

PSYPIONEER

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According to legend, a Spiritualist church was founded in Keighley, England in 1853. But what really happened in the town? York Spiritualist historian Gerald O'Hara has unearthed forgotten accounts of a pioneering community See page 21.

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Did A.J. Davis found the Movement?

The reference books tell us that the Modern Spiritualist movement began in 1848 with manifestations around the Fox sisters in Hydesville, New York State, and this is celebrated on 31 March each year.

There's a fashion in history today to ask " What if " questions. What if this famous leader had died (or not died) - and what if this war or that had been differently won and lost. So let's join it and ask, " What if the Fox family had never come to Hydesville - would there have been Spiritualism?

Clearly the practice of mediumship in many traditional societies would have been unaffected. Throughout black Africa, for example, healers and mediums have continued their work for centuries, including the "detection" of witches. In some cultures, like Tibet, sacred oracles guided the government.

In England cunning folk still worked especially in country districts, finding lost objects and advising on affairs of the heart. Across America, by the 1840s and in fashionable France, mesmeric practitioners (followers of Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism) were spreading altered states of consciousness. Cahagnet in France published spirit messages, such as " Arcanes de la vie future dévoiles"(1848). The adolescent mesmeric subject Emma Hardinge was working with the Orphic Circle, though her occultists were antagonistic to the idea of spirit communication.

And then there was the young Andrew Jackson Davis, a mesmeric clairvoyant in New York State who was internationally famous before the Fox sisters.

This brings us to our main theory; that it was Davis who was the real founder of Modern Spiritualism. We intend to test this by drawing firstly on his book " Beyond

the Valley" (Boston, Colby & Rich, 1885), described as a sequel to " The Magic Staff", an autobiography. " The Magic Staff" has been reprinted by SNU Publications. But "Beyond the Valley " has been largely forgotten.

This is not surprising. Although some of Davis's books have been reissued in the States over the years, his literary style has not been popular with modern readers, especially when expanded in trance. His reputation also suffered because of complications in his marriages. By 1884, he had serious problems with his voice and general health and was about to change his profession to doctor!

"Beyond the Valley" is a mixed bag, with chapters devoted to historical phases in the author's middle life (not in order either) together with addresses, and question and answer sections that might accumulate in the drawer of a platform speaker. The book is not well organised, and appears to have been mainly compiled in the winter of 1884-5 while Davis was staying in the house of a friend in New England, Alfred E. Giles, having separated from his second wife Mary.

One of the documents incorporated by Davis (in Ch. XV) is from the Spiritualist newspaper " Religio -Philosophical Journal" of Chicago dated April 6 1872 and is a sermon by Rev. W.E. Copeland, a Unitarian minister of Emporia, Kansas. It makes the case for Davis in fulsome terms, and we may usefully quote it here.

" Davis" claims Copeland, " has impressed upon Spiritualism the peculiar ideas and phraseology of the Harmonial Philosophy. So far as the religion is orderly and definite, it is through the labours of Davis."

(However, although Davis sometimes called himself a Spiritualist, Davis was at pains in a footnote to distinguish Spiritualism, which was " almost wholly founded upon and devoted to the authority of " Spiritual Intercourse" ", from the Harmonial Philosophy which was " founded upon and devoted to the authority of Nature, Reason and Intuition.")

Copeland calls Davis the most remarkable man of modern times, and asserts that " the series of books written by Davis contain a compendium of theology and morality which made a part of one's life, cannot well fail to make of the disciple a genuine Christian." He calls a Davis " a liberal Christian of the advanced school " with millions of disciples.

The claim, which most concerns us, is this. The Unitarian minister writes:

" I have for years watched Spiritualism, read its books and heard its lectures, and I can find but little which Davis did not teach before a medium spoke, and that little is only an amplification of some points in the Harmonial Philosophy. Davis is the father of the religion called Spiritualism. His lectures are the fountains from whence flows the water of life, with which our Spiritual brethren sate their thirst."

More follows on the immense contribution made by Davis to religious and social reform, and the need for Spiritualism, if it is to progress, to have a well-digested system of truth. But let us pause to consider Copeland's claim that Davis fathered Modern Spiritualism.

Clearly there was some contribution from the Fox sisters, and from the development of circles which followed. But none of the sisters produced any systematic account of the new teaching. Moreover, as the practice of mediumship spread, many foolish communications from other mediums were put into print as early as 1850, which damaged the new movement.

Davis did have some following abroad, including Europe. But as years went by other systems became popular, such as Kardecism in Roman Catholic countries and the Christian Spiritualism of Stainton Moses in Britain. Certainly there was a good deal less in circulation when Copeland wrote on 1872, and Davis was still pre-eminent in the States.

Copeland's own career illustrates the search for new teaching. For information on this I turned to Dr John Buescher, editor of the web site www.spirithistory.com, which features the history of American spiritualism. Dr Buescher is also the author of the article "Spiritualism" which appears in the "on line" Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography.

Dr Buescher told me that William Ellery Copeland (1838-1904) held a number of Unitarian pastorates, and went on to live for a time in a socialist utopian community and even to edit a socialist newspaper. He was also a mason, and became a non-resident member of a theosophical colony based in Oceano, California. He was perhaps typical of many seekers who for a time were influenced by Davis.

But we need to examine other aspects of Andrew Jackson's work before reaching a final verdict and will therefore be going "Beyond the Valley" next month.

(A.J. Davis - 4)

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How the Lyceum came to Australia

In 2001, a valuable history was issued of Spiritualism in Melbourne's Golden Age 1870-1890. The author, Dr Al Gabay is senior lecturer in history and religious studies at La Trobe University, Australia. He previously published in 1992 a biography "The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin", the pioneer Australian spiritualist who became three times Prime Minister. (see PP2), For his research, he used rare source material from the Victorian Spiritualists Union. The new work "Messages from Beyond" is from Melbourne University Press, and is available in the UK through Eurospan Distributors of Covent Garden, London at £13.95 plus £2 postage.

Dr Gabay devotes a chapter to William H. Terry, founder editor from 1870 of the monthly newspaper "Harbinger of Light" who in October 1872 began the Melbourne Progressive Lyceum with 25 scholars. (That was just a few months after Alfred Kitson in England!) Terry was its first conductor and taught there until 1899. By 1878 there were 150 regular scholars, and in 1886 there were 256 scholars enrolled, but numbers were severely reduced by a financial depression in 1891.

Dr Gabay describes the advanced teaching methods which closely followed those of A.J. Davis. Deakin edited a children's paper "Lyceum Miniature" while Terry produced "Lyceum Leader". A favourite outing in the 1880s was the annual Lyceum Christmas picnic, which up to 200 people would attend. (Don't forget- it is summer in Australia when it is winter in the UK!). But in 1882, there was a tremendous row when Thomas Walker, a trance lecturer originally from Lancashire, became a Secularist, and tried to take Australian Lyceumists away from Spiritualism.

Dr Gabay concludes that the Lyceums were inspired by a Romantic view of human nature, similar to Wordsworth's belief in the divine image within. If you are interested in psychic history, this is an excellent work- and look out for Emma Hardinge Britten's visit to Australia in its pages. LP.

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Biographical numbering. In this and later issues of the newsletter, readers may see items prefixed (e.g. Stainton Moses (1).) This is to make easy, reference over many months to items about major pioneers.

(Stainton Moses 2)

Stainton Moses and the Crystal Visions

Among the rarest of this author's publications is a booklet reprinted by LIGHT of three articles which appeared in its pages on January 7, 14 and 21 1888 under the title "Visions." (The Pioneer project hopes one day to reprint the booklet, identifying the persons mentioned from the surviving Moses notebooks.) These 1877 visions were received with the aid of a crystal.

Introducing the visions, SM wrote, "Thrice only have I been brought into contact with spiritual beings who profess never to have been incarnate in this world. One of these was known to me as "The Angel Harmony". Her method of teaching was, as I have said, by symbolic vision. I became clairvoyant, and saw these visions, having first of all prepared myself by gazing fixedly into a crystal."

Commenting on the first vision, "Rector" said:

"The grouping of the friends on the other side is made for your convenience. We know no time nor space and I am enabled to place this scene before your spiritual eye. Withdraw your eye now and gaze fixedly on the crystal. It will enable you to free yourself from the body and accompany her."

SM adds "Accordingly I got my crystal, and using it in the way I had been directed, I soon seemed to be free to move as I was impressed. I joined (or seemed to join) the angel..."

Later SM noted

"I was conscious of the presence of HARMONY, and gradually I resumed the conditions there described. After gazing for some minutes at the crystal, I seemed to

be disengaged from the body and stood with the Angel in as very peaceful scene. We seemed to travel rapidly..."

We will return to this question of Stainton Moses and the crystal, but suggest that his use was only occasional, and the crystal was not involved in the receipt of material later edited for the famous volume "Spirit Teachings."

LP.

NEWS FROM KEIGHLEY

Mr Editor-Sir- I take up my pen to communicate to you a few words concerning the oldest, and perhaps the best-conducted, spiritual organisation in the United Kingdom.

"The Spiritual Brotherhood" and Lyceum in their constitutions are very simple: all contributions to the same are bestowed voluntarily. Several of the members seem to take turns at opening and presiding over their Sunday meetings, and in reading the lessons before the general address is given to the public.

The members are all equal in rights and privileges, and anyone of the general public has equal right with the members to address the meeting and to put questions.

The Lyceum is conducted also by the brethren and sisters taking their turns as conductors and teachers; thus the burdens are borne by many, which makes the work easy and pleasant, instead of wearying and wearing out the devoted few, as is too often the case.

I may here mention that "The Spiritual brotherhood" in this place have collected or collated a small pocket book of " Progressive Lyceum Exercises " got up in neat wrapper, and consisting of hymns and of pleasant marches accompanied with the music, in which all, both young and old, can take part: and also of rational and philosophical lessons and recitations. The entire consists of about fifty pages and can be supplied by D.W. Weatherhead, Low Street, Keighley, at the low price of 2d. per copy to other schools or Lyceums: single copies, 3d. each.

The contents of this little work are very suggestive and interesting to the thoughtful Spiritualist, and simple enough to attract the attention and to elevate the mind and the feelings of the young. It is easier and less cumbersome than the larger " Lyceum Guides," and it is cheap enough for the children to purchase and to take home with them to commit to memory. All Spiritualist Lyceums and schools should have this little book.

The order or constitution of " The Spiritual Brotherhood" at Keighley is so effective and so happyfying in its results, that the people will not relinquish it on any consideration whatever. I am distinctly informed that they have no inclination to affiliate with any other society except in spirit and in truth, which affiliation, they claim, is the only true national spiritual association. Their motto seems to be – harmonious, voluntary, effective, local associations or communions, without any centralising, overriding, national society. Any national co-operative effort, they affirm, should be democratic, yet distinct from all local societies or communions, and

should be supported or aided by individual voluntary gifts or offerings, as in the case of the Spiritual Institution.

The Sunday meetings are well attended even at this season of the year. The brotherhood have just held their anniversary in the Mechanics' Institution, in which they had large and overpowering audiences to listen to excellent trance orations through Mrs Scattergood. They also intend to hold a picnic and tea-party in the grounds owned by Mr Weatherhead, high upon the hill-sides, having a beautiful and very extensive view, at which they will be happy to meet all who can make it convenient to be present on Saturday, August 22nd, to meet at the Lyceum between one and two o'clock.

Another piece of news is that our secularistic friends at Keighley are about to relinquish the " Working Men's Hall" to some other party or parties, and I wish, and almost hope, that they may come over en masse to membership of " The Spiritual Brotherhood ". I must now close this, or it may prove to be too lengthy for the columns of your highly-useful journal.

*- Yours truly, D RICHMOND
Keighley, August 10, 1874.*

This letter, which appeared in " The Medium and Daybreak" August 14 1874, is one of the fruits of York historian Gerald O'Hara's extensive investigation into the earliest stirrings of English Modern Spiritualism. Gerald argues that the brotherhood at Keighley was not a church. We will print more of his evidence in the next issues.

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Early Spiritualists and Sexism

Spiritualists generally believe in the equality of the sexes, and are against what we now call sexism. Sexism is unjustified distinction between men and women. It is sexism, for example, to prevent women driving cars.

Spiritualists were pioneers in the spread of women's rights, and this reminder (not always welcome) was made to feminists and to historians generally in Dr Ann Braude's classic American work " Radical Spirits" (1989). This has recently been reprinted by Indiana University Press with a new introduction describing the impact of the book (available in the UK through Plymbridge.)

It is surprising to learn, however, that the actual word " sexism" was being used, with a different meaning, by early American Spiritualists. This is revealed in a fascinating paper written by John Buescher, the founder of the web site. www.spirithistory.com. Dr Buescher's work appears in the September 2002 issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, an open membership body which promotes the study of religion. This is entitled " More lurid than lucid: The Spiritualist Invention of the word Sexism".

In 1866 the Massachusetts Spiritualists Association was revising its declaration of principles, and one member of the revision committee, J.H.W. Toohey said of mediumship " The qualifications are constitutional, if not organic, and for the time, become fundamental – mere sexism being of secondary significance. "

In this statement in the newspaper “Banner of Light” Toohey partly meant by sexism the physical and outward sexual characteristics that place one in the category of male or female.

In their final report, the revision committee declared their support for “the equality of the sexes, and the moral integrality of sexism.” Some other Spiritualists were not sure what the last part of that sentence meant.

The editor of the “The Spiritual Republic” a Spiritualist paper in Chicago, Frank L. Wadsworth failed to find “sexism” in the dictionary and wondered if it might be “free love”, another expression of uncertain meaning.

Lily Barney Sayles, a women’s suffrage activist, who had been present when the principles were debated, reinforced that suspicion. It was indeed, she said, more lurid than lucid, and a gentleman there had smiled knowingly when she asked if it meant every man and woman had the right to do as they pleased in sexual matters.

Medium Levi Coonley, also present, had suggested the term encouraged promiscuity and libertinism. But Henry Wright defended it as asserting the right of women in marriage to choose if and when they wished to have babies.

There was currently much discussion among Spiritualists and other reformers about the importance of a mother’s role, and her influence on the unborn child, so this line of thought was sympathetically received.

Toohey explained that the expression “moral integrality of sexism” was intended to take a positive view of the sexual roles of both men and women.

In the background, as Dr Buescher explained,

“Spiritualists looked to a “natural” law of sex, whereby spiritual feelings of attraction, regarded as manifestations of a subtle form of magnetism or electricity, would determine sexual relations. The committee that coined the word sexism meant sexual naturalism and the unhindered flows of mutual attractions, in line with the calculus of “amatory affinities” that the French social philosopher Fourier had envisioned.”

Another Spiritualist who shared in these debates was John Spear who in 1858 had declared that sexualism (we would say “sexuality”) was universal in nature with even planets being male and female and having life cycles. Dr Buescher notes that Spear had a personal interest. He had decided that his true spiritual affinity was not his wife of thirty years, but with Caroline Hinckley, who was visibly pregnant at the time this discourse was given to him in trance, and written down by her!

Another group of Spiritualists, called Alphites or Alphaists, looked forward to eliminating human sex altogether. They had their own journal “The Alpha” and hoped that women might conceive through spirit visitation alone. In 1872, Addie Lucia Ballou had a trance vision of this “spiritathesis”. Moreover, John Spear, already mentioned, thought it might be possible one day to dispense with clothes.

Other Spiritualists, less extreme, at least hoped for a gradual improvement of the race through social reform. Scientific developments in evolution and genetics eventually led to a toning down of rhetoric about the powers of parents to shape their offspring. The term “sexism” was not reintroduced until 1968, by which time the word had the meaning we know today. LP

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Emma Hardinge Britten (1)

Emma’s Library

In 1968, with a grant from the Parapsychology Foundation of New York, Mostyn Gilbert produced an “Index of Books” in the Britten Memorial Library in the SNU offices, Manchester, England. It ran to 131 duplicated pages, with alternate pages the other way up. There was also a “Supplementary list of books, periodicals, extra periodicals and pamphlets” of 16 pages in the same format.

Mostyn was not given access to archival material, such as the Britten scrapbooks that were brought to the attention of Dr Dingwall when he was re-editing “Modern American Spiritualism” for University Books, nor to other EHB personal possessions which can be found today in the Britten Museum at Stansted.

It is clear from the Index that the library is a composite collection formed in the sixty years after the death of Mrs Britten. Of possibly 4000 books, only about 100 are definitely linked with her. The itinerant nature of her life doubtless reduced her own volumes. Important collections have been added from Leslie Curnow, Abraham Wallace and Ernest Oaten, and possibly Alfred Kitson and J.J. Morse. Not all books are relevant.

In so large a library there are naturally many treasures, and some opportunity to compare multiple editions of the same title. We hope to share some information from this index in the months ahead

Interesting Australian entries include:

*Browne, Hugh J. Rational Christianity
Melbourne, 1879*

*Browne, Hugh Roman Catholicism before the birth of Jesus. E.H. Britten’s copy
from the Author
Melbourne 1897*

*Britten, Emma .H. The Faith, Facts and Frauds of Religious History “
Melbourne 1879.
E.H. Britten’s own copy: the first four pages have been removed.*

Denovan, W.D. C. The Evidences of Spiritualism Melbourne 1882

*Curtis, James “ Rustlings in the Golden City “ Ballarat Australia 1896 (2nd edition)
and London 3rd edition revised, 1902.*