Following the *Traveller*, she became editor-in-chief of the weekly home journal, *Boston Budget*, resigning in 1893 to devote herself exclusively to press correspondence and literary work.⁶⁶

In the early twentieth century, Whiting took an avid interest in Katherine Tingley, the head of the American Section of the Theosophical Society, writing a number of pamphlets about theosophy, Tingley, and her work organizing and leading the theosophical colony at Point Loma, CA.⁶⁷ Whiting also did as much as any other writer to popularize the principles of the New Thought movement, drawing a number of feminist reform leaders to her writings on mental healing and thought transference.⁶⁸ Like

⁶⁶ “Miss Lilian Whiting,” 767-768,” in *A Woman of the Century; Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life* ed. Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore (Buffalo, NY: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893); “Lilian Whiting and Her Work,” *Current Literature* 19 (January 1, 1896): 13; “Lilian Whiting,” *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* vol. 9, (New York: James T. White & Co., 1907), 261; and “Lilian Whiting, 82, Critic Litterateur. Boston Author, Once Literary Editor of *The Traveler*, Dies.” *New York Times*, May 1, 1942, 19. For reasons unknown Whiting listed her date of birth as 1859 when it was actually 1847. Hence the error of her age in the *Times* obituary.

⁶⁷ For Katherine Tingley (1847-1929) and theosophy as practiced at the American colony at Point Loma, CA see Emmett A. Greenwalt, *The Point Loma Community in California, 1897-1942: A Theosophical Experiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955); Paul Kagan and Marilyn Ziebarth, “Eastern Thought on a Western Shore: Point Loma Community,” *California Historical Quarterly* 52.1 (1973): 4-15; Penny Brown Waterstone, “Domesticating Universal Brotherhood: Feminine Values and the Construction of Utopia, Point Loma Homestead, 1897-1920,” (PhD. Diss., University of Arizona, 1995); Evelyn A. Kirkley, “‘Equality of the Sexes, But...’: Women in Point Loma Philosophy, 1899-1942,” *Nova Religio* 1 (April 1998): 272-288; W. Michael Ashcraft, “The Child, Theosophy, and Victorian American Culture at Point Loma,” *Theosophical History* 7 (April 1998): 64-83; W. Michael Ashcraft, *The Dawn of the New Cycle: Point Loma Theosophists and American Culture* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002); and Edmund B. Ligan, *The Theatre of the Occult Revival: Alternative Spiritual Performance from 1875 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), chapter 2, “Katherine Tingley and the Theatre of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society,” 29-61.

⁶⁸ In a chapter devoted to Whiting, Benjamin O. Flower, editor of *Arena*, referred to her as “Perhaps the most popular among all the New Thought writers.” B. O. Flower, *Progressive Men, Women, and Movements of the Past Twenty-Five Years* (Boston: The New Arena, 1914), 179.

her friend Frances Willard, who remained a steadfast Methodist while involved with theosophy, occultism, and psychical research, Whiting remained a devout Episcopalian and staunch supporter of Trinity Church, Boston, or “Phillips Brooks’ Church”, as it was often called. She also participated in humanitarian relief causes and became a supporter for woman’s suffrage. At the age of ninety-four she died of a coronary thrombosis at the Hotel Copley Plaza, Boston, where she had moved during World War II when the federal government assumed control of the Brunswick Hotel, her home for over forty years. At her request her ashes were laid beside those of Kate Field in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA.⁶⁹

The day following the close of the Psychical Science Congress, Whiting, in one of her syndicated columns repeated a premise that she had laid out at the congress that if psychical science would ever become as valued as other sciences, it would have to bring “practical aid and recognized illumination on the serious concerns of our common life.” In perfect New Thought stride, she emphasized that an individual’s spiritual state reigned as the defining force in resolving the concerns of this common life. Calling for an intensive study into the secrets of the spiritual force which governs individual life, Whiting determined that “the work of the Congress of Psychical Research is the most practical and immediately important work of the age.”⁷⁰ In the years following the Psychical Congress Whiting turned even more toward spiritualism particularly after experiencing a number of psychical dreams and experiences following the death of Kate Field which she addressed in her books *After Her Death* (1897), *Kate Field* (1899), and *The Spiritual Significance* (1900). In 1899 she wrote to Richard Hodgson about her sittings with the famed Boston medium, Mrs. Leonora Piper, who relayed messages to Whiting from Kate Field.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth F. Hoxie, “Lilian Whiting (1847-1942),” in *Notable American Women*, vol. 3, 592-593; and Tumber, *American Feminism*, 57-65.

⁷⁰ Lilian Whiting, “Life in Boston. Transferred, However, to Charming Chicago.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, August 26, 1893, 13; and Lilian Whiting, “Life in Boston. Temporarily Transferred to the World’s Exposition.” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, September 2, 1893, 13.

Favorably disposed toward Mrs. Piper from previous sittings, Hodgson vouched for the credibility of the messages the spirit of Kate Field was sending, further reinforcing Whiting's growing reliance on spiritualistic truths.⁷¹ With her now near absolute conviction of spiritualism's commanding presence in directing human welfare, Whiting wrote in *After Her Death* that psychical research was making great practical gains in applying occultism to the practical affairs of life. She was certain that psychic science was "conquering new territory; discerning more and more of truth constantly....truths [that] are as unquestionably attested as any truths of philosophy or of physics."⁷²

Kate Field (1838-1896), who read Lilian Whiting's paper at the Psychical Science Congress, remains, herself, an intriguing and extraordinary figure of the nineteenth century, well-known in her time but largely forgotten today. Her interests in the occult led her to begin experimenting in the 1860s with the planchette, a prototype of the Ouija Board, which ultimately convinced her of the genuineness of spiritualism and prompted her to publish an account of her experiments entitled *Planchette's Diary* (1868). Field was enthralled with both Chicago and the World's Columbian Exposition, staying for the entire World's Fair at the Lexington Hotel on Michigan Boulevard. During the Congress of Representative Women, she addressed a standing-room only crowd in the assembly room of the Woman's Building, heralding the Woman's Congress as "the dawn of a new era for woman." Field died of pneumonia at the age of fifty-seven in Honolulu, Hawaii, where she had been lecturing and vacationing. Her ashes were buried in the family plot in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA.⁷³ Shortly before

⁷¹ "Cases," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (December 1899): 150-151. "From a Spirit." *Boston Globe*, November 13, 1899, 4; "Lilian Whiting Says She Talked with Kate Field in the Spirit World." *New York Herald*, November 12, 1899, 2. To the end of her life Whiting contributed to the *National Spiritualist*, published in Chicago.

⁷² Lilian Whiting, *After Her Death; The Story of a Summer* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1900 [1897]), 33, 106-107. See also Lilian Whiting, *The Spiritual Significance of Death as an Event in Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1901).

⁷³ Gary Scharnhorst, *Kate Field: The Many Lives of a Nineteenth-Century American Journalist* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 218; Maurine H. Beasley, "Kate Field," *American National Biography Online*, www.anb.org/articles/16/16-00536.html; and David Baldwin, "Kate Field," *Notable American Women*, vol. 1, 612-614. On her death the *New York Tribune* described Field as "one of the best-known women in America," and the *Chicago Tribune* characterized hers as "perhaps the most unique woman the present century has produced." Scharnhorst, *Kate Field*, xi.

her death, Field had written about her belief in the afterlife, positing her faith that science would soon prove the truth of immortality.⁷⁴ In a tribute to her friend, Lilian Whiting wrote “The world is the better, social progress is the more advanced, and the world of the unseen is nearer and more real because of the life, of the infinite energy, of the lofty purposes of Kate Field.”⁷⁵

The immediate years following the Psychical Science Congress found occult subjects in Chicago and throughout the country still generating considerable interest, with progressive women of advanced spirituality keeping topics of spiritual science alive in the public mind. In 1895 the spiritualist trance speaker Cora Richmond lectured before a “cultivated audience” on the subject of ‘Psychic Research and Hypnotism,’ in which she declared that “theosophy, clairvoyance, Christian science and hypnotism are all indications that occult influences are more and more at work in the world.”⁷⁶ That same year, Margaret S. Peeke, a minister’s wife from Sandusky, Ohio, wrote in *Arena* that occultism “belongs to this age,” and that its mission was to serve “as a prominent factor of reform in all lines of human life, individual, social, political, scientific, and religious.” In a vein similar to that of Lilian Whiting at the Psychical Congress, Peeke further declared that “When occult principles are lived by many, crime must cease, impurity of thought and deed obliterated, and selfish organizations [will] die from lack of sustenance. Drunkenness, poverty and misery *must* go.”⁷⁷ In January 1896, Emma Moore Davis

⁷⁴ Lilian Whiting, *Kate Field; A Record* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1899), 576. See also Lilian Whiting, “Psychical Research: Limitation in Spirit Return,” *Coming Age* 2 (August 1899): 153-158; and Lilian Whiting, “The Mission of Spiritualism,” *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* 58 (July 15, 1899), 6.

⁷⁵ Lilian Whiting, “Kate Field,” *Arena* 15 (November 1896), 926. For press coverage of her death see “Kate Field is Dead. Brilliant in Journalism and as a Lecturer.” *Washington Post*, May 31, 1896, 1; “The Death of Kate Field.” *Washington Post*, June 10, 1896, 6; “Kate Field’s Funeral. Her Remains Will Be Brought to This Country for Final Burial.” *Washington Post*, June 5, 1896, 2; and “Buried in a Distant Land. Movement for a Fund to Bring Kate Field’s Remains Home.” *Washington Post*, August 8, 1896, 4.

⁷⁶ “Talked of Hypnotism. Large Audience Entertained by the Rev. Cora Richmond of Chicago.” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 10, 1895, 4. See also Cora L. V. Richmond, “Psychic or Supermundane Experiences,” *Arena* 18 (July 1897): 98-107; and Cora L. V. Richmond, “The Spiritualism of Today,” *Arena* 21 (March 1899): 359-369.

⁷⁷ Margaret B. Peeke, “The Mission of Practical Occultism To-Day. Second Paper,” *Arena* 12 (April 1895), 198, 200-201. Margaret Bloodgood Peeke became Inspector General of the Martinist Order for the United States (an occult

presented a paper to the Chicago Woman's Club on the topic 'Scientific Psychological Research', a lecture which "created considerable interest among the women present." Over four hundred members and nearly fifty guests were in attendance to hear Mrs. Davis discuss psychological research and hypnotism as the "scientific problem of the age," and according to the *Tribune* and the *Inter Ocean*, a lively discussion ensued with Sarah Hackett Stevenson and Mary Hawes Wilmarth, both members of the Woman's Organizational Committee of the Psychological Science Congress, as primary discussants.⁷⁸ Occultism continued to be a featured topic of conversation for leading Chicago women and their associates who came to speak at venues throughout the city. As an anonymous writer in the *Chicago Tribune* mused, "A woman is nothing if not progressive nowadays," and occult interests, as we have seen, were an integral part of women's progressive thinking. There is still much work to be done in formulating a more complete picture of *fin-de-siècle* women's progressive intellectual culture. As historian Mary Hilton noted, "we are now only beginning to construct a women's history of progressive ideas: one that traces their contributions and their differences, the ways they accepted some aspects of popular ideologies and changed and extended others."⁷⁹

Progressive occultism developed as a significant aspect of Chicago's cultural landscape as the city became a major metropolis in the 1880s, capturing world attention in the early 1890s as plans for the World's Congress Auxiliary unfolded and publicity for the Psychological Science Congress traversed

society) on February 12, 1902 and directed Martinism in America until her death on November 2, 1908. On October 7, 1894, she lectured at the Masonic Temple in Chicago on "How to Find God," stating that "Americans have not yet learned the occult powers of the mind." "Mrs. Margaret B. Peeke Lectures. Says Man is not Happy Until He Gains a Higher Consciousness." *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1894, 2.

⁷⁸ Lecture Before Woman's Club. Mrs. C. W. Davis Talks on 'Scientific Psychological Research.' *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 1896, 12; and "Hypnotism, Problem of the Age. Interesting Psychological Paper Read Before the Woman's Club." *Chicago Inter Ocean*, January 16, 1896, 8. Emma Moore Davis was the wife of Col. Charles W. Davis, head of the publishing department for A. C. McClurg & Co. "Death of Colonel Davis." *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1898, 12.

⁷⁹ "Not Perfection Yet. Even Progressive Woman is Not Free from Vagaries." *Chicago Tribune*, January 8, 1893, 35; and Mary Hilton, "Revisioning Romanticism: Towards a Women's History of Progressive Thought, 1780-1850," *History of Education* 30 (September 2001), 471.

across the country. A number of leading Chicagoans with established reputations in business, religion, medicine, and journalism lent their support to the organization of societies devoted to the investigation and advancement of spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research. Had it not been for the notable men and women who devoted themselves to these undertakings it is likely there would have been no Psychical Science Congress and no Theosophical Congress at the Parliament of Religions. Progressive occultism in Chicago in 1893 and the years immediately preceding the World's Fair brimmed with an expectant hope of providing proof for immortality, reflecting the period's culture of optimism and faith in scientific progress. If the leaders of the psychical congress failed in their quest of proving life after death or in establishing psychical research as a permanent discipline, they were struggling in difficult terrain that yielded little of the absolute. Moreover, the men and women who gathered at Chicago to promote psychical science were almost exclusively non-scientists who devoted their energies to spiritualism and psychical research in conjunction with careers unrelated to science. In the end, of course, any attempt to verify human immortality may be doomed to failure, as the elusive nature of our ultimate destiny is most likely firmly perched in the realm of the unknowable. Still, the question will most likely remain of enduring interest just as Chicago's psychical science congress demonstrated through its capturing of public attention, if only for a fleeting moment.

EPILOGUE: OCCULT SPIRITUALITIES AND THE CULTURAL IMAGINATION: EXPANDING THE PURVIEW OF PSYCHICAL SCIENCE

Psychical Science, Romance, and Popular Modernism

Psychical research, in much of the recent historiography, has been too narrowly construed as the domain of white scientific, religious, and academic elites, and this perception has been somewhat reinforced in this study of the Psychical Science Congress. While presumably international in scope and including speakers from South America, the Congress was primarily an Anglo-American affair, including just a smattering of continental European psychical researchers who were either present or had papers read on their behalf. But psychical science at the end of the nineteenth century can be more broadly configured than merely as a psychical research enterprise concerned with spiritualism, telepathy, and theosophy—and directed by the white elites associated with exploring, endorsing, or disparaging these movements. This concluding epilogue will seek to broaden the historical and thematic scope of psychical science in one particular direction by aligning it with features of the cultural landscape with which it shared more than just passing similarities. Specifically, I will situate psychical science within the wider public imagination of what literary historians refer to as the ‘New Romance,’ a stylistic direction underway in literature during the 1880s but which can be recognized as being culturally present in public domains beyond novels and subsets of literary fiction. This wider ‘New Romance’ found expression in popular attention devoted to scientific exploits, adventures, and contested speculations surrounding Arctic exploration, winners in the race to the North Pole, and the ‘discovery’ that extraterrestrials inhabited Mars, a notion that found widespread acceptance thanks to numerous magazines articles, public lectures, and books by astronomer Percival Lowell beginning in the mid-1890s. Viewed in this cultural context, psychical science or progressive occultism in the form of spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research becomes intertwined in the constellation of adventuresome

romance, which became a prominent feature of a popular modernism and new enchantment which captivated large segments of the American reading public at the end of the nineteenth century. Particularly does spiritualism, among the subject areas of psychical science, share strong historical affinities with both Arctic exploration and the Mars mania that gripped the public imagination during these years. I will also discuss 'spirituality' as a linking feature among a number of Progressive reform movements, such as city beautification, conservation, eugenics, and home economics, and highlight the inability of psychical science to ultimately position itself as one of the enduring social sciences emerging at the end of the nineteenth century.

I also wish to broaden the ongoing recovery of the African American presence in North American spiritualism through what we might term *voodoo/spiritualism*—that particular variety of African American occult spirituality which appeared in urban settings such as New Orleans and Chicago in the early twentieth century and which became a uniquely American variety of magico-religious practice. This recovery of African American spiritualism is of recent origin and has yet to penetrate standard historiographies of psychical research. The final two sections of this epilogue will discuss the emergence in the mid-1890s of a commercially-based, money-making occultism in Chicago which publicized itself as a variety of New Thought and will examine the public occultism of William T. Stead and a sanitized version of spiritualism called "Immortalism" which Samuel Fallows, Bishop of St. Paul's Reformed Church in Chicago, introduced in the first decade of the twentieth century. Finally, the long-standing notion that Chicago possesses some peculiar occult properties that draws metaphysically-minded people to its environs will be reviewed as a closing note to the study.

In his book on the English domestic novel, Nicholas Daly examines the popular fiction of the 'romance revival' of the late Victorian and Edwardian years, focusing on the work of such authors as Bram Stoker, H. Rider Haggard and Arthur Conan Doyle, classifying their work as part of the period's

emergent ‘popular modernism’. What contemporary critics called a “revival of romance” became apparent in mid-1880s best-selling adventure novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883) and H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), two works that “did much to create the popular perception of a new direction in fiction.”¹ Daly dismisses the notion that this turn was a throwback to an earlier ‘romantic era’, and instead situates these new novels of adventure and romance as “a distinctively *modern* phenomenon” that can be regarded as the period’s literary manifestation of popular modernism, a development which, in turn, should be readily recognized in other cultural domains such as science, religion, and philosophy. Particularly do the public movements in end-of-the-century modern occultism—spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research, those manifestations of progressive occultism I have detailed in this study and which share features of fictionalized romance in literature—also become significant features of this new, popular modernism.² Popular modernisms such as progressive occultism, the ‘new romance’ in literature, the allure of Arctic exploration, and the general acceptance that Mars was inhabited, contributed to the creation of what Michael Saler has described as “convincing worlds of enchantment and wonder” that the reading public “could inhabit imaginatively.” These cultural engineers of popular modernism, he suggests, “created literal geographies of the imagination... for the new spectacular culture that burgeoned at the turn of the

¹ Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8. According to Christine Ferguson, romances “were the most popular literary form of the *fin-de-siècle*” and “the best-selling novels of the period.” Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 54; and Anna Vaninskaya, “The Late-Victorian Romance Revival: A Generic Excursus,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 51.1 (2008): 57-79.

² Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle*, 9. For spiritualism and the occult as elements in the ‘new romance’, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998). An expansively broad conception of modernism informed by occultism can also be found in John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); see particularly the new “Series Editor’s Preface” by Roger Griffin, ix-xiv, found in Bramble’s book.

century.”³ All in all, what can be described as the ‘New Romance,’ or ‘popular modernism,’ of the *fin de siècle* extended its reach far beyond fiction and literature, drawing together elements of science, horror, psychology, the supernatural, the fantastic, and adventure into an imaginative cultural realm of planetary excitement, psychical powers, and possible worlds promising survival after death.

Polar Exploration and Psychical Phenomena

One prominent feature of popular modernism was the public attention to news coverage of the exploration of Arctic regions, the search for the Northwest Passage, and the race to the North Pole. The heyday of this popular fascination for the Polar Regions and the North Pole, the decades from 1850 to 1910, coincided with the nineteenth-century modern occult revival and the popular attraction to the subjects of spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research.⁴ It is not surprising then to discover areas of overlap where polar exploration becomes entangled with psychical phenomena. For one thing, in a fashion similar to those psychical researchers who bemoaned the lack of funding and scientific support for investigative work with spiritualists and mind readers,⁵ one polar historian has complained recently about the “insufficient attention” devoted to a full historical appreciation of the geographical significance of the Arctic and the Antarctic regions.⁶ In addition another Polar scientist also

³ Michael Saler, “At Home in the Ironic Imagination: The Rational Vernacular and Spectacular Texts,” in *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment* ed. Maiken Umbach and Bernd Huppau (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 55, 67. Saler indicates (63) that the period for critical discussion of the New Romance in literature ranged from the 1880s until the 1910s, precisely the periodization of greatest interest in classical psychical research. See also Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴ These dates for the heyday of popular interest in the Arctic are provided by Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2.

⁵ Some psychical researchers bitterly complained of the disparity of funding for their work when compared to the lavish outlays, both private and public, of monetary support for Arctic exploration. See e.g., “Psychical Research in the United States,” *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 23 (January 1901), 84; and Ferdinand C. S. Schiller, *Riddles of the Sphinx; A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), 382-383.

⁶ Roger D. Launius, “Toward the Poles: A Historiography of Scientific Exploration during the International Polar Years and the International Geophysical Year,” in *Globalizing Polar Science: Reconsidering the International Polar*

disappointed by the lack of American and international scientific interest in the Arctic and in prose reminiscent, though more subdued, to that heard at the Psychical Science Congress, insists that “the keys to many of our nation’s, and indeed our planet’s, present and future problems may lie in this region.”⁷

Spiritualism and polar exploration first became intertwined in what was the most publicized and romanticized undertaking in the nineteenth century, the ill-fated expedition of Sir John Franklin, a British Royal Naval officer who sailed out in 1845 to chart the Northwest Passage in the Canadian Arctic, only to perish, unbeknownst to the world, with his entire crew in 1847.⁸ Although final proof of his fate and that of his crew was not determined until 1859, it was clear to most observers by 1854 that Franklin must have died. The prolonged and strenuous efforts of Lady Jane Franklin, wife of Sir John, and her niece Sophy Cracroft to determine the fate of the Franklin Expedition are well known to Arctic historians. For fourteen years Lady Jane had pursued all paths in ascertaining whether her husband was still alive and her efforts remain one of the classic Victorian stories of spousal perseverance. In her attempts to find out what happened to her husband, Lady Jane and her niece consulted a number of clairvoyants to seek possible information on his state of health and physical location. By the early 1850s, during the time when spiritualism had crossed the Atlantic to reach Britain, a number of mediums and spiritualists offered their services in the search for Sir John Franklin. In what British historian Francis Spufford regards as a “curious connection between psychic and Arctic interests,” the

and Geophysical Years ed. Roger D. Launius, James Rodger Fleming, and David H. DeVorkin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 47.

⁷ Gunter Weller, “The United States and the Role of Science in the Arctic,” in *United States and Arctic Interests: The 1980s and 1990s* ed. William E. Westermeyer and Kurt M. Shusterich (New York and Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 158. Weller maintains that the Arctic “is a large ‘natural laboratory’ of surprising diversity that offers exciting research possibilities in every branch of science,” (158) an argument psychical researchers would have found congenially suited to their own field of supernormal and supernatural phenomena.

⁸ While a great number of books and articles have appeared on the Franklin expedition, the best place to start is Patricia D. Sutherland, ed. *The Franklin Era in Canadian Arctic History, 1845-1859* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1985).

American explorer, Elisha Kane, who held a romantic interest in Margaret Fox, one of the famed Fox sisters responsible for the spiritualist craze in America, launched his own search for Franklin.⁹ Even if we only considered the compelling story of Sir John Franklin and his disappearance, Shane McCorristine has observed, we would be forced to conclude that “the histories of Arctic exploration and spiritualism are interrelated to an extraordinary degree.”¹⁰

But Arctic exploration and psychical science interface once again, although in a less spectacular fashion, with Lt. Adolphus W. Greely, the American commander of the Greely Arctic Expedition of 1881-1884. The expedition’s saga is told in Greely’s *Three Years of Arctic Service*, while its spiritual side was detailed in an article by Greeley in the *Ladies Home Journal* entitled “When I Stood Face to Face with Death.” In that article Commander Greely recounted how he and his men “held fast to the eternal and imponderable qualities of the mental and spiritual universe,” pondering “what was to come in a future existence.” Those who believed in a future life, Greely declared, “bore present evils with more courage and composure than could be expected from non-believers.”¹¹ While lecturing in Washington, DC in 1887, Greely spent time in the company of Alfred Russel Wallace, the noted English naturalist. Wallace, it might be recalled, had a paper read on his behalf by Elliott Coues at the Psychical Science Congress

⁹ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1996), 132; W. Gillies Ross, “Clairvoyants and Mediums Search For Franklin,” *Polar Record* 39 (January 2003): 1-18; and Ralph Lloyd-Jones, “The Paranormal Arctic: Lady Franklin, Sophia Cracroft, and Captain and ‘Little Weesy’ Coppin,” *Polar Record* 37 (January 2001): 27-34. On the romance between Elisha Kent Kane and Margaret Fox, see David Chapin, *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* (Amherst and London: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); and Pierre Berton, *The Arctic Grail: The Quest for the North West Passage and the North Pole, 1818-1909* (New York: Viking, 1998), 235-243.

¹⁰ Shane McCorristine, “The Spectral Presence of the Franklin Expedition in Contemporary Fiction,” *Critique* 55.1 (2014), 65; and Shane McCorristine, “The Supernatural Arctic: An Exploration,” *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9 (March 2010): 47-70. See also Robert G. David, *The Arctic in the British Imagination, 1818-1914* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

¹¹ General A. W. Greely, “When I Stood Face to Face With Death,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* 15 (October 1898): 2; and Adolphus Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service: An Account of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition of 1883-1884 and the Attainment of Farthest North*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886). The definitive history remains Alden Todd, *Abandoned: The Story of the Greely Arctic Expedition 1881-1884*, 2nd ed. (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2001).

titled “Notes on the Growth of Opinion as to Obscure Psychical Phenomena during the Last Fifty Years.” Greely and his companions, who gathered at their “small conversational club” in Washington, were quite taken by Wallace’s “advanced views [on] spiritualism.” The Greely group was charmed by Wallace’s “amiability, interesting talk...freedom from contentiousness...and wonderful fund of general and scientific knowledge.”¹²

Spiritualism shared another significant feature with Arctic exploration—a penchant for fraud and deceit. Both men who claimed to have reached the North Pole either in 1908 or 1909, Frederick A. Cook (1865-1940) and Robert E. Peary (1856-1920), apparently lied about it. The documentation of the two explorers, which they said proved their claim to have reached the North Pole, was either fabricated or non-existent, causing Arctic historians to conclude that neither man reached the Pole, and reminding us that individuals more prestigious than most spiritualist mediums can have their credibility questioned and their reputations destroyed.¹³ While the battle raged in the press about who was the first to reach the Pole, spiritualists began to weigh in on the controversy. In a 1911 letter from William T. Stead, editor of the *Review of Reviews* to Washington, DC attorney Arthur R. Colburn, Stead claimed to have received spirit messages informing him that neither Dr. Cook nor Commander Peary had reached the North Pole but that Cook had gotten closest. Stead informs Colburn in the letter that he received a

¹² Major-General A. W. Greely (U.S.A., Retired) *Reminiscences of Adventure and Service; A Record of Sixty-Five Years* (New York and London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927), 291. Greely wrote that Wallace “deeply impressed us as a man and a scientist” (292). On Wallace and spiritualism, see Malcolm Jay Kottler, “Alfred Russel Wallace, the Origin of Man, and Spiritualism,” *Isis* 65 (June 1974): 144-192; Peter Pels, “Spiritual Facts and Super-visions: The ‘Conversion’ of Alfred Russel Wallace,” *Etnofoor* 8.2 (1995): 69-91; and the extended discussion in two biographies, Ross A. Sloten, *The Heretic in Darwin’s Court: The Life of Alfred Russel Wallace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and Martin Fichman, *An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). An anonymous account of an apparition appearing during an unspecified Arctic expedition can be found in “His Daughter’s Ghost. It Appeared to an Arctic Explorer at the Hour of Her Death.” *Salt Lake Herald*, June 27, 1902, 4.

¹³ Anthony Brandt, “Introduction,” ix-xxii, in *The North Pole: A Narrative History* ed. Anthony Brandt (Washington, DC: National Geographic Adventure Classics, 2005); and Robert M. Bryce, “Introduction to the Cooper Square Press Edition,” v-xxx, in Robert E. Peary, *The North Pole; Its Discovery in 1909 under the Auspices of the Peary Arctic Club* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001 [1910]). The definitive account is Bruce Henderson, *True North: Peary, Cook, and the Race to the Pole* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2005).

message from the spirit of Sir John Franklin stating that he [Franklin] had personally escorted Cook to a short distance from the Pole when he allowed Cook to complete the journey on his own. In his response to Stead, Colburn wrote that it was “most noteworthy that the testimony of the spirit world is unanimous that neither explorer reached the pole, but that Cook got nearer than Peary,” citing testimony from over “fifty gifted psychics” who confirmed this opinion.¹⁴

Mars, Martians, and Spirit Voyages to the Red Planet

The beginnings of the *fin-de-siècle* Mars mania can be traced to the remarkable telescopic observations made by the Italian astronomer Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli during the opposition of September 1877 when he claimed to have discovered what he termed *canali* (channels or canals depending on the translation) on the planet’s surface. Mars can get as close as 35 million miles to earth when it is in opposition, meaning the opposite side of the earth to the sun. Oppositions afford astronomers their best view of the planet. Interest in Mars grew worldwide after Schiaparelli’s discovery and by the early 1890s was growing quite intense when in August 1892, as the planet was in its closest opposition since 1877, the famed French astronomer and novelist Camille Flammarion published his monumental work on the red planet.¹⁵ When the book fell into the hands of Percival

¹⁴ “Spirits for Cook. They Say He Was Nearer the Pole than Peary.” *Honesdale [PA] Citizen*, January 20, 1911, 2. Arthur Rollinson Colburn (1871-1951) has been an overlooked or even unknown figure in 20th century spiritualism historiography. He was a frequent correspondent with Stead and claimed to have received cross correspondence from Stead shortly after he perished when the *Titanic* struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic and sank. “Stead’s Spirit Talks. Takoma Park Psychic Takes Message on Ouija Board.” *Washington Post*, April 30, 1912, 5. Colburn was the author of a twenty-five page pamphlet, *Messages from the Spirit Planes: No. 1* (Takoma Park, DC: Pioneer Press, 1910). Along with his sister, Helen Frances Colburn, he held numerous séances in the Washington DC area where the two received spirit messages from George Washington and Amelia Earhart. “Voice of Washington Heard from Beyond, Woman Says.” *Washington Post*, February 22, 1933, 4; and “Two Spiritualists in Maryland Talk to Miss Earhart.” *Washington Post*, July 5, 1937, 13.

¹⁵ Camille Flammarion, *La planète Mars et ses conditions d’habitabilité* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1892). An English translation of this work was recently published. See *Camille Flammarion’s The Planet Mars: As Translated by Patrick Moore* ed. William Sheehan (Heidelberg and New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015). Flammarion (1842-1925) published numerous books on astronomy, popular science, psychical research, and science fiction. See Serena Keshavjee, “Science and the Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the

Lowell, a New England amateur scientist already familiar to the reading public, the Mars mania entered a completely new phase. Flammarion's notion that Mars was inhabited by beings like us captured Lowell's imagination, and during the summer of 1894, after only observing Mars telescopically for one month, Lowell announced to the world that Martians had constructed the canals to carry water from its melting polar caps to alleviate a global water shortage. Lowell proceeded to publicly proclaim his Martian thesis in a number of magazine articles published in *Popular Astronomy* and *Atlantic Monthly* and through a series of lectures in 1895 at Boston's Huntington Hall. The public was enthralled by his Martian romance of extraterrestrials fighting off extinction and this popular view of intelligent Martian canal builders lasted well beyond his death in 1916.¹⁶

Flammarion and Lowell shared another related interest in addition to speculating about life on Mars, that of psychical research. Like Arctic exploration, modern Martian studies are firmly linked to psychical research through its involvement with spiritualism. Camille Flammarion, we will recall, had sent Elliott Coues a telegram of congratulations at the opening of the Psychical Science Congress and is a well-known figure in the historiography of psychical research. Percival Lowell is less well known to historians of psychical science even though his *Occult Japan: The Way of the Gods: An Esoteric Study of Japanese Personality and Possession* (1894), was acclaimed for its well-documented study of trance phenomena. Flammarion was drawn to spiritualism throughout his whole life while Lowell shunned any

Symbolists in *fin-de-siecle* France," *Aries* 13.1 (2013): 37-69; and Fred Nadis, "Camille Flammarion's Amazing Universe," *Astronomy* 44 (June 2016): 47-49.

¹⁶ William Sheehan and Stephen James O'Meara, *Mars: The Lure of the Red Planet* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001); William Graves Hoyt, *Lowell and Mars* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976); Michael J. Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate, 1750-1900: The Idea of a Plurality of Worlds from Kant to Lowell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Robert Markley, *Dying Planet: Mars in Science and the Imagination* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005). Based on telescopic observations from his observatory in Flagstaff, NM, Lowell wrote three books about Martians and their heroic efforts to survive conditions on the red planet: *Mars* (1895); *Mars and Its Canals* (1906); and *Mars and the Abode of Life* (1908).

association with spiritualists, a number of whom approached him with ideas for contacting Martians.¹⁷ Even while he was promulgating his canal-building Martian thesis, Lowell was being assailed by professional astronomers for misleading the public in a similar fashion that professional psychologists rebuked psychical researchers for popularizing occultism and promoting false science.

The Mars mania of the period is also infused with accounts of spirit travel to the planet with the classic case of such mediumistic journeying being Théodore Flournoy's investigative account of Hélène Smith in *Des Indes à la Planète Mars* [*From India to the Planet Mars*](1899). Flournoy, a professor of psychology at the University of Geneva and a noted psychical researcher, began attending her séances in December 1894, and while rejecting her interplanetary claims, concluded that her rather remarkable abilities were the result of a heightened subliminal subconsciousness.¹⁸ But the case of Hélène Smith, while the most celebrated of Martian spirit travel lore, was hardly unique and overshadows a number of lesser known American cases of spiritual flight to Mars. One such case involved Sackville G. Leyson, of Syracuse, New York, founder and president of the city's First Progressive Co-Operatic Psychological Association. Newspaper accounts of Leyson's amazing adventure relate that his spirit travelled the 40 million mile distance between Earth and Mars in just forty minutes while he lay rested and composed on a couch in the presence of fifty members of his Psychological Association. Following his return trip to Syracuse Leyson described two different humanoid Martian species—a large type where he only came

¹⁷ William Sheehan, *Planets and Perception: Telescopic Views and Interpretation, 1609-1909* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1988), 169, 215; and Robert Crossley, "Mars and the Paranormal," *Science Fiction Studies* 35 (November 2008): 466-484. Robert Crossley, *Imagining Mars: A Literary History* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2011) offers intriguing insights regarding Lowell, Mars, and psychical research as does David Strauss in *Percival Lowell: The Culture and Science of a Boston Brahmin* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), Chapter 7, "Psychical Researcher," 133-150.

¹⁸ Sonu Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène: Théodore Flournoy and the Genesis of Subliminal Psychology," xi-li, in Théodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages* ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Carlos S. Alvarado, et. al., "Théodore Flournoy's Contributions to Psychical Research," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 78 (July 2014): 149-168; and Carlos S. Alvarado and Nancy L. Zingrone, "Note on the Reception of Théodore Flournoy's *Des Indes à la Planète Mars*," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 79 (July 2015): 156-164.

up to their knees and another much smaller type which only came up to *his* knees. He hoped that he would soon to be able to duplicate his travels before a group of scientists.¹⁹ The discerning observer cannot but help be struck by the allusion to the classic traveller's tale by Jonathan Swift whereby Swift's character, Lemuel Gulliver, in a similar fashion to Sackville Leyson, encounters in the island of Lilliput a race of tiny people less than six inches tall and in the realm of Brobdingnab a race of giants. Curiously, in this fantastic tale of *Gulliver's Travels*, written in 1726, Swift anticipates a modern astronomical discovery, confirmed by the American astronomer Asaph Hall in 1877, of two moons orbiting Mars.²⁰ The size and rotation of the two moons described by Swift corresponded so closely to Hall's observations that one writer mused that "some have refused to attribute it to coincidence, and assert that Swift must have had some uncanny means of knowing the truth by crystal-gazing, or astral currents, or one of the varied means of information, which come within the ken of the Society for Psychical Research."²¹ At any rate, one New York woman confirmed Sackville Leyson's observations of curious

¹⁹ "Sees Mars; Tale Amazes. Chief Psychic Brings Back a Queer Account of Planet." *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 1906, 2; "Saw Two Races in Mars. Syracuse Man Says He Visited the Planet." *New York Tribune*, August 14, 1906, 1. "Mystic's Spirit Saw Marvellous Sights in Mars. Leyson, in Trance, Beheld Men Who Looked Like Cyclops." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 19, 1906, 8B; "Mystic's Spirit Sees Weird Sights on Mars in Hairy Cyclops with Noses of Lions," *Indianapolis Star*, August 26, 1906, SM2; and "Saw Two Races in Mars. Syracuse Man Says He Visited the Planet." *New York Tribune*, August 14, 1906, 1.

²⁰ Swift wrote in his timeless classic, "They [his Laputan astronomers] have discovered two lesser stars or satellites, which revolve about Mars, whereof the innermost is distant from the centre of the primary planet exactly three of his diameters, and the outermost five; the former revolves in the space of ten hours, and the latter in twenty-one and a half." James, Johnston, "Anticipations of Modern Inventions by Men of Letters," *Cassier's Magazine* 22 (August 1902), 477. See also Cecilia Miller, *Enlightenment and Political Fiction: The Everyday Intellectual* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), ch. 3, "Gulliver's Travels (1726, amended 1735), Science, and Social Class," 120-168. Asaph Hall was professor of astronomy at the U.S. Naval Observatory when he discovered the two moons of Mars, Deimos and Phobos, through the USNO's 26 inch telescope, the largest refracting telescope in the world at that time.

²¹ Johnston, "Anticipations of Modern Inventions," 477; "Anticipations," *Living Age* 233 (April 5, 1902), 58; and "Fiction and Discovery," *Current Literature* 34 (November 1902), 620. A connection between *Gulliver's Travels* and psychical reference is alluded to by the contemporary psychologist Lisa J. Miller who writes "To my graduate students, I liken psychological research to the journey in *Gulliver's Travels*....we have actually stayed home, but we crafted a new lens through which to perceive humans and our place in the world....The language, operative concepts and assumptions of our culture increasingly hinge on spiritual ways of seeing, knowing, living." Lisa J. Miller, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality* ed. Lisa J. Miller (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1. Miller is Professor of Psychology and Education at Teachers College,

Martian creatures when she claimed that she herself was visited by a spirit from Mars six years before Leyson had made his 'trip' to the planet. One newspaper was rather impressed by this "good deal of [apparent] travel between Earth and Mars."²²

And indeed there was. George W. Arnold, a devoted reader of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, wrote to the paper that while he had found their coverage on Sackville Leyson compelling he had additional information to share on another spiritual traveler "better able to speak on Mars." He wrote about attending a public trumpet séance where the spirit of Robert G. Ingersoll was "delivering a lecture in the trumpet." The Rev. Dr. B. F. Austin (see below) was also present and asked the famous agnostic, "Colonel, there is quite a discussion between scientists and scientific writers as to whether Mars is inhabited. Have you visited Mars?" Ingersoll replied "Yes, Henry Ward Beecher and I visited Mars, and found it inhabited with a race of people much smaller in stature than we, who are highly educated, but have no religion as you have. We are going to introduce Spiritualism there as soon as possible."²³

Bringing spiritualism to unenlightened Martians who were devoid of a religious sense was also the intent of another intrepid spiritual voyager, Mrs. Sara Weiss (1832-1904) of St. Louis, Missouri. In accounts to reporters of the *Post-Dispatch*, Mrs. Weiss claimed to have made several visits to Mars

Columbia University and Director of the Spirituality and Mind/Body Institute. William T. Stead referred to William Crookes 1897 Presidential Address to the Society of Psychical Research as "A Scientific Gulliver's Travels," in *Borderland* 4 (April 1897), 133.

²² "Hairy Man from Mars Made But Brief Call. Woman Tells of Visitor Who Had One Eye and That in His Forehead." *Washington Times*, August 17, 1906, 6; and "News from Mars Is Confirmed. New York Woman Says She Had Visit from One-Eyed Giant Seen by Mr. Leyson." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 15, 1906, 5.

²³ "Ingersoll on Mars. Spirit of Noted Infidel Called Up to Give His Opinion of Certain Matters." *Hartford [KY] Herald*, August 29, 1906, 4. Speaking trumpets were used by mediums in spiritualist séances beginning in the early 1850s and quickly became a common feature of séances through the 1920s. Trumpet mediums amplified the voices of the dead "through a special megaphonic instrument that was raised into the air by an invisible power." Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 239. For 'speaking through trumpet' séances, see Loren Albert Sherman, *Science of the Soul: A Scientific Demonstration of the Existence of the Soul of Man as His Conscious Individuality Independently of the Physical Organism; of the Continuity of Life and the Actuality of Spirit Return* (Port Huron, MI: The Sherman Co., 1895), 307-330.

during a period extending from October 6, 1892, to September 16, 1894 through the means of “soul flight” in the company of the departed spirits of noted scientists Louis Agassiz and Alexander von Humboldt. She described Mars [or *Ento* as Martians called their planet] as a “happy planet, filled with love,” while the ‘Entonians’ designated Earth as “the sorrowful star.” All these romantic ventures were recorded in her book *Journeys to the Planet Mars* (1903), a work which the *Post-Dispatch* noted resonated with residents in St. Louis as there were many citizens throughout the city who accepted her account as literally true, “held by them to be a record of travel as authentic as if it merely covered a voyage to Europe instead of a soul flight through unfathomable space to Mars.”²⁴ The newspaper also gave the book a favorable review, praising “its inherent depth of thought, gracefulness of style, and comprehensible philosophy.” Her observation that Martians excelled Earthlings “in mechanical and scientific fields,” but lagged far behind us “in religious and spiritual matters,” prompted Mrs. Weiss and her spirit guides “to enlighten the people of Mars, who dwelt in the darkness of a profound materialism.”²⁵ The purpose of her book, as stated by the Rev. B. F. Austin in a sermon to his spiritualist congregation in Rochester, New York, was to teach Martians about spiritualism and convert them to its doctrines, an ambitious evangelical space mission to say the least.²⁶ In her obituary, the *Post-Dispatch* indicated that Mrs. Weiss, “a cultured woman, highly esteemed for her many qualities of head and

²⁴ “A St. Louis Woman’s Journey to Mars.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 20, 1903, B8; and “St. Louis Woman Draws under Spirit Influence. Impelled by a Power Outside Herself and Without Art, Education, or Previous Experience She Has Made Pictures Which She Believes Represent the Flora of the Planet Mars.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 2, 1901, B6.

²⁵ “Romance, Philosophy, Morals.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 15, 1904, 11. Sara Weiss, *Journeys to the Planet Mars, or, Our Mission to Ento (Mars): Being a Record of Visits Made to Ento (Mars) by Sara Weiss, Psychic, under the Guidance of a Spirit Band, for the Purpose of Conveying to the Entoans a Knowledge of the Continuity of Life*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, NY: Austin Publishing Co., 1905 [1903]). Further reviews of this work can be found in “All About Mars.” *New York Times*, December 19, 1903, BR10; “The Holiday Bookshelf.” *Louisville Courier Journal*, December 19, 1903, 4; and “In Serious Vein.” *St. Louis Republic*, December 12, 1903, Pt. 2, 2.

²⁶ “To Teach Mars of Spirits. Why Mrs. Weiss Went to Planet in a Trance is Explained.” *Baltimore Sun*, April 7, 1905, 8. Unlike H. G. Wells who had written of Martians attacking Earth in *War of the Worlds* (1898), on this occasion it was spiritualists doing the invading of Mars.

heart," was a past president of the First Spiritual Association of St. Louis and that she had been raised on a farm adjacent to the childhood home of General Phillip Sheridan and his brother in Perry County, maintaining a friendship with the famous Union Army general throughout her life.²⁷

Following its publication in 1903, Mrs. Weiss's book caught the attention of a prominent Rochester, New York spiritualist, the Rev. Dr. B. F. Austin, who published a second edition of *Journeys to the Planet Mars* through his own firm, the Austin Publishing Company. B. F. [Benjamin Fish] Austin (1850-1933) remains an understudied figure in the history of early-twentieth century spiritualism. In 1899 he was declared a heretic by the London Conference of the Methodist Church for his advocacy of spiritualism and expelled from the pulpit of the Methodist Church of Canada. Following his excommunication from the Methodist Church, Austin spent a number of years writing about spiritualism, culminating with *Glimpses of the Unseen: A Study of Dreams, Premonitions, Prayers, and Remarkable Answers, Hypnotism, Spiritualism, Telepathy, Apparitions, Peculiar Mental and Spiritual Experiences, Unexplained Psychological Phenomena* (Toronto and Bradford: Bradley-Garretson, 1898), a book that drew heavily from the work of British and American psychical researchers. In 1904, he moved to Rochester, New York where, along with a number of area spiritualists founded Plymouth Church. Austin stayed at Plymouth until 1911 whereupon he moved to Los Angeles to become affiliated with various spiritualist churches in California.²⁸

²⁷ Mrs. Sara Weiss Passes Away. She Was Prominent Spiritualist and Author of *Journeys to the Planet Mars*." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 23, 1904, 1; and "Funeral of Mrs. S. Weiss. Body of St. Louis Author Is to Be Incinerated." *St. Louis Republic*, March 25, 1904, 14.

²⁸ Stan McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 42-56; and Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 69-78. For his conversion to spiritualism in 1893 after a sitting with a Detroit medium, see B. F. Austin, "Some Remarkable Psychological Experiences," *Arena* 20 (September 1898): 289-331. It is somewhat curious that no Canadian spiritualists were present at the Psychological Science Congress, particularly when we learn that B. F. Underwood had lectured in Toronto in the 1870s when local spiritualists were active in the city. Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 66.

A final remarkable case of spiritual flight to Mars concerns the investigative account of a medium known as 'Mrs. Smead' by James H. Hyslop, who became secretary of the reorganized American Society of Psychical Research in 1907. Mrs. Smead was the pseudonym of Mrs. Ida Maude Cleaveland (1868-1923), an American housewife who practiced automatic writing and received revelations about spiritual life on Mars. She was 'discovered' when her husband, the Rev. Willis Milton Cleaveland (1866-1927), minister of the Methodist Church of Winchester and Westport, New Hampshire, wrote Hyslop in 1901 who subsequently began working closely with her for many years. In his correspondence with Hyslop, Rev. Cleaveland spoke of his wife's mediumistic powers and indicated that he had transcribed a collection of 'communications' purportedly from the planet Mars. His interest piqued, Hyslop discovered that the clergyman's experiments with his wife had extended over several years and that reasonably good records had been kept. Mrs. Smead had used the planchette since childhood and in 1895 she began to receive messages from three of her deceased children, whose spirits now inhabited Mars. Hyslop suspected this to be a case of subconscious duplicity for he soon discovered that one of the sessions in 1895 occurred one day before an article about Percival Lowell appeared in a newspaper subscribed to by the couple. The Cleavelands denied that Mrs. Smead had read the newspaper article or any of Lowell's articles about life on Mars and subsequent sittings with Mrs. Smead convinced Hyslop that she possessed some genuine mediumistic ability.²⁹ But he attributed her automatic writings from the planchette—the communications from Mars—as a manifestation of the subconscious mind while newspaper accounts of Mrs. Stead's revelations tended to dwell on her descriptions of Martian

²⁹ James H. Hyslop, "The Smead Case," *Annals of Psychical Science* 4 (August 1906): 69-105; James H. Hyslop, "Apparent Subconscious Fabrication," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 1 (December 1906): 201-215; James H. Hyslop, *Psychical Research and the Resurrection* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1908), 222-265; and James H. Hyslop, "Journeys to the Planet Mars," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 7 (May 1913): 272-283.

language, foliage, and airships.³⁰ Psychological science was part and parcel of the period's fascination with the unexplored and unknown—whether regions of the mind, remote parts of the planet, or revolving planets around the Sun.

Spiritualism and the Occult in African-American Culture

The historian John Kucich has concluded that spiritualism has been too narrowly configured as an Anglo-American dominated affair with an origin myth of 1848. A broader perspective, he suggests, allows for Native American and African-American “spiritualist practices like conjure [hoodoo] and the Ghost Dance” to become part of the landscape and context of nineteenth century spiritualist history.³¹ *Conjure*, an integral part of American slave culture mentality, is frequently designated as an umbrella term for invoking spiritual power for various applications of self-enhancement and self-preservation, or oppositely, to direct affliction toward others, often designated as ‘harming practices’. Conjure can best be regarded as enveloping the entire apparatus of techniques and avenues to the spiritual realm by particularly gifted psychically-inclined individuals on Southern slave plantations in order to improve the physical conditions or mental welfare of other slaves. Conjure and related avenues to the supernatural referred to as ‘spirit work’—Hoodoo, root working, tricking, and Voodoo—were critical worldviews offering African American slaves occult devices for coming to grips with an unfriendly and hostile environment. Although there are distinctions among these terms, they all refer to similar spiritual

³⁰ “Spirit Medium Gets Messages from the Inhabitants of the Planet Mars.” *Baltimore Sun*, July 19, 1908, 16; “Messages from Mars. How They Talk, Eat and Sail.” *Nashville American*, July 19, 1908, 7; and “Spirit Talks with Residents of Mars. New York Woman Professes to Receive Word from Planet Nearest Earth.” *Indianapolis Star*, July 26, 1908, 6. A rebuttal from astronomist and past president of the ASPR is found in James Morrow, “Planets Not Inhabited. According to Investigations of Dr. Simon Newcomb, One of the Greatest Astronomers in the World, Who Also Says That Mars Is as Cold as the North Pole and That There Is No Communication Between the Living and the Dead.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 1, 1908, B1.

³¹ John J. Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), xii.

practices.³² Conjurers, who were held in high esteem by African American slaves who believed they wielded more power than the slave masters themselves, prepared small bags containing roots from various plants, trees and cemetery soil called “gooper” dust for plantation slaves to wear around their necks for spiritual protection. These bags, called by various names such as “hand,” “toby,” “ju-ju,” “greegree bags,” and “voodoo bags,” were worn by nearly every Southern slave, young or old, male or female.³³

These manifestations of African American spiritualism are generally absent from mainstream spiritualist historiography. They have been subjected to what Margarita Simon Guillory terms a *historical compounded repression*—a “multivariate form of resistance that seeks to eliminate the expression of certain person(s)/act(s) from historical records.”³⁴ This historically compounded repression came about not only through the machinations of white spiritualists but, in the early twentieth century, from those black religious communities in Northern cities desiring to distance themselves from the *voodoo/spiritualism* practices brought to the North by Southern migrants. However, despite this suppression from white spiritualists groups and black religious communities, African American Spiritualists found other avenues of expression in the early twentieth century, particularly through the so-called storefront spiritual churches—one room churches, frequently in older

³² Yvonne P. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003), 20-21, 77; and Yvonne Chireau, “The Uses of the Supernatural: Towards a History of Black Women’s Magical Practices,” 171-188, in *A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender, and the Creation of American Protestantism* ed. Susan Jester and Lisa MacFarlane (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

³³ Elmer P. Martin and Joanne M. Martin, *Spirituality and Black Helping Tradition in Social Work* (Washington DC: National Association of Social Workers, 2002), 49; and Kameelah L. Martin, *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work, and other such Hoodoo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-2.

³⁴ Margarita Simon Guillory, “Spiritually Repressed: Exploring the Historical Repression of African American Women in Rochesterian Spiritualism,” in *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and Around the World*, vol. 3, ed. Christopher M. Moreman (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 155, 281, 284; and Margarita Simon Guillory, “Conscious Concealment: The Repression and Expression of African American Spiritualists,” 281-297, in *Histories of the Hidden God: Concealment and Revelation in Western Gnostic, Esoteric, and Mystical Traditions* ed. April D. DeConick and Grant Adamson (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2013).

or abandoned buildings, which African Americans established as they migrated to Northern urban centers. While African-American spiritualism has not been fully incorporated into the general project of modern occult studies, recent signs indicate this is beginning to change with the appearance of a new subfield called *Africana Esoteric Studies*.³⁵

Individual African Americans who are well known for their involvement in various reform causes of the nineteenth century and for whom spiritualism was either a central or marginal feature of their careers are also beginning to receive increasing historical notice. Sojourner Truth, for example, is now recognized as at least a minor figure in the Spiritualist movement, identifying with spiritualism as early as 1851 and continuing an association with spiritualist organizations until her death in 1883. Truth cultivated a lifelong friendship with Giles B. Stebbins, a Detroit spiritualist and friend of Col. John C. Bundy of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* who wrote an important commentary on the Psychological Science Congress.³⁶ New information about another prominent African American woman, Hattie E. Wilson, whose *Our Nig* (1859) is the earliest known novel written by an African American woman, has revealed her rather extensive activities as a Boston spiritualist medium.³⁷ But the work of the most important African American, Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-875), has been more fully recovered,

³⁵ Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory, and Hugh R. Page, Jr., "Introduction: Africana Esoteric Studies: Mapping a New Endeavor," 1-20, in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: "There Is a Mystery"...* ed. Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory, and Hugh R. Page, Jr. (Leiden, The Netherlands and Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015).

³⁶ Carleton Mabee and Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), 241-244; and Margaret Washington *Sojourner Truth's America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 216-218, 278-279.

³⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and R. J. Ellis, "Introduction," xiii-lxviii, in Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); and R. J. Ellis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "'Grievances at the Treatment She Received': Harriet E. Wilson's Spiritualist Career in Boston, 1868-1900," *American Literary History* 24 (Summer 2012): 234-264.

thanks to the splendid biography by John Patrick Deveney who identifies Randolph as a central figure in the transformation of spiritualism to occultism in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.³⁸

While most psychical research scholars are familiar with John Patrick Deveney, they seem unaware of the work of Patrick Arthur Polk, an anthropologist/historian who has contributed new insights into the complex cultural relationship of African Americans and spiritualism. Polk has examined a number of cases from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century in which racialized spirits, brought to life by Anglo-American mediums, evoked “imaginative constructions of blackness” with connections “to other race-inflected public discourses of the time.” More precisely, the context of raising African American spirits from the dead and the performative manner in which their presence was staged, Polk has confirmed, conformed to related cultural portrayals of Blacks associated with “storytelling and joking, minstrelsy and theatrical conventions, and nascent anthropological systems of human distinction.”³⁹ In one particular case, Polk describes a fascinating entertainment venue held at a spiritualist organizational meeting which offered a “full-blown hypnosis-fueled musical program with spiritualists in black face providing minstrel entertainment complete with banjoes, tambourines, etc.” Polk’s convincing linkage of mediumship, minstrelsy, and the portrayal of black spirits to traditions in the popular theatrical arts further reflects the racialized dimensions of American spiritualism.⁴⁰

³⁸ John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph; A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). See also the recent treatments of Randolph in Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 114-141; Joscelyn Godwin, *Upstate Cauldron: Eccentric Spiritual Movements in Early New York State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 159-167; and Lara Finley, “Paschal Beverly Randolph in the African American Community,” 37-51, in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*.

³⁹ Patrick A. Polk, “‘He Will Remember Me’: Anglo-American Spiritualists, Slavery, and the Ghosts of Miscegenation,” *Southern Quarterly* 47 (Summer 2010): 25, 34.

⁴⁰ Patrick A. Polk, “‘Who’s Dat Knocking at the Door?’ A Tragicomic Ethiopian Spirit Delineation in Three Parts,” in *Spirited Things: The Work of ‘Possession’ in Afro-Atlantic Religions* ed. Paul Christopher Johnson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 91; and Patrick Arthur Polk, “Black Folks at Home in the Spirit

Other recent scholarly work on African American occultism has focused on correcting misunderstandings of Voodoo and highlighting its close association with American spiritualism. Most popular and scholarly literature, asserts Kodi A. Roberts, views Voodoo as a somewhat despicable religion belonging exclusively to African Americans, a perception that he notes contributes to the further disparaging and negative depictions of African American fringe religion.⁴¹ The term *Voodoo* references the organized religion imported from Haiti that flourished in New Orleans from the eighteenth through the early twentieth century while *Hoodoo* characterizes the magico-religious practices of ‘workers’ serving individual clients. Instead of being a static religious form, Voodoo, as Roberts indicates, adapted to the racially diverse cultural environment found in New Orleans, drawing into its orbit both Blacks and whites who were searching for a system that could bring them power, profit, and prestige. The racial diversity found in New Orleans Voodoo in both practitioners and clients by the early twentieth century is a clear demonstration, Roberts argues, of what was originally an African American religion broadening into a more distinctly American religion.⁴² Many of the religious aspects of Voodoo were incorporated into newer churches, founded in New Orleans in 1920 by Mother Leafy Anderson (c. 1887-1927), a black

World,” 371-413, in *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* ed. Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

⁴¹ Late-nineteenth century writers typically denigrated Voodooism as baseless Negro superstition. See e.g., “The Voodoo Revival. Fetish Rites in Louisiana—Horrors of Negro Superstition.” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 17, 1870, 1; “Colored Superstition. A Strange Case of Colored Hoodooism.” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 25, 1883, 7; “Story of Hoodoo. Related by the Piney Woods Negro Who Was the Victim.” *Washington Post*, April 2, 1893, 15; “Old Southern Voodooism. Amulets, Magic Potions, Witch Hazel, Serpents, and Toads. Grisly Orgies of the Negroes.” *New York Times*, November 18, 1894, 20. “Hoodoo and Voodoo. The Superstitions That Still Prevail with the Negroes.” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 24, 1894, 23; “Voodoo. Strange Weird Magic that Holds the African in Its Spell.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 2, 1894, 19; and “Negro Superstitions. Curious and Baleful Effects of the Conjuring Hoodoo.” *Nashville American*, May 20, 1896, 8.

⁴² Kodi A. Roberts, *Voodoo and Power: The Politics of Religion in New Orleans, 1881-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015). See also Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

minister from Chicago who combined elements of Spiritualism, Pentecostalism, Catholicism, and Voodoo into what would simply be called Spiritual churches.⁴³

The Great Migration brought tens of thousands of Southern blacks to Chicago.⁴⁴ With them they brought their spiritualistic practices and conjuring traditions of the slave era and, while rejected for the most part by respectable Black churches, established their own places of worship, the spiritualist storefront church which resembled one-room church buildings found in the South. Although these congregations soon renamed themselves 'Spiritual' instead of 'Spiritualist', they nonetheless retained a belief in communication with spirits and used mediums to relay messages between their members and the spirit world.⁴⁵ The Black Spiritual movement, a combination of occult, African, Christian, and metaphysical traditions, emerged in large urban areas of early twentieth century America, most notably in Chicago, New Orleans, Detroit, New York, and Kansas City.

By the 1930s Spiritual churches in Chicago had experienced tremendous growth, numbering over fifty congregations and representing nearly eleven percent of the city's African American

⁴³ David C. Estes, "'Hoodoo? God Do': African American Women and Contested Spirituality in Spiritual Churches of New Orleans," 157-182, in *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America* ed. Elizabeth Reis (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Books, 1998). In 1913 Alethea 'Leafy' Anderson established in Chicago the Eternal Life Spiritualist Church, one of the earliest Black spiritualism churches in the North. For Mother Anderson see Yvonne Chireau, "Prophetess of the Spirits: Mother Leafy Anderson and the Black Spiritual Churches of New Orleans," 303-317, in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998); Stephen C. Wehmeyer, "Marching Bones and Invisible Indians: African American Spiritualism in New Orleans, Past and Present," *Southern Quarterly* 47 (Summer 2010): 43-60; and Stephen C. Wehmeyer, "Indian Spirits on the Rock Island Line: Chicago as 'Gate of Tradition' for African American Spiritualism in the Gulf South," paper presented at the American Academy of Religion panel, "Gateway of the Spirits: African Diaspora Religions in Chicago," 2008.

⁴⁴ James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Joe William Trotter, Jr. ed. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Carole Marks, *Farewell—We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989; and Christopher Robert Reed, "Beyond Chicago's Black Metropolis: A History of the West Side's First Century, 1837-1940," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 92 (Summer 1999): 119-149.

⁴⁵ Mary Ann Clark, "Spirit is Universal: Development of Black Spiritualist Churches," 86-101, in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*.

churches.⁴⁶ These Spiritual churches contributed to Chicago's cultural modernism when they began purchasing air time from small independent radio stations. As Davarian L. Baldwin has observed, a new gospel style of music was becoming featured in the services of Chicago's Black Spiritual churches and soon Chicagoans of all races were hearing this sound through the "ministry of singing Evangelists and Spiritualist preachers on the radio." Radio provided the medium, Baldwin contends, where marginal religious groups such as the Spiritual churches created a cultural venue reaching "more Americans of both races" than any other group utilizing any form of social communication. Through the transmission over the airwaves of "a fascinating blend of old and new, foreign and familiar sounds to a larger listening community," spiritual churches contributed to "the creation of a modern religious experience."⁴⁷

Another important feature of this religious modernism contributed by African American Spiritual Churches in Chicago and other Northern cities was the explosion of magical and occult products for spiritual and financial enhancement, which were widely marketed through both the churches and the Black newspapers. Combined with the sale of occult commercial items, Yvonne P. Chireau has shown, was "a remarkably elaborate system of gambling...known variously as the Numbers, Bolito, or Policy."⁴⁸ Emerging from Chicago in the late 1880s, the 'Numbers' soon became established across the country as a popular black-market lottery system. Playing the numbers was facilitated by consulting so-called dream books and other supernatural artifacts sold at the storefront Spiritual churches. Dream books,

⁴⁶ Arna Bontemps, "And Churches," 209-216, in *The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers* ed. Brian Dolinar (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

⁴⁷ Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 187.

⁴⁸ Yvonne P. Chireau, "Varieties of Spiritual Experience: Magic, Occultism, and Alternative Supernatural Traditions among African Americans in the Cities, 1915-1939," in *The Black Urban Community: From Dusk Till Dawn* ed. Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randolph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 197; Carolyn Morrow Long, *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001); and George McCall, "Symbiosis: The Case of Hoodoo and the Numbers Racket," 419-427, in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of African American Folklore* ed. Alan Dundes (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981).

however, were hardly the exclusive property of African American numbers players. White gamblers frequently consulted these dream books and through this exposure to them became familiar with African American language and supernatural imagery.⁴⁹ Through the sale of occult products and gambling, sanctioned by the storefront Spiritual churches, “the roles of the slave Conjuror and the southern Hoodoo Doctor were transferred to new environments” where “supernatural specialists who practiced in the cities recast their magical work as ministries.”⁵⁰

New Thought and Chicago’s Occult Commercialism

Before African American commercial occult marketing in Chicago became prevalent a number of white entrepreneurs who preceded them exploited the self-help ideals of New Thought more for financial gain than for spreading the spiritual uplift of metaphysical idealism. This emerging commercialism, underway in the mid-1890s, served to transform much of progressive occultism from the ideal of individual transformation of average citizens into psychically gifted people which would then lift the human race to a higher spiritual realm into a form of commercial hucksterism in which the promise of psychical skills would be easily obtained through home course books and study guides purchased through a proliferating array of practical occult magazines and periodicals. Gone from this newer trend of occult self-help was the arduous process of strenuous theosophical and spiritual exercises in favor of quickly-learned telepathy, clairvoyance, psychometry, etc., through pamphlets available for purchase in the advertisements of these periodicals. Cheap and easy were the new watchwords of this proliferating occult hucksterism. Only recently has this trend in occult

⁴⁹ Ann Fabian, *Card Sharps, Dream Books, and Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th-Century America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 144-146; and Harry B. Weiss, “Oneirocritica Americana: The Story of American Dream Books,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* (1944): 519-653.

⁵⁰ Chireau, “Varieties of Spiritual Experience,” 200; and Elizabeth Pérez, “Working Roots and Conjuring Traditions: Relocating Black ‘Cults and Sects’ in African-American Religious History,” 71-85, in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*.

commercialism begun to receive much attention with the finest study to date being that of John Patrick Deveney who notes that this particular variety of the early twentieth century psychical development industry has been overlooked; most historians of New Thought have focused either on the spread of the movement, the development of churches and associations devoted to its cause, or the more general self-help thrust of the movement. Instead Deveney views this hucksterism as the “more interesting (though seamier) underside” of the New Thought movement characterized by “a world of magic and occultism,...con men, crooks, cranks,...obscure journals and popular magazines with vast circulations,...bogus swamis, [and] secret societies”.⁵¹ Deveney’s take on New Thought commercialism is at variance with the position of Suzanne K. Kaufman, who views the commercialism associated with the Lourdes [France] healing shrine in a more positive light, arguing that a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the commercial has been erected by historians and that the sale of trinkets and bottles of water have been essential to the status of Lourdes as a faith and healing shrine.⁵² Deveney locates the center of New Thought commercialism in the Western part of the United States but we could more readily argue that its heart, and most certainly its beginnings, was found in Chicago and various locales in the Midwest. Six of the seven names Deveney lists as representing this new force in commercial

⁵¹ John Patrick Deveney, “Man is a Spirit Here and Now: The Two Faces of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Creation of the Magical Occult Theosophical Spiritualist New Thought Amalgam,” in *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* ed. Cathy Gutierrez (Leiden, The Netherlands and Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), 134.

⁵² Suzanne K. Kaufman, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), esp. chapter two, “Commercialized Pilgrimage and Religious Debasement”; and Ian Reader, *Pilgrimage in the Marketplace* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 16. See also Suzanne K. Kaufman, “Selling Lourdes: Pilgrimage, Tourism, and the Mass-Marketing of the Sacred in Nineteenth-Century France,” 63-88, in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America* ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Lisa M. Bitel, “Virgins for Sale,” *Journal of Women’s History* 19 (Summer 2007): 170-177; Suzanne K. Kaufman, “Our Lady of Lourdes: Faith and Commerce at a Marian Shrine,” 116-125, in *The Many Faces of Mary* ed. Diego Irazabal, Susan Ross, and Marie-Theres Wacker (London: SCM Press, 2008); Suzanne K. Kaufman, “Some Thoughts on Religion and Modernity: The Case of the Lourdes Shrine in Nineteenth-Century France,” 92-108, in *Disciplining Modernism* ed. Pamela L. Caughie (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Robert A. Scott, *Miracle Cures: Saints, Pilgrimage, and the Healing Powers of Belief* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010); and *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States* ed. Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

occultism—William Walker Atkinson, Sydney B. Flower, Sidney A. Weltmer, J.C.F. Grumbine, Ernest Loomis, News E. Wood, and Thomas Jasper Betiero—launched occult enterprises of some sort in Chicago during the late 1890s and early 1900s. Only Sidney A. Weltmer, the founder of “Weltmerism” who owned and operated a suggestive therapeutics clinic in Nevada, Missouri, operated outside of Chicago.

In 1901, Sydney Blanchard Flower (1867-c.1928), an obscure but significant magazine editor and entrepreneur, epitomized those businessmen who seized upon the occult lure of the New Thought to make an easy dollar. One newspaper observed that “Sydney Flower [is in] the business of making money ‘quick,’ [preying on] the gullibility of mankind.”⁵³ In 1901, he ambitiously launched the Psychic Club of Chicago, a “private order of cultured men and women interested in the Powers of Mind, the New Thought, and Experimental Psychology,” i.e., occultism and psychical research. Flower’s *Journal of Magnetism*, published in Chicago by his Psychic Research Company, served as the official organ of the Psychic Club. Flower established a reading room and library at the Auditorium Building,⁵⁴ with hours set aside “for healing, thought-transmission, [and] success circles” during which members, through their united thought-waves, would cast “a vast girdle of electric unity of purpose throughout this continent.”⁵⁵

⁵³ “The ‘New Thought’.” *Omaha World-Herald*, June 9, 1904, 4. Flower himself confessed, “I don’t love money.... I want money...barrels of it.” Sydney Flower, “Money-Making and Other Things,” *New Thought* 11 (June 1902), 11.

⁵⁴ The Auditorium Building, built during the years 1886-1890, was a premier showcase of Chicago’s cultural ascendancy and a splendid example of the architectural designs of Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler. Situated on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Congress Street, the multi-purpose Auditorium Building, with a theater, hotel, and offices, was the tallest structure in Chicago and the largest structure in the United States. The Auditorium, an ambitious attempt to “create an unprecedented cultural institution,” provided a fitting headquarters for the similarly ambitious Psychic Club of Chicago. Mark Clague, “The Industrial Evolution of the Arts: Chicago’s Auditorium Building (1889-) as Cultural Machine,” *Opera Quarterly* 22 (Summer-Autumn 2006), 504; and Joseph M. Siry, *The Chicago Auditorium Building: Adler and Sullivan’s Architecture and the City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ [No Title], *Journal of Magnetism* 10 (May 1901): 14. For joining the Psychic Club in 1902 Flower promised to send each member a free copy of the Kill-Fear Secret, a method, he claimed, which could be “understood and applied in five minutes,” promising that it “absolutely breaks up FEAR and all distressing emotions by means of a simple

In the November 1901 issue of the *Journal of Magnetism* Sydney Flower introduced William Walker Atkinson (1862-1932) as his new co-editor.⁵⁶ Between January and April 1902 Atkinson steered the *Journal* in new directions, informing readers of that the journal was being renamed *New Thought*, and renaming the Psychic Club of Chicago as the Psychic Club of America. He reported that since the Psychic Club was “rapidly growing” with “applications pouring in from all parts of the country,” the new name better reflected its widening scope. Atkinson boasted that he and Flower’s Psychic Club had “more members than any other organization of its kind” and that “wonderful results” in the field of experimental psychology were being reported.”⁵⁷ Members, Atkinson announced, were rapidly advancing their psychical skills, with not just a few demonstrating “wonderful powers....in thought-transference, mind-reading, psychometry, clairvoyance, etc., etc.”⁵⁸ In one advertising flyer for the Club, Atkinson indicated “We believe in the Dynamic Force of Individual Thought” and requested all members, wherever they may be, to “give up five minutes to a silent determination...at the noon hour” that they

physical exercise.” “Advertisement,” *Health* (December 31, 1902), n.p. Flower’s magazine also offered a series of Home Courses for Psychic Instruction priced at \$5.00 per course. One example of this series was *A Complete Course in the Art of Mind-Reading Divided Into Twenty Lessons* (Chicago: The Psychic Research Co., 1901)

⁵⁶ For Atkinson see Carl T. Jackson, “The New Thought Movement and the Nineteenth Century Discovery of Oriental Philosophy,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 9 (Winter 1975), 537-538; Gary L. Ward, “William Walker Atkinson,” in *Religious Leaders of America* ed. J. Gordon Melton (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1991), 21; R. Andrew White, “Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and Turn-of-the-Century Occultism on the System,” *Theatre Survey* 47 (May 2006), 82; Mark Singleton, “Suggestive Therapeutics: New Thought’s Relationship to Modern Yoga,” *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007), 80-81; and Clint Marsh, “Introduction to Swami Panchadasi’s *Clairvoyance and Occult Powers*,” v-xix, in Swami Panchadasi’s (William Walker Anderson) *Clairvoyance and Occult Powers*, ed. Clint Marsh (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2011 [1916]).

⁵⁷ William Walker Atkinson, “The Psychic Club,” *New Thought* 11 (May 1902): 13. Atkinson had come to Flower’s magazine from a similar Chicago periodical, *Suggestion*, where he had been the assistant editor to Herbert A. Parkyn, a physician specializing in psycho-therapeutics. *Suggestion* described itself as “a Popular Home Review devoted to the scientific discussion of psycho-therapy, suggestive therapeutics hypnotism, natural healing, hygiene, advanced thought, psychic research and occultism.” *Suggestion* 10 (June 1, 1903), n.p.

⁵⁸ William Walker Atkinson, “The Psychic Club,” *New Thought* 11 (June 1902), 18. New Thought doctrines and institutions, including the Psychic Research Company and the Psychic Club of America, are ridiculed in Gilbert Seldes, *The Stammering Century* (New York: The John Day Co., 1928), 348-358.

might create “one vast Battery of Thought throughout the world; a Battery that will make its influence felt in the fullness of time.”⁵⁹

Flower most likely borrowed the name “Psychic Club” from the *Metaphysical Magazine* edited by Leander Whipple and which was published in New York City.⁶⁰ He also may have gotten the idea for the mass noontime silent thought projection from another Chicago entrepreneur occultist, Ernest Loomis, who had organized the Home Silent Thought Brotherhood in October 1896 to develop occult powers “in accordance with the laws of cooperative thought.”⁶¹ Such silent thought projection, whether conducted individually or as a group effort, could have, unbeknownst to us today, affected the outcome of some of the era’s major historical events. The Home Silent Thought Brotherhood, according to one newspaper, albeit satirically, played a considerable role in bringing the Spanish-American War to a quick cessation. The paper suggested that the Brotherhood, with their twenty-five thousand “deep and powerful thinkers” simply “‘thought’ away the war.” It instructed its readers that “‘thoughts are endless” and that once “a thought wave” is launched, it travels onward ceaselessly affecting everything and everyone with which it comes in contact.” The paper seemed troubled that the Brotherhood was not bringing the full brunt of its thought waves to the solution of other pressing social concerns but

⁵⁹ “The Psychic Club of America [advertisement],” in *A Course of Instruction in the Development of Power through Psychometry* (Chicago: Psychic Research Co., 1902), iv.

⁶⁰ The *Metaphysical Magazine* featured a Department of Psychic Experiences, Psychic Club, and a Department of Healing Philosophy. The masthead for the December 1896 issue read “Devoted to Occult, Philosophic, and Scientific Research [of] Mental Healing and Psychic Phenomena.”

⁶¹ Ernest Loomis, *Six Essays on the Subject Methods of Self-Help; Showing How to Use the Thought Faculties and Occult Powers of Mind* (Chicago: Ernest Loomis & Co., 1898), 16, 105; and Ernest Loomis, *Occult Science Library; Seven Essays on the Subject of Practical Occultism* (New York: The Inwood School of Philosophy, 1899), 10, 21. See also Melvin L. Draper, “Ernest Loomis and Occult Force in Late-Nineteenth-Century Chicago,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association, Albuquerque, NM, November 30, 2014. Loomis was the editor of *Occult Science Library*, a periodical published in Chicago which ran from 1896 to 1900.

though they were uncertain as to “just how effective the thoughts of Chicago occultists have been in bringing the war to a close there is not a shadow of doubt that they have worked wonders.”⁶²

Psychical Euthenics, Moral Environmentalism, and Progressive Occultism: A Shared Vision of Spiritual Evolutionary Thought

I have suggested in this dissertation that occultism was an important aspect of the overall makeup of the individuals who pursued psychical science both in Chicago and at the Psychical Science Congress. We can see this clearly, for example, in the professional lives of Elliott Coues, Frances Willard, and John C. Bundy. Admittedly, their involvement in occultism varied considerably both in time and intensity, as all had ongoing professional concerns requiring the bulk of their attention—Coues to natural science, Willard to the WCTU, and Bundy to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. Each of these individuals, along with the scores of men and women drawn to spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research in Chicago and across the nation incorporated occultism into their worldview and efforts at reform. If occultism was not always the defining feature of these leading cultural figures, it nonetheless figured heavily in their understanding of subjectivity in a modern urbanized world. In a similar fashion, occultism itself shared considerable cultural space with reform undertakings voicing similar visions of individual and social progress for the present as well as the future. In other words, across the spectrum of Progressive Era reform, a shared understanding about what was necessary to achieve significant social improvement and personal uplift can be found in the approaches and goals of various social movements. For example, four keywords identified by historians as critical in comprehending the sweep of cultural progressivism—*spirituality, evolution, environment, and efficiency*—characterize the relationship of occultism with a number of related progressive undertakings. At first glance psychical

⁶² “The Real Heroes,” *Anaconda [MT] Standard*, September 14, 1898, 6. One outgrowth of Loomis’s organizing efforts was the Chicago Heart-Culture Society that met weekly for “the study and discussion of love,” which members believed was the most important principle in all varieties of occultism. Members hoped to make Chicago a great and important “love center” in the near future. “Chicago’s Heart Culture Society Seeks to Make the City ‘The Center of Love’.” *Chicago Tribune*, April 7, 1901, 45.

science would appear to have little in common with eugenics, ecology, the ‘fresh air’ movement, conservation, or the city beautiful movement—all significant progressive reforms which, along with spiritualism and theosophy, embraced the four keywords which defined much of progressivism evident from the late 1880s through the First World War.

In a seminal article speculating on how historians should position occultism as an enterprise and body of knowledges and practices in modernity, Corinna Treitel pointedly asked “Where does the occult fit?” Questioning its traditional placement as a discursive formation residing in contested spaces between science and religion, Treitel called for “new perspectives” in appreciating how occultism works in modern cultures, insights that would not only place occultism in a more positive light, but account for its seemingly pervasive presence in places we would not expect.⁶³ One unexpected place that the “radical optimists” of occultism were drawn to was the progressive scheme of eugenics which advocated a program of bio-determinism calling for scientific human breeding based on the new sciences of heredity and genetics in order to optimize a population of healthy individuals strong in mind and body while controlling the reproduction of the lesser fit.⁶⁴ Eugenics was one of a number of secular movements drawing on evolutionary thought that had a significant impact on social policy in the United States throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Other persons attracted to the

⁶³ Corinna Treitel, “What the Occult Reveals,” *Modern Intellectual History* 6 (November 2009), 612. Treitel notes how occultism penetrates dietary considerations and the cultivation of certain organic foods.

⁶⁴ Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 17; and Christine Ferguson, “Eugenics and the Afterlife: Lombroso, Doyle, and Spiritualist Purification of the Race,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 12 (Spring 2007): 64-85.

⁶⁵ There is an extensive literature on eugenics in America. See e.g. Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968); Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963); Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Knopf, 1985); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and*

movements associated with progressive occultism, however, including a great number of those in Chicago attending the Psychical Science Congress, were more sympathetically inclined to identify environmental influences instead of biological determinism as the means for uplifting humanity and improving the overall condition of the human “stock.” These individuals chose euthenics, a science of environmental determinism, over eugenics, as the most effective way for achieving progress, if not ultimate perfection, for humanity both in the immediate present as well as the near future. Ellen Swallow Richards, a nutritional scientist and the first woman to serve on the faculty at MIT, initially used the term ‘euthenics’ in 1905 calling it rather vaguely as the “science of *better* living.” Five years later she refined the term by defining euthenics as the “betterment of living conditions, through conscious endeavor, for the purpose of securing *efficient* [my italics] human beings.” She cited in particular the environment of the home as determining the health, character, and interactive capacities of family members as well as their relationship to the outside community. Richards characterized the influences of the home environment and the relations it generated as “partly physical and material, partly ethical and *psychical* [my italics].” For Richards personal evolution came “from within,” with progress and “the belief in better things” resulting from impressions made upon individual minds.⁶⁶

What is significant here is the introduction by Richards of the term *psychical* into the discursive discussion of a science of environmental euthenics. While admittedly not using the term in the exact

the American Eugenics Movement (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Alister E. McGrath, “Darwinism,” 681-696, in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* ed. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Wendy Kline, “Eugenics in the United States,” 511-522, in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Eugenics* ed. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Christine Neejer, “The American Eugenics Movement,” 345-360, in *A Companion to the History of American Science* ed. Georgina M. Montgomery and Mark A. Largent (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2016); and Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁶⁶ Ellen H. Richards, *The Cost of Shelter* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1905), 12; and Ellen H. Richards, *Euthenics, The Science of Controllable Environment; A Plea for Better Living Conditions As a First Step Toward Higher Human Efficiency* (Boston: Whitcomb and Barrows, 1910), vii, 15, 18, and 20. The most recent full-length biography of Richards is Pamela Curtis Swallow, *The Remarkable Life and Career of Ellen Swallow Richards: Pioneer in Science and Technology* (Hoboken, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 2014).

sense that spiritualists, theosophists, and psychical researchers did as embracing an extraordinary range of mental and supernatural phenomena, the use of the word ‘psychical’ nonetheless points to the manner by which vocabulary and ideas central to occultism became appropriated into the language and conceptual formulations of non-occultists. For once psychical (i.e., mental, spiritual, and moral) considerations become incorporated into more general usage and acceptance, the door is opened to expanding the conception of ‘normal’ mental functions to the range of ‘exceptional mental states’ described by William James and investigated by the Society for Psychical Research. Never mind that these exceptional mental states were disputed and denied by segments of the scientific community and general public—they have now become a possibility within the normative constitution of mental development and ability. For in a euthenic utopia, just how far advanced were ‘minds’ supposed to evolve? If mental capacities, as developed through euthenic influence, were to increase at levels beyond generally accepted abilities and functions of the mind, then who is the occultist now? At that point, where the language and aspirations of secular and occult spokespersons are intertwined, it becomes difficult to separate occult from non-occult positions and to discriminate spiritual and theosophical science from a science such as *psychical eutherics*. This becomes one important way, then, in which the occult ‘fits’ in modern society—through the blending of its own particular spiritual-philosophical perspectives with more generalized secular movements. Clearly, as two historians have recently suggested, occultism is “central for understanding all types of discursive networks in the Victorian era and beyond.”⁶⁷

Ellen Richards’ view of euthenic evolution bears a close resemblance to the spiritual evolution portrayed by spiritualists and theosophists. Henry Steele Olcott, for example, explained the theosophical position of individual evolution by establishing within psychical science a “Darwinian

⁶⁷ Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, “Introduction,” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* ed. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 5.

psychology,” that would enable the evolution of both body and soul “to the finer as well as to the grosser elements which constitute the human being.”⁶⁸ Lilian Whiting, the public philosopher of spiritualism and whose paper on “That Which Is To Come” was read at Chicago’s Psychological Congress, wrote frequently of a spiritual world inhabited with “beings like ourselves” but who were in a “higher state of evolution.” For Whiting, it was essential that man’s spiritual nature become more fully developed, a task she believed fell squarely upon psychical science, a science that she believed had already discovered the “unseen realm” in which these spiritual beings resided. Moreover, as physics had confirmed the presence of an atmospheric ethereal plane, psychical science had demonstrated that the ether was in fact a spiritual atmosphere wherein the psychical body could survive and flourish. It became imperative, in Whiting’s view, that to develop spiritually, mankind must learn to survive and move about in the ethereal atmosphere, which she contended was an ever-present environment similar to the physical atmosphere in which humans breathed and lived. The ethereal environment would thereby further the spiritual evolution of mankind through development of the psychical condition, pushing mankind to the next higher phases of life.⁶⁹ The biologist and naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), who also had a paper on spiritualism read at the Chicago Psychological Congress, believed that new psychical qualities would arise from the process of evolution, gainful mental attributes that he ascribed to supernatural agency. In *World of Life* (1911) Wallace argued that spiritual influences

⁶⁸ Henry S. Olcott, *A Buddhist Catechism, According to the Canon of the Southern Church* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1887), 35. See also Elliott B. Gose, Jr., “Psychic Evolution: Darwin and Initiation in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 18 (December 1963): 261-272; *Spiritual Evolution; Articles by H.P. Blavatsky* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Co., n.d.); Florence Huntley, *Harmonics of Evolution: The Philosophy of Individual Life, Based Upon Natural Science, as Taught by Modern Masters of the Law* 4th ed. Chicago: Indo-American Book, Co. 1906 {1897}); [Anon.] *The Religion of the Spiritual Evolution of Man* (Chicago, E. A. Rogers, 1910); Lara Vetter, “Theories of Spiritual Evolution, Christian Science, and the ‘Cosmopolitan Jew’: Mina Loy and American Identity.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 31 (Fall 2007): 47-63.

⁶⁹ Lilian Whiting, *The World Beautiful. Third Series* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1898), 25, passim.; Lilian Whiting, *From Dream to Vision of Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1906), 44, 99-100; and Lilian Whiting, *The Life Radiant* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1903), 173.

underscored human evolution and provided the guiding force for the creative powers of the mind, including intelligence and morality.⁷⁰

Progressives, as historians have shown, dreamed of transforming the individual through various reforms classified under the broad rubric of euthenic or ecological environmentalism: conservation; parking (a term used by urban planners referring to the planning and construction of parks); the fresh air movement; civic beautification; and other reforms incorporating *moral environmentalism* as means to alter the urban landscape and uplift the psychological condition of its inhabitants. Occult notions and ideas inevitably crept into these reformatory undertakings as well, blending or merging with postmillennial hopes to a degree in which secular spirituality could not be distinguished from spiritualism proper. Progressive occultism competed for turf not just with science and religion but with more secular reform movements for 'soul regeneration', personal uplift, and human progress. Domains such as soul evolution were hardly the exclusive concern of occultists, but instead reflected a shared cultural philosophy with individuals and groups who also identified with the evolutionary tenets of 'advanced' progressivism. Where occult notions were not always apparent in the intellectual formations of these more secular progressives, a deep concern with spirituality and spiritual values was generally in evidence.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Alfred Russel Wallace, *The World of Life; A Manifestation of Creative Power, Directive Mind and Ultimate Purpose* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1911). For discussions of Russel's notions on spiritual evolution, see Charles H. Smith, "Wallace, Spiritualism, and Beyond: 'Change,' or 'No Change?'" 391-423, in *Natural Selection and Beyond: The Intellectual Legacy of Alfred Russel Wallace* ed. Charles H. Smith and George Beccaloni (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Flannery, "Introduction: Shedding Light on Darwin's Shadow: Alfred Russel Wallace and Intelligent Evolution," 1-57, in *Alfred Russel Wallace's Theory of Intelligent Evolution; How Wallace's 'World of Life' Challenged Darwinism* ed. Michael A. Flannery (Riesel, TX: Erasmus Press, 2008); Howard Jones, "The Vision of Alfred Russel Wallace," *Journal for Spiritual and Consciousness Studies* 38 (May 2015): 17-24; and Michael A. Flannery, "Alfred Russel Wallace, Nature's Prophet: From Natural Selection to Natural Theology," 51-70, in *Naturalists, Explorers and Field Scientists in South-East Asia and Australasia* ed. Indraneil Das and Andrew Alek Tuen (Cham: Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2016).

⁷¹ Spirituality refers to one's sense "meaning, purpose, and connection with self, others, the universe, and ultimate reality, however one understands it, and which may or may not be expressed through religious forms or

The urban geographer Phillip Gordon Mackintosh has written extensively on the secular semi-occult spirituality which underwrote all efforts of *moral environmentalism*, a “conviction that beautiful and orderly environments morally influenced human behaviour and thought, and encouraged social uplift.” Moral environmentalism, according to Mackintosh, “channeled ‘higher life,’ and would lift urban masses to this higher life “through a type of moral osmosis,” a process that would appear to be an appropriation of quasi-occult practices by city planners especially as city planning was “as much about improving the social and psychic lives of people” as it was about designing cities.⁷² In addition, the fresh air movement, which expressed a strong Transcendentalist element of mystical and occult overtones, postulated that Nature would psychically benefit the children of the urban poor.⁷³ Indeed, from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Gifford Pinchot and John Muir, occultism figured in the making of modern ecological environmentalism. Emerson, for example, wrote in his essay *On Nature* (1849) that “particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts” and that “Nature is a symbol of spirit.”⁷⁴ Likewise, both

institutions.” Michael J. Sheridan, “Predicting the Use of Spiritually-Derived Interventions in Social Work Practice: A Survey of Practitioners,” *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work* 23.4 (2004), 10.

⁷² Phillip Gordon Mackintosh, “‘The Development of Higher Urban Life’ and the Geographic Imagination: Beauty, Art, and Moral Environmentalism in Toronto, 1900-1920,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 31 (October 2005): 689, 690, 713; and Felix Driver, “Moral Geographies: Social Science and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 13.3 (1988): 275-287. On ‘moral environmentalism’, see also Bonj Szczygiel, “‘City Beautiful’ Revisited: An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Civic Improvement Efforts,” *Journal of Urban History* 29 (December 2003): 107-132; William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and Joseph Stanhope Ciadella, “A Landscape of Ruin and Repair: Parks, Potatoes, and Detroit’s Environmental Past, 1879-1900,” *Michigan Historical Review* 40 (Spring 2014): 49-72.

⁷³ Phillip Gordon Mackintosh and Richard Anderson, “The *Toronto Star* Fresh Air Fund: Transcendental Rescue in a Modern City, 1900-1915,” *Geographical Review* 99 (October 2009): 539-562; and Phillip Gordon Mackintosh, “The ‘Occult Relation between Man and the Vegetable’: Transcendentalism, Immigrants, and Park Planning in Toronto, c. 1900,” 85-106, in *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada* ed. Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi (Vancouver and Toronto: The University of British Columbia Press, 2011). On the transcendentalist revival culminating in the 1890s and its interaction with occultism, see Tom Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel: Studies in English Literary Criticism and Ideas, 1880-1920* (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1973), 10 ff.; and Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982), 7.

⁷⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *On Nature* (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1849), 23. For Emerson’s views on occult relationships in nature, see Eugene C. Hargrove, “The Historical Foundations of American Environmental

Pinchot and Muir, pivotal figures in the Progressive Era conservation movement, incorporated strong spiritual values into their worldview of ecology and the environment, and were, for a time, quite invested in spiritualism.⁷⁵ Christine Oravec, a historian of the environmental movement, has concluded that conservation became viewed so extensively as a secular religion that it was just “assumed that the true understanding of the principles of conservation came about through spiritual revelation.” Accordingly, she noted, the conservation movement, a “forceful and pragmatic program for public action” was steeped in evolutionary thought grounded in a “barely secularized spiritualism.”⁷⁶

In chapter one I briefly referred to the notion of postmillennialism in which Christ’s return is prefigured and prepared by mankind’s efforts at bringing about a perfected God’s Kingdom on Earth. This end-of-days religiosity merged with doctrines of evolution and found its way into a number of progressive reforms interweaving psychical eugenics and moral environmentalism into programs giving

Attitudes,” in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* ed. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 42; Dewey W. Hall, *Romantic Naturalists, Early Environmentalists; An Ecocritical Study, 1789-1912* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014); Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015); and Kaitlin Mondello, “‘Perpetual Analogies’ and ‘Occult Harmonies’: Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Ecological Selves,” 105-122, in *Romantic Ecocriticism: Origins and Legacies* ed. Dewey W. Hall (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

⁷⁵ On Gifford Pinchot and spiritualism, see Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington and London: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 2001), 192-195; and James G. Bradley, “The Mystery of Gifford Pinchot and Laura Houghteling,” *Pennsylvania History* 66 (Spring 1999): 199-214. For John Muir see Dennis Williams, “John Muir, Christian Mysticism, and the Spiritual Value of Nature,” 82-100, in *John Muir: Life and Work* ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); and *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, selected with an introduction by Tim Flinders (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

⁷⁶ Christine Oravec, “Science, Public Policy, and the ‘Spirit of the People’: The Rhetoric of Progressive Conservation,” in *Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era* ed. J. Michael Hogan (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 92, 105. See also Kevin C. Armitage, “‘The Science-Spirit in a Democracy’: Liberty Hyde Bailey, Nature Study, and the Democratic Impulse of Progressive Conservation,” 89-116, in *Natural Protest: Essays on the History of American Environmentalism* ed. Michael Egan and Jeff Crane (New York and London: Routledge, 2009); Leslie E. Sponsel, *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012); Steven Chase, *Nature as Spiritual Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011); Carolyn Merchant, “Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement: 1900-1916,” *Environmental Review* 8 (Spring 1984), 73-74; and Susan Rimby, *Mira Lloyd Dock and the Progressive Era Conservation Movement* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012). For Spiritualists’ views of Nature, see William D. Moore, “‘To Hold Communion with Nature and the Spirit-World’: New England’s Spiritualist Camp Meetings, 1865-1910,” 230-248, in *Exploring Everyday Landscapes* ed. Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

hope and expectation to the postmillennial utopia that would be created by humankind itself. As Phillip G. Mackintosh recently noted, postmillennialism “anchored much urban and social reform between 1880 and 1920.”⁷⁷ This spiritualized urban geography along with the elevation of a spiritually developed populace roaming the ethereal plane would lift people, in both the secular and occult vision, to the ‘higher life’ of a postmillennial social utopia. This, then, was precisely the kind progressive culture that psychical science, in tandem with moral environmentalism, expected to achieve in the near future—a postmillennially perfected society in which urban dwellers would be, for the secularists, mentally and morally uplifted and for the occultists, spiritually advanced and psychically talented. “We are on the verge of a new era” was language typically seen both in the rhetoric of occultists and secularists alike. Sharing more than language, these groups also sought to create more efficient human beings, a goal openly expressed in the rapidly emergent social sciences of the early twentieth century and which psychical science hoped, but ultimately failed, to become.

The Social Sciences of Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Psychical Research: The Search for Practical Utility in Psychical Science

Psychical science has been approached in its historiography largely through its relationship to the physical sciences, which it is generally said it sought to emulate, particularly with regards to physics and instruments of measurement and calibration. But as the previous section suggested, occultism had an apparently strong kinship to particular social movements and environmental sciences which characterized the progressive spirit from the end of the nineteenth century to the years immediately preceding the First World War. In their modes of investigation and data-gathering techniques, spiritualism and psychical research more closely mirrored the kind of evidence-gathering found in

⁷⁷ Phillip Gordon Mackintosh and Forsberg, Clyde R., Jr. “‘Co-Agent of the Millennium’: City Planning and Christian Eschatology in the North American City, 1890-1920.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103 (May 2013), 729; and *Mapping the End Times: American Evangelical Geopolitics and Apocalyptic Visions* ed. J. Dittmer and T. Sturm (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010).

anthropology, geography, sociology, and psychology. As Roger Luckhurst has indicated, the contents of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* as well as its signatory publication in 1886, *Phantasms of the Living*, consistently presented an enormous quantity of material gathered and sifted from countless letters and postcards sent to members of the SPR by the reading public.⁷⁸ Bernadette M. Baker is perhaps the foremost scholar today who has theorized the relationship of psychical research to the social sciences, particularly in the manner in which it shared that particular perspective of integrating religion, philosophy, and science, an expressive approach Baker suggests can be found across the social sciences. She further believes that questions over the nature of evidence in psychical research were not as central to its marginalization from other social sciences as was its elevation of “the mystical” from a subordinate status of non-Western regionalism and providing it with a certain fixed degree of stability not granted by other social sciences.⁷⁹

Debates over subjects that encompassed the realm of the invisible were central, Baker suggests, to the formation of the new late-nineteenth century social science disciplines of abnormal psychology, anthropology, psychotherapy, sociology, and psychical research. Psychical science, both in its pre-publicity announcements and its span of subjects covered at the 1893 Congress in Chicago, ambitiously attempted to encompass *all* of these social sciences, granting extensive cultural latitude to spiritualism, which it designated as the central controlling social science in bringing all the other social sciences under one discursive umbrella. In this sense, psychical science, as conceived by Elliott Coues and a number of the arrangement committee members, would become a sort of super-social science through which the evidence brought forth from spiritualism and psychical research would provide theoretical

⁷⁸ Roger Luckhurst, “Knowledge, Belief and the Supernatural at the Imperial Margin,” in *The Victorian Supernatural* ed. Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 197.

⁷⁹ Bernadette M. Baker, “Rationality, Governmentality, Natio(norm)ality? Shaping Social Science, Scientific Objects, and the Invisible,” *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 28.1 (2012), 27-28; and Bernadette M. Baker, “Governing the Invisible: Psychical Science and Conditions of Proof,” 303-340, in *Governmentality Studies in Education* ed. Michael A. Peters, et. al. (Rotterdam: The Netherlands, Sense Publishers, 2009).

and programmatic guideposts for these related social sciences. Lilian Whiting, for example, appeared as though she was calling for a sociology, history, and anthropology of the spirit world when she suggested that the inhabitants of the spiritual world located in the ethereal atmosphere had “homes, temples of worship, libraries, halls for music, for lectures,” and that what was now required of spiritualism here on earth was to “apprehend their nature, their methods of life, [and] the conditions that form their environment.”⁸⁰ Expectations that psychical science would establish itself as a recognized social science lived on in the hopes of a number of Chicago occultists for some years but they would soon watch helplessly as other social sciences prospered in hospitable academic settings while psychical research lost ground in this competition and spiritualism failed to attain serious, sustained institutional or intellectual respectability.

William James, in his last published account on psychical research, pointedly emphasized the problematic nature of so-called ‘scientific’ evidence and its unreliability as being ‘factual’ even when compared to the ‘evidence’ brought forth by spiritualism. Believing “deliberate fraud and falsehood” to be “grossly superficial” in determining the veracity of evidence, James pointed out that scientists often engaged in in deceit at public lectures, rather than let experiments fail. He related one particular occasion, when as a medical student at Harvard, he himself “cheated shamelessly.” As an assistant to Professor Newell Martin at a public lecture held in Sanders Theater demonstrating the physiology and nervous activity of a turtle’s heart, James was responsible for keeping the heart’s movements visible on a stereoscopic screen viewed by the audience as the lecturer described what was occurring on the screen. James became horrified when the turtle’s heart suddenly expired and in a state of panic manipulated the dead organ manually with his lab utensils in a manner making it appear on the screen as though it was the actual movement of a live turtle’s heart. James’ actions prevented the experiment from failing and kept the ‘true’ facts apparent for the audience’s proper understanding and the integrity

⁸⁰ Whiting, *The World Beautiful. Third Series*, 25, 215.

of the lecturer intact. But just the memory of having to resort to cheating, James wrote, caused him to “feel charitable towards all mediums who make phenomena come in one way when they won’t come easily in another.”⁸¹

If indeed everyone has ‘cheated’ at some point in life, as James seems to suggest, then the charge leveled against mediums for doing so when phenomena won’t appear on their own, loses some of its force, especially if, as David Walker has suggested, the public attended séances fully expecting that fraud and “possibly authentic phenomena,” would be included in the performance. Walker views spiritualism as a Barnumesque type of entertainment full of “skepticism and operational intrigue” in which spiritualists appeared to be inviting the public to decide for themselves what they were seeing and hearing. He suggests that Barnum had something more in mind than mere trickery or fraud when using the term *humbug*, a notion that combines publicity and showmanship to generate interest in a performance where even suspicious practices do not necessarily delegitimize a potentially valid phenomena or credible intellectual position.⁸² Components of questionable spiritualist practices, acting in combination with commercial promotion and advertising and the spectacle and entertainment of the

⁸¹ William James, *Memories and Studies* (New York and London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 179-183. Chapter Eight, “Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher,” 173- 206 was originally published under the title “Confidences of a Psychical Researcher,” in *American Magazine* for October 1909. On the problematic nature of evidence in spiritualism, see Michael Tymn, “Filtering Out the Bosh,” *Journal for Spiritual and Consciousness Studies* 38 (May 2015): 1-6; Peter Lamont, “The Making of Extraordinary Psychological Phenomena,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 48 (Winter 2012): 1-15; Peter Lamont, “Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence,” *Historical Journal* 47 (December 2004): 897-920; Fernando Blanco, Itxaso Barberia, and Helena Matute, “Individuals Who Believe in the Paranormal Expose Themselves to Biased Information and Develop More Causal Illusions than Nonbelievers in the Laboratory,” *PLoS One* 10 (July 15, 2015): 1-16; Richard Wiseman, Emma Greening, and Matthew Smith, “Belief in the Paranormal and Suggestion in the Séance Room,” *British Journal of Psychology* 94 (August 2003): 285-297; *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time* ed. Michael Shermer (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002); Susan Blackmore, “Evidence for Paranormal Phenomena Has Not Been Found,” 32-40, in *Paranormal Phenomena* ed. Karen Miller (Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2008); and Paul S. MacDonald, “The Absurdity of the Paranormal,” *Cogito* 11 (April 1997): 33-38.

⁸² David Walker, “The Humbug in American Religion: Ritual Theories of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism,” *Religion in American Culture* 23 (Winter 2013): 30-74, esp. 31-39.

séance setting, provides an important framework for understanding spiritualism's appeal among the general populace.

What was at stake for occultism and psychical research, even more than demonstrating to the public the genuineness of their phenomena and the truth of their spiritual philosophy, was to provide useful psychological or technical applications from their occult demonstrations. In other words, the question was whether 'discoveries' and claims of extra-sensory psychical powers and astral travel to the spiritual kingdoms found in the ether were of any further utility to the public. What technical developments, machinery, or physical apparatus could be appropriated from occultism to 'something' that could be mass-produced, widely disseminated, and utilized by the public in a rapidly developing consumer society in which new products, adapted from discoveries or innovations in science, were actually changing the way people lived their lives? How exactly were people supposed to dwell on the ethereal plane and what were the practical benefits such lives in the ether bring to people on earth? Since progressive occultism was essentially a spiritual philosophy and social science of the invisible, the answer was that little if anything tangible or useful would be derived from occult studies and psychical research which would benefit large numbers of the population.

What was at stake for opponents of occultism was the prevention of the heavily feminized domains of spiritualism and theosophy from impinging on male authority in religion and science. Even more troubling was the spilling over into science and religion of a feminine spiritually-intuitive manner of knowledge formation tied to an Eastern (Oriental) mysticism that would undermine a Scripturally-informed Protestantism and undercut Western scientific reasoning and the prevalent materialism that served as its foundation. But such encroachments of feminine thinking never materialized as spiritualism, theosophy, and psychical research were effectively held at bay—their marginalized status to dominant conventional intellectual structures always a potential threat but ultimately unable to stand

alongside in any kind of equal status with prevailing systems of thought reigning supreme in conventional science and religion.⁸³

In the end psychical science floundered on the shoals of improbability and impracticality. It did not or could not develop technology or mental apparatus applicable to improvement of human life. Worse, psychical science, as portrayed at the Chicago Congress, was a formative science in search of coherence. As the ranging list of topics and subject matter at the Psychical Science Congress indicates, there was no coherent, organized, and stable body of potential knowledge which clearly defined psychical science. There was nothing solid or specific for those in Chicago to wrap their heads or hands around. Proponents grabbed at anything ‘wild’, unusual, provocative, or promising—almost in a feverish hope that whatever new knowledge they could ‘establish’ would finally ground ‘psychics’ as an appropriate and ‘normal’ science and thereby gain the public and professional acceptance they so desperately desired.

Yet, psychical science served, as Bernadette Baker has suggested, the important role of helping to “organize the domains of different disciplines.”⁸⁴ I indicated in the previous section that the term *psychical* spread from its occult usage to reform movements such as euthenics, city beautification, and moral environmentalism. A semi-occult notion of *psychics* also instructs the formation of various social science disciplines. While Frances Willard and Lilian Whiting were unable to successfully introduce

⁸³ However, that may not be an accurate assessment of the situation today. For example Marcy Morse has suggested that intuition has become “more publically acceptable as a scientific tool” as female scientists have an increased presence in the scientific community. Marcy Morse, *Women Changing Science: Voices from a Field in Transition* (New York: Insight Books, 1995), 93. On feminine patterns of knowledge formation, see Mary Field Belenky, et. al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986); and *Knowledge, Difference, and Power: Essays Inspired by Women’s Ways of Knowing* ed. Nancy Rule Goldberger, et. al. (New York: Basic Books, 1996). For the subordinate position of women in science in the period under discussion here see Margaret W. Rossiter, “‘Women’s Work’ in Science, 1880-1910,” *Isis* 71 (September 1980): 381-398. The role of women in the periodic revivals of spiritualism is discussed in Christopher P. Scheitle, *Bringing Out the Dead: Gender and Historical Cycles of Spiritualism.* *Omega* 50.3 (2004-2005): 237-253.

⁸⁴ Bernadette M. Baker, *William James, Sciences of Mind, and Anti-Imperial Discourse* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 257.

psychical research or ethereal spiritualism into that favorite target of progressive reformers—the home—Ellen Swallow Richards did successfully introduce a system of psychical euthenics into the home and dynamics of family life that became known as home economics.⁸⁵ If the “white feminized advanced guard” of progressive evolutionary occultism forming around such luminaries as Willard and Whiting failed to develop a social science of *home psychics*, Richards organized her own advanced white feminine guard that successfully created a social science of psychical euthenics that enjoyed great success in the twentieth century.⁸⁶ Home economics entered the home where occult studies could not; it incorporated its own psychical perspectives to achieve greater home efficiency and personal uplift along with introducing practical home management skills that eased the burden of housewives and promoted a positive spiritual atmosphere for children’s psychological and moral development.⁸⁷ Furthermore, home economics did not threaten male professional preserves or bring in threatening metaphysical notions of the Orient that disturbed existing scientific and religious norms.

⁸⁵ On the formation of home economics and its early years, see Emma Weigley, “It Might Have Been Euthenics: The Lake Placid Conferences and the Home Economics Movement,” *American Quarterly* (January 1974): 79-96; Barbara Richardson, “Advocate for *Oekology*, Euthenics and Women’s Leadership in Using Science to Control the Environment,” *Michigan Sociological Review* 14 (Fall 2000): 94-114; Rima D. Apple and Joyce Coleman, “‘As Members of the Social Whole’: A History of Social Reform as a Focus of Home Economics, 1895-1940,” *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 32 (December 2003): 104-126; Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and Yvonne S. Gentzler, “Home Economics: Ever Timely and Forever Complex,” *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 92 (Summer 2012): 4-7.

⁸⁶ The designation “white feminized advanced guard” is attributed to Richard W. Burkhardt, Jr., historian of science, who used the phrase at a pre-defense meeting, held at the Department of History of the University of Illinois—Urbana-Champaign, September 9, 2016. Ellen Richards “envisioned a vanguard of scientifically trained women...who would act as social engineers....[in] a new era which promised women a much more active role in the shaping of society.” Sara Stage, “Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement,” in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 27; and Sharon Y. Nickols and Billie J. Collier, “Knowledge, Mission, Practice: The Enduring Legacy of Home Economics,” 11-35, in *Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times* ed. Sharon Y. Nickols and Gwen Kay (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).

⁸⁷ Spiritualists such as Lilian Whiting shared Richards’s goal of greater efficiency in people’s lives, picturing the efficient person as “one whose spiritual powers controlled the flow of events in an individuals life.” Subsequently, as humanity evolved to higher spiritual levels, efficiency would increase as well. Lilian Whiting, *The World Beautiful* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897 [1894], 175-176; Lilian Whiting, *The Adventure Beautiful* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1917), 54; and Lilian Whiting, *They Who Understand* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1919), 44, 138.

Home economics, then, a secular social science of physical and psychical euthenics, and in the broadest sense a mental science for the moral and spiritual improvement of the home, identified home and family as “the most significant sites for development of spiritual ideals;” moreover, spirituality was regarded as the “highest ideal” of home economics.⁸⁸ Homes were portrayed as being enveloped with a psychic atmosphere which revealed “the mental and moral stock” of its inhabitants. The study of this psychic atmosphere and its furtherance in infusing spirituality into the home and its environs constituted the psychical euthenics which formed such a large feature of the home economics mission. Furthermore, ordinary household items such as books and objects of art and beauty were perceived in some quarters as reflecting the “disembodied spirits of the dead and living clad in typographical vestments,” thus introducing a system of psychometrics into the psychical perspectives of home economics.⁸⁹

Some of the early pioneers of home economics were disenchanted with the name adopted for this new social science of home and human ecology. For example, Wilbur O. Atwater of the Department of Agriculture’s Office of Experimental Stations objected to the term ‘home economics’, calling for the discipline to be called simply “home science” as the word *economics* seemed too materialistic and lacked a proper appreciation of the workings of the soul, “the most important element of homemaking.”⁹⁰ A few years later, at a subsequent Lake Placid Conference, another speaker called for

⁸⁸ Jay Deagon and Donna Pendergast, “Historical Overview of Spiritual Discourses in Home Economics: From Big History to the Late Twentieth Century,” *International Journal of Home Economics* 8.1 (2015), 33; Sue McGregor and Nancy Chesworth, “Positioning Human Spirituality in Home Economics,” *Journal of the Home Economics Institute of Australia* 12.3 (2005): 27-44; and Jay Deagon and Donna Pendergast, “A Framework for Investigating Spiritual Health and Wellbeing in Home Economics,” *International Journal of Home Economics* 5.1 (2012): 3-17.

⁸⁹ Ellen Burns Sherman, “The Psychic Atmosphere of Homes,” *Ideal Review* 12 (May 1900), 115.

⁹⁰ Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics, *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference, September 16-20, 1902* (Lake Placid, New York, 1902), 84. One recent work which echoes the parallel positioning of home and soul is Roger Kennedy, *The Psychic Home: Psychoanalysis, Consciousness and the Human Soul* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014). A similar view is found Satenig S. St. Marie, *Homes Are for People* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973); Anthony Lawlor, *A Home for the Soul; A Guide for Dwelling with Spirit and Imagination* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1997); and Peter Vitale, *The Divine Home: Living with Spiritual Objects* (New York: Clarkson

the expansion of home economics by incorporating even more of “the psychic in our science of the home” noting that spirituality factored mightily in “the fine art of family living.”⁹¹ Permeations of the psychical, as they carried their occult baggage across lines of disciplinary formation, perpetuated certain ideas which had occupied a central position for spiritualists, theosophists, and a great number of investigators in psychical research. In this manner, then, elements of psychical science survived as newer social sciences incorporated some of its crucial perspectives regarding the role of spirituality and psychical euthenics in bringing about individual uplift and social progress. If spiritualism and psychical research failed in the attempt to ‘prove’ man’s immortality, the idea of the soul’s immortality in many modern social sciences has persisted down to the present day.

Back to the Beginning: William T. Stead, *Immortalism*, and Chicago’s Occult Mystique

I began this study with a synopsis of William T. Stead’s stay in Chicago from the end of October 1893 through March 1894 and the thriving occult environment he found throughout the city, particularly the proclivity of its leading citizens—clergy, educators, lawyers, reformers, editors, physicians, and business leaders—to explore psychical phenomena. I will close these pages by briefly: 1) returning to the spiritualism-centered public occultism that Stead found in Chicago and promoted through his editorship of *Borderland* and the *Review of Reviews* throughout the 1890s; 2) introducing the doctrine of *Immortalism*, a term coined by the Episcopal Bishop Samuel Fallows in 1909 to inaugurate a new version of spiritualism minus the fraud and trickery; and 3) exploring the mystique

N. Potter, Inc. 2008). For the home as an interiorized space see Cornelia Klinger, “Interior Spaces and Other Playgrounds of Inwardness,” 89-105, in *Private Utopia: Cultural Settings of the Interior in the 19th and 20th Century* ed. August Sarnitz and Inge Scholz-Strasser (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

⁹¹ Benjamin R. Andrews, “Psychic Factors in Home Economics,” 151-154, in *Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics, Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference, July 1-6, 1907* (Essex Co., NY: Lake Placid Club, 1907); and Anna R. Van Meter, “Psychic Factors Affecting Home Economics,” 148-151,” in *Ibid.* One discussant on this topic confessed that she knew “very little” about psychic factors (153).

that has surrounded Chicago from the time of the Psychological Science Congress to the present, creating a sense that it has been a special occult center.

Stead, like many of those associated with the Psychological Science Congress, propagated a heavily popularly-oriented version of psychical science, much in line with figures such as Elliott Coues and Lilian Whiting, both of whom were prone to espousing wildly about what the fruits of psychical research would soon be bringing to bear on a suffering humanity. Justin Sausman, perhaps the earliest historian to use the term “public occultism,” has situated Stead as a proponent of a psychical science that sought to bring occultism within the comprehensive reach of the masses. For Stead, as for Coues and Whiting, psychical science had to gain a wide popular acceptance, apart from the attentions of devoted specialists, if it were ever to become a science of usefulness to general society. Whether in Chicago conversing with old members of the Western Society for Psychical Research or writing columns in his popular spiritualism periodical *Borderland*, Stead was “a crucial figure in formulating the idea of public occultism as a new cultural field.” Stead even drew upon the wider cultural imagination in furthering his popularization of psychical research by alluding to polar expeditions and seeking to situate occultism in a “general scheme of Exploration.”⁹²

The same year, 1909, that Stead wrote of the exploration of the other, border world in the *Fortnightly Review*, another interesting development in psychical science linked to the North Pole appeared in a chapter entitled “Marvels of the Year 1909” in J. Martin Miller, *Discovery of the North Pole*. Included as ‘Marvels’ for the year alongside the discovery of the North Pole and advances in wireless telegraphy was a prediction by Bishop Samuel Fallows of the Reformed Episcopal Church of Chicago that very soon in the future people would be conversing with spirits in a manner similar to

⁹² Justin Sausman, “The Democratisation of the Spook: W. T. Stead and the Invention of Public Occultism,” in *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary* ed. Laurel Brake, et. al. (London: The British Library, 2012) 151-152, 159-160; William T. Stead, “How We Intend to Study Borderland,” *Borderland* 1 (July 1893): 3-6; and William T. Stead, “The Exploration of the Other World,” *Fortnightly Review* 85 (May 1, 1909): 850-861.

ordinary ways of speaking. Declaring telepathy to be “an established fact,” Bishop Fallows, an organizer of Chicago’s Western Society for Psychical Research in 1885, declared that it was because of the great strides made in psychical science that mankind would soon be “conversing with the spirits of departed friends and relatives.” Such an achievement in the realm of public occultism, Fallows announced, would “be made known to us through the science of ‘immortalism,’” which he called “spiritualism with the ‘fakes’ left out.” Immortalism, he declared, would be “studied by the masses just as they now delve into Latin, arithmetic, geography or grammar.”⁹³

Bishop Fallows launched his new public spiritualism from the pulpit of St. Paul’s Reformed Episcopal Church in a Sunday sermon on “Why am I an Immortalist and Not a Spiritualist” in August 1909. He termed this new science of speaking with spirits *Immortalism* “because it depends for its existence upon the immortality of the soul, in which we all believe, and the preservation of identity beyond the grave.”⁹⁴ Asked by a reporter if he had ever spoken with a spirit, the Bishop replied that he had not but that members of his St. Paul’s congregation in Chicago had, and these individuals were honorable and distinguished citizens whose word he could not doubt. An early convert to Fallow’s new spiritual science, Dr. C. Pruyn Stringfield, a prominent physician of Chicago, stated in the same paper that Bishop Fallows’ conclusions were “perfectly justified,” and that society stood “on the threshold of a new era in this science,” believing in his heart that “some day we shall [all] talk with spirits.”⁹⁵

⁹³ J. Martin Miller, *Discovery of the North Pole* (Philadelphia: G. A. Parker, 1909), 304. One magazine with a wide readership took issue with Bishop Fallow’s claim that telepathy was an established fact, cautioning him about making such assertions. The magazine said the statement was simply not true noting “it [telepathy] has no acceptance in science....and we are surprised that Bishop Fallows does not know the fact.” “Immortalism.” *Independent* 67 (September 9, 1909): 613.

⁹⁴ “Dead Return, Bishop Says. Dr. Fallows Believes in Communications from Other World.” *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1909, 3; “Immortalism, New Cult, is Launched. Bishop Fallows of Reformed Episcopal Church is Sponsor.” *Anaconda [MT] Standard*, September 6, 1909, 9; “‘Immortalism’ Will Be Taught in Schools of Future, Says Fallows.” *Rock Island [IL] Argus*, August 31, 1909, 1; and “Note and Comment.” *Springfield [MA] Republican*, September 4, 1909, 8.

⁹⁵ “Latest New Religion is Bishop Fallows’ ‘Immortalism.’” *Baltimore Sun*, September 12, 1909, 17. For C. [Cornelius] Pruyn Stringfield (1866-1928) see *History of Northwestern University and Evanston* ed. Robert D. Sheppard and

My dissertation's title, *A Modern Mecca of Psychic Forces*, expresses the vibrant occult culture that existed in Chicago, properly defining it as a psychical capital of the United States during the final two decades of the nineteenth century, a status demonstrated by the Psychical Science Congress in 1893, the first international congress devoted solely to psychical research. Some present-day historians as well as contemporary observers have acknowledged Chicago's attraction for metaphysically- and spiritually-minded people. Milton C. Sennett described Chicago as "a religious mecca for African Americans," in the years running up to the First World War, while Hans Baer designated Chicago as "the city with the greatest number of [African American] Spiritual churches in the country," and "the foremost center of the black Spiritual movement."⁹⁶ Ernest Loomis, who I previously discussed in reference to the Home Silent Thought Brotherhood, wrote in a pamphlet entitled "Woman's Occult Forces" that Chicago was destined "to be a central 'power-house' for the generation of individualized spiritual strength." In tracing the city's history all the way back to prehistoric times, Loomis declared that Chicago was "a focusing point for occult forces long before the Indians killed skunks on what are now its principal streets" and that the "negative condition of the soil" was particularly "adapted to the transmission of occult forces."⁹⁷ When Sydney Flower and William Walker Atkinson relocated their magazine and occult mail order business to New York in 1903, Atkinson told readers of *New Thought* that he was leaving Chicago "with the warmest feelings for its people and the city;" and that during his

Harvey B. Hurd (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1906), 619; A. N. Waterman, *Historical Review of Chicago and Cook County and Selected Bibliography*, vol. 1, (Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1908), 407-408; *History of Medicine and Surgery and Physicians and Surgeons of Chicago* (Chicago: The Biographical Publishing Corp., 1922), 846; and Green B. Raum, *History of Illinois Republicanism Embracing a History of the Republican Party in the State to the Present Time* (Chicago: Rollins Publishing Co., 1900), 724.

⁹⁶ Milton C. Sennett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 156; Hans A. Baer, *The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism* 2nd ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001 [1984]); xv; and Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, *African American Religion: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* 2nd ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002 [1992]), 185.

⁹⁷ "Chicago's Heart Culture Society," 45.

three-year stay in Chicago the city's "breeziness, push, hustle and energy" had "worked wonderful changes" in him. If he was to meet with success in New York, he offered, it would only be because "I have taken with me a bit of the Chicago spirit."⁹⁸

As these pages have demonstrated, Chicago enjoyed thriving branches in theosophy and psychical research and housed a spiritualist community with wide-ranging spectacles of entertainment to semi-serious scientific engagement with mediumistic phenomena. One columnist for the *Tribune* viewed the city as "one of the supreme meccas" for students of the occult, describing it as "*the central stamping ground* [my italics] of many of the great movements that are interesting and making the nation... being the habitat of more religious and philosophical cults than any place in the states." As for Chicago possessing any peculiar atmospheric attributes, this same writer cited an occultist from Iowa who swore that she could identify any paper or magazine she handled as coming from Chicago just "by the rapid vibrations" it imparted.⁹⁹ In 1976, Henry Rucker, then director of the Psychic Research Foundation, referred to Chicago as "a Mecca....the place where the psychics come. By that I don't mean that psychics and spiritual people don't *come* from all over and don't *live* all over the world, but Chicago just seems to be *the hub, the place where people are geared toward psycho-spiritual development.*"¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ William Walker Atkinson, "From Chicago to New York," *New Thought* 12 (September 1903): 175. Eric Homberger has suggested that the decline of Boston, and rise of New York and Chicago as important commercial centers, signified "the beginnings of 'modern' American culture [in that] New York and Chicago stood for everything *new* in American society." Eric Homberger, "Chicago and New York: Two Versions of American Modernism," in *Modernism: 1890-1930* ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1976), 151.

⁹⁹ Ida May Krecker, "Life in All Phases Found in Chicago; Students Can Rub Against the World." *Chicago Tribune*, August 23, 1908, H4.

¹⁰⁰ Rucker quoted in Brad Steiger, *Psychic City: Chicago; Doorway to Another Dimension* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 86. See also Sally Banes, Sheldon Frank, and Tem Horwitz, *Sweet Home Chicago: The Real City Guide* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1974), 157-159; "Mapping the Occult City: Exploring Magick and Esotericism in the Urban Utopia," a pre-conference held on November 16, 2012 for the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Chicago and organized by Jason L. Winslade, DePaul University; and Steve Pile, "The Strange Case of Western Cities: Occult Globalisations and the Making of Urban Modernity," *Urban Studies* 43 (February 2006): 305-318. There is an urban legend in psychical myth quarters which maintains that Adolph Hitler considered Chicago as "a city of the dead" and planned "to open a school of occult studies where

His pronouncement couldn't be a more fitting description of the culture of Chicago's progressive occultism in the immediate years before and after the Psychical Science Congress.

The sense that Chicago in 1893 was the center of a national unfolding of spiritual energy was also evident in the welcoming address of Milan C. Edson, chairman of the three day National Delegate Convention of Spiritualists of the United States of America which convened in Chicago on September 27, 1893, less than two weeks after the closing of the Theosophical Congress at the Parliament of Religions. Edson echoed a general sentiment equally felt by those spiritualists, theosophists, and psychical researchers drawn to the city when he declared Chicago to be "the most bustling city on the continent...the pulse of the nation." The multitudes who had recently gathered to visit the World's Fair and attend the Auxiliary Congresses, Edson declared, were "leaving with this place and this people an unseen and silent flow of spiritual potency, the effect of which no one can tell." The existence of this "great spiritual wave," he determined, formed "a most glorious and most fitting crown to this closing decade of the nineteenth century."¹⁰¹ An occult spirituality, it seemed, pervaded Chicago's atmosphere in 1893, becoming an inseparable and integral element of the World's Columbian Exposition itself, permeating through and among the souls of those twenty-seven million people who visited the Fair, whether they realized it or not.¹⁰²

City Hall now stands." John Petz, *Dead Lee Presents Haunted Chicago* (Northlake, IL: published by the author, 2010), 11.

¹⁰¹ *Proceedings of the National Delegate Convention of Spiritualists of the United States of America, held in Chicago, Illinois, September 27, 28, and 29, 1893* (Washington, DC: Stormont & Jackson, 1893), 6-7. Stead claimed that this National Spiritualist Convention "was attended largely by those who considered the Psychical Congress as not sufficiently advanced." "Mr. Myers at Chicago," *Borderland* 1 (October 1893), 101.

¹⁰² The spiritual atmosphere may have even affected those who did attend the Fair. The editor and humorist John Kendrick Bangs (1862-1922) wrote in reply to organizers of the World's Congress of Authors wrote that he could not "expect to go to Chicago—unless it should some day turn out that Chicago is the place we are liable to go after we die." World's Congress Auxiliary Congress of Authors Collection, Scrapbook 1, A-H, item 12, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library. The signed post card by Bangs is dated May 17, 1893.

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