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The Home of Truth: The Metaphysical World of Marie Ogden

Stanley James Thayne II

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Home of Truth: The Metaphysical World of Marie Ogden

Stanley J. Thayne

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Master of Arts

Marie Ogden's Home of Truth colony—a religious community that was located in southern Utah during the 1930s and 40s—was part of a segment of the American religious landscape that has largely been overlooked. As such, her movement points to a significant gap in the historiography of American religion. In addition to documenting the history of this obscure community, I situate Marie Ogden as part of what I call the early new age of American religion, an underdeveloped part of the broader categories of metaphysical religion or Western esotericism. This thesis also points to several other overlooked figures from the same era, suggesting several avenues for further study.

Keywords: metaphysical religion, Western esotericism, American West, religious studies, astrology, the occult, Aquarian Age, New Age, New Thought, new religious movements, Theosophy, Great Depression, U.S. History

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began with a Sunday evening dinner conversation with my in-laws. My mother-in-law told me about this eccentric religious group, the Home of Truth, that had been located just north of Monticello, Utah, where she grew up. My father-in-law told me a story about a local boy who played a prank on the Home of Truth members by riding into their valley on a white donkey, dressed in a white sheet, in imitation of the Messiah whose imminent return they anticipated. From there on out every family gathering became an opportunity for gathering more stories and more memories about the Home of Truth colony. Accordingly, my acknowledgments must begin there: with both of our families, who opened their homes and cupboards (and pocketbooks) and whose generosity made such an undertaking possible.

My graduate chair, Grant Underwood, was very excited and supportive of the project, even when I wanted to bail on it in favor of something more familiar. He advised me to stick with it, and I am glad he did. My committee members were likewise encouraging. Brian Cannon's seminar on Western history and his knowledge of local history helped me to contextualize the Home of Truth in their Western setting. Independent readings with Spencer Fluhman helped me to gain a grasp of the religious history that formed Ogden's intellectual background—often acting as a sounding board, bouncing back ideas on a topic that was new to both of us. I had recently completed Eric Eliason's American folklore course when I first heard of the Home of Truth, and that class trained my ear to recognize a great story and potential research project when I heard it. All were very helpful in pointing me to sources and providing thoughts and suggestions for research and revision. Mary Stovall Richards did multiple readings of each chapter and worked very closely with me throughout the revision process, bringing the

work into conformity with correct format and style. I thank each of them for their time, patience, and encouragement.

And finally, I must thank my wife, Becca, for humoring me as I turned one family outing after another into a research project, and for understanding the necessity of so many hours working off-the-clock; and also our little Emerson, whose distractions make it all worth it; and our as-yet-unnamed little one on the way, who will prove to us once again that Marie Ogden was right about one thing: there really is no death—life just keeps on a-coming.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phone call San Juan County Attorney Donald Adams received on a spring day in 1935 probably struck him as at least slightly odd. The call was from the state attorney general—that part was normal enough: fairly routine—but his request was unusual. He had received a visit from an out-of-state woman who was suspicious that her deceased mother, who had been living in a religious community in San Juan County, Utah, known as the Home of Truth, may not have received a proper burial—or any burial at all for that matter. He wanted Adams to go check it out.

The Home of Truth, also known as Ogden Center, was led by a woman named Marie M. Ogden. She had moved to San Juan County two years before, in the fall of 1933, from Newark, New Jersey. She gathered followers from around the United States: Idaho, Chicago, New York, Michigan. There were reportedly upwards of one hundred members within the first year of settlement, though seventy is a more conservative figure. Their numbers had already dwindled significantly by this time. The desert is a tough place to live.

They had settled the southern end of Dry Valley, about fifteen miles north of Monticello, where Adams had his office. It probably would have taken him about thirty to forty minutes or so to make the drive, on gravel and dirt roads (even the highway—there was only one in San Juan County—was gravel at this time). “So I went down to see her,” Adams later recalled of his visit to Mrs. Ogden, “and she told me the woman wasn’t dead. She said there is a cord that connects the hereafter and the present life and this cord had never been severed.”¹ The woman (or corpse,

¹The image of a silver cord whose severance or untying is a symbol of death is a common motif in Western literature, alluding to the phrase in Ecclesiastes 12:6, “Or ever the silver cord be loosed.” Later Talmudic midrashes,

some might say) in question, Ogden explained, had the option of staying in this life or of severing the cord to “go back.” She apparently had not chosen, as of yet, to sever the cord.

Ogden accordingly had two of her followers, who were also trained nurses, caring for the body during this apparently liminal state.²

giving an allegorical reading of the passage, interpreted the silver cord as the spinal column (see *The Talmud Babylonia: An Academic Commentary, II. Bavli Tractate Shabbat B*, ed. Jacob Neusner [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996], 33:716). In 1220, Jewish commentator Samuel Ibn Tibbon wrote that “it is . . . possible that *silver cord* represents, along with the spine, all the nerves that originate in it, since each of them resembles a *silver cord*” (James T. Robinson, ed., *Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], 596.) Four hundred years later, many British anatomists and theologians alike accepted such an interpretation simply as a matter of course (see John Edwards, *A demonstration of the existence and providence of God, from the contemplation of . . . the wonderful formation of the body of man* [London: Printed by J.D. for Jonathan Robinson and John Wyat, 1696], 75; John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, volume 3 [Bristol: William Pine, 1765], 1923).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the silver cord was beginning to take on a more mystical, though no less anatomical, interpretation in metaphysical religion. Rather than a spinal cord, it was beginning to be interpreted more as an umbilical cord, though in a spiritual or etheric rather than a physical sense. This interpretation may have been influenced by Kabbalah, particularly the Zohar, as filtered through the lens of Theosophy. Between 1900 and 1914, a British Theosophist under the pseudonym Nurho de Manhar published an English translation of the *Sepher Ha-Zohar* in the theosophical journal *The Word*, edited by H.W. Percival. In a chapter titled “Kabbalistic Philosophy of the Soul,” de Manhar depicts a discussion between Rabbi Simeon and two other rabbis in which he explains the soul’s flight into higher realms during sleep. “When the soul leaves the body,” Simeon (via de Manhar) explained, “its connection with the body remains intact, by means of what is termed the silver cord or magnetic tie.” In another section, de Manhar’s Simeon refers to the “thread or silver cord as it is termed, . . . that binds body and soul together” (Nurho de Manhar, “The Sepher Ha-Zohar—the Book of Light,” *The Word* 15, no. 4: 251). Thus the silver cord is that which unites the soul to the body when together in daily life and when separated during sleep.

The mystical interpretation was probably most fully developed by Max Heindel, founder of the Rosicrucian Fellowship and one-time associate of Rudolf Steiner. Heindel’s mystical theory of anatomy went beyond a simple soul-body dualism. Humans are at least tripartite beings, and perhaps more, in Heindel’s “cosmo-conception.” The physical body itself is dual, composed of a dense body and a vital body. Above this are the “higher vehicles”: the desire body, the mind, and the ego. These higher vehicles (including the vital body) are able to leave the dense body but remain “connected with it by a slender, glistening, silvery cord” (Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* [Oceanside, CA: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1911], 97-98.) Heindel gave what is perhaps the most elaborate description of this cord and how it attaches to a seed atom in the heart and plays a crucial role at death. The idea is also found in the teachings of Edgar Cayce.

It was in the vernacular and print culture of this cultic milieu that Marie Ogden’s ideas about death and life were being formed. Thus, though Peshak appeared to the uninformed to be dead, Ogden understood that, though the “Soul-Spirit had taken flight,” the “‘Silver Life Cord’ had not been severed.” Peshak was still alive. She had simply, and temporarily, passed to the other side for instruction. She was experiencing something like that which would later come to be termed an out of body experience (OBE). She was in the presence of “Invisible Helpers” who were assisting her in her preparations for her return to her physical body in a “rebirth” or “complete restoration of self.” Ogden, “Rebirth,” *San Juan Record* (hereafter cited as *SJR*), August 15, 1935, 4.

² Harold George Muhlestein and Fay Lunceford Muhlestein, *Monticello Journal: A History of Monticello until 1937* (n.p., 1988), 242. The nurses Adams mentioned were two of Marie Ogden’s followers: Home of Truth members Mary Cameron and Aletheia Chamberlain. Cameron was one of Ogden’s original followers who migrated to southern Utah’s desert country from the eastern United States in 1933. She was a registered nurse and a graduate of Boston City Hospital; she served on the editorial staff of *The American Journal of Nursing* from 1906 to 1916 and as a nurse in the Army Reserves during WWI. Chamberlain, also a Boston Hospital graduate and trained nurse from New York, arrived in the valley in 1934.

Ogden refused to let Adams view the body during this visit, however, and she refused him again when he returned with the sheriff. She did agree, however, to allow the local doctor, I. W. Allen, if he were to pay them a visit, to have a view of the body. So Adams went to Dr. Allen's clinic. The doctor unfortunately wasn't in but two of his nurses were there; Adams, assuming that was good enough, asked them to assist him in one more effort to examine the body. Once again, Adams, this time in company with the nurses and a group of curious tagalongs who also accompanied them, traveled back out to Ogden Center and was yet again denied access to the body.

Eventually Adams was able to contact Dr. Allen and convinced him to go out to the community to determine whether the unburied corpse posed a public health hazard (which would have provided legal grounds for a coerced burial). After wrapping things up at the clinic, Dr. Allen made his way out to Dry Valley, once again assisted by his two nurses, Leda Young and Dorothy Bayles.

Leda Young later recalled what happened: Ogden met them on the road with her arms outstretched, apparently motioning for them to go no further. She only allowed Dr. Allen to go in to examine the body. Fifteen or twenty minutes later he emerged from Ogden's cabin, "chuckling all over" as Ogden escorted him back to the car. After "considerable persuasion," Allen finally convinced Ogden to allow his nurses to examine the body to see if they could detect a pulse—something he apparently had failed to do. This is what Leda Young remembered:

We found the two nurses had everything well in hand. Twice a day they gave the patient a salt bath, and a milk enema. The milk was to give her nourishment and replace the dead cells in the live tissue, and the salt baths kept her clean, and well preserved. The nurses instructed us to press our fingers in the soles of the patient's feet, and when we could not detect any pulse they had us press our fingers on the crown of her head. Since we could not find a pulse the nurses determined we did not have a sixth sense, something they professed to have. Dorothy and I were not fooled. We knew poor Mrs. Peshak was a corpse,

well preserved and very clean. She has skin stretched over small bones with no muscle or fat, as she had died of cancer, no telling how long ago. However, there definitely was no public health hazard, so we drove away exited [*sic*] over what we had seen. How the two nurses were so duped we could never figure out.³

When Dr. Allen and the nurses saw that the body was basically mummified, they told county authorities that it did not pose any health hazard. The issue was, for the time being at least, laid to rest, even if Edith Peshak's body was not.

This so-called death of Edith Peshak raises numerous questions: What compelled people like Edith Peshak and her family to give up their former lives and join Marie Ogden's religious community? Who was Marie Ogden and just what was she doing in a place like Dry Valley? What were the community's beliefs and why did they feel they could cheat death? Most importantly, how does this little-known episode fit within the broader sweep of twentieth-century American history? In particular, what does it say about the medicalization of death in American society, the lure of the West for religious utopians, the nature of twentieth-century millenarianism and apocalypticism, and the American response to the Great Depression. The story of the Home of Truth can indeed be viewed from various vantage points, each of which help to situate it as a western manifestation of what may be considered a proto-New Age movement in the period prior to World War II.

The retreat to rural America to fulfill a utopian vision was of course nothing new in American history. Over the course of the previous century numerous religious utopianists had made the westward migration: the Mormons arrived in Utah in 1847; the spiritualist John Ballou

³ "Writings of Leda Young" (1987) as quoted in Muhlestein and Muhlestein, *Monticello Journal*, 242-3.

Newbrough's Shalam colony was established in New Mexico in 1884; and in the early twentieth century, a theosophical community was established at Point Loma, California, to name only a few examples. The Jeffersonian agrarian ideal experienced somewhat of a revival during the Progressive Era, despite major migrations to the city.⁴ The stock market crash of 1929 and the resultant Great Depression of the 1930s only served to heighten these utopian and agrarian impulses. In addition to the many public works projects undertaken under the aegis of the New Deal, a number of planned communities were established as an attempt to promote cooperative living. These planned communities were part of a much larger back-to-the-land movement during the Depression era as many individuals and families abandoned city life for what they hoped would be a more self-sufficient and reliable existence in the country.⁵ While many of these projects were fueled by agricultural, economic, and industrial motivations, many were also religious projects. Christian and Theosophical Socialist communities sprang up all along the west coast, particularly in California but also in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.⁶ While Marie Ogden did not identify her communal project as overtly Christian, Theosophical, or Socialist, her teachings and the lifestyles of many of her followers reflected influences from each of these movements.

⁴ See William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974).

⁵ See Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959).

⁶ See Samuel Eldon Charles Wagar, "Theosophical Socialists in the 1920s Okanagan: Jack Logie's Social Issues Summer Camps" (master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2005); J. Gordon Melton, "The Theosophical Communities and Their Ideal of Universal Brotherhood," in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 396-418.

Pinning a religious designation on Marie Ogden is a tricky undertaking—one that she was wont to dodge herself. “I am asked by many, ‘What is your religion or belief[?]’” she stated in a newspaper column titled “Metaphysical Truths.” In response, Ogden was fittingly esoteric: “it is difficult to explain to the average person that we cannot ‘label it.’” She chose rather to describe the spiritual basis of the community’s praxis by pitting it against the materialism of modern society: “it is based on the most simple laws of living,” stated Marie, “and still the MOST DIFFICULT TO LIVE because there are so few in the world today who are willing to ‘let go’ of the material things of life and return to such simplicity of living as will allow them to think of the spiritual aspects of life.”⁷ The only name Ogden preferred to give her religion was simply “Truth.” Yet, as the title of her article—“Metaphysical Truths”—suggests, Marie Ogden and the Home of Truth can be situated rather comfortably within a broad tradition that has since come under the designation “metaphysical religion.”

Metaphysical religion is a fairly recent term in the field of religious studies. Catherine Albanese, whose recent *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (2007) promises to become the magisterial work on the subject, situates metaphysical religion alongside the evangelical and the liturgical as a third major form of American religiosity.⁸ The term, as Albanese uses it, refers to a broad complex of Western

⁷ Marie M. Ogden, “Metaphysical Truths,” *SJR*, May 24, 1934, 4.

⁸ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4-6. Albanese did not invent this term. Around the turn of the twentieth century the term “metaphysical movement” was used to describe a religious movement, fairly recent at the time, generally identified as New Thought (see, for example, Paul Tyner, “The Metaphysical Movement,” *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* 25, no. 3 [March 1902]: 312-20). This usage was perpetuated by historian Charles S. Braden with his 1963 history of the “rise and development of new thought,” though he did recognize a “broad complex of religions,” including spiritualism, mesmerism, and Theosophy, that are “sometimes described by the rather general term ‘metaphysical,’ because its major reliance is not on the physical, but on that which is beyond the physical” (Charles S. Braden, *The Rise and Development of New Thought* [Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963], 4). Braden’s recognition of this broader complex that comprised the metaphysical movement was more explicitly recognized and developed by historian J. Stillson Judah, who gathered transcendentalism, spiritualism, occultism, Theosophy and its “allies,” as well as Christian Science and New

religions spanning a good chunk of Western history—with roots in pre-seventeenth-century Hermetic tradition—that are united by certain ideological features.

Albanese defines a movement as *metaphysical* according to four broad themes: (1) a preoccupation with “mind”; (2) “a predisposition toward the ancient cosmological theory of correspondence between worlds” (the idea that the microcosm—our world—is patterned after a prior and greater macrocosm, of which our world is in reality a part); (3) a tendency to think and speak of phenomena in terms of movement and energy; and finally, (4) a tendency to develop in an environment that is concerned with healing and therapy.⁹ Those movements which came to exemplify all of these characteristics, and which arose in postbellum America, she identifies as “mature forms of metaphysical religion,” namely, Theosophy, Christian Science, and New Thought, and beyond that, the multiplicity of New Age movements these movements spawned.

Albanese’s delineation of metaphysical religion according to these four criteria is not too unlike French historian Antoine Faivre’s description of modern “Western esotericism” according to four “intrinsic elements”: (1) correspondences, (2) living nature, (3) imagination and meditation, and (4) the experience of transmutation.¹⁰ He describes esotericism as “a diverse group of works, authors, trends,” ranging from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries, “which possess an ‘air de famille.’”¹¹ This classification was adopted and extended by Dutch

Thought under the “metaphysical movements” umbrella (J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967]).

⁹ Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 13-15.

¹⁰ Antoine Faivre, “Introduction I,” trans. Karen Voss, in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), xv-xix. Faivre also includes two “relative” or “non-intrinsic” factors which “frequently appear alongside the four intrinsic characteristics” but do not necessarily have to be in place for the element in question to be considered “esoteric”: (5) the practice of concordance and (6) transmission.

¹¹ Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, “Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions,” *Numen* 42.1 (1995): 48.

historian Wouter Hanegraaff who sees the contemporary New Age movement (with its highpoint in the 1980s) as the latest manifestation of this much larger category, Western esotericism.¹²

Ogden's interest in astrology, numerology, and pyramidism; her contact with the Higher Realms as a spiritual medium; her teachings regarding a coming New Age—the Aquarian Age—and New Order of living; her emphasis on personal transformation or transmutation during that transition period—all of these elements clearly situate her within these broad categories, whether one chooses to call it metaphysical religion or Western esotericism. The very breadth of these categories, however, with their wide application over time and space, limits their usefulness. It does little to situate Ogden temporally or geographically (discursively, of course) in the historiography. Nor does it indicate with much specificity just to what or to whom she was intellectually heir. There are many groups within the broad appellations discussed above; situating Ogden amongst them can be tricky.

It is helpful, therefore, to identify some of the categorically smaller movements contained under these broad appellations, metaphysical religion and Western esotericism. However, as I hope to show, Ogden does not fit neatly into any of these categories, though she exhibits resonance with and seems to have been influenced by nearly all of them, at least indirectly if not directly, through her reading and personal contacts. There was a great melding of influences during the period Ogden represents—a melding of ideas from sources that just a few years earlier could be identified as separate entities—at least organizationally if not ideologically. This melding and its resultant complexity makes the Home of Truth, like many other movements of

¹² Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Hanegraaff situates the “metaphysical movement” as a subcategory within the broader movement known as Western Esotericism, particularly applicable to a certain segment of that movement in the Americas (see 455-56 and personal email to the author, June 18, 2009). Albanese, however, avoids the term “esoteric” altogether because of its connotation with secrecy, which she does not see as fitting with the openness of so-called “esotericists,” and further finds the term “metaphysical” to be used more frequently by practitioners. See Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 12, and personal email to the author, June 18, 2009.

the period, difficult to categorize and thus difficult to talk about. For this reason, I argue, her movement—the Home of Truth—points to a significant and underdeveloped gap in the historiography of American religion—what I choose to call the “early new age.”

In order to demonstrate this I first need to provide some context by describing some of the movements that led up to and followed the early new age. I will not address every movement that comprises metaphysical religion, of course, but will focus on those that seemed to have the most significant impact on the development of the Home of Truth, as well as those—or that—which followed it. These are Theosophy and its off-shoots, New Thought, and New Age—or, as I would argue, *late* New Age—religion.¹³

Though the term *theosophy*, with a little *t*, goes way back (the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates it to 1650¹⁴), generally in reference to the speculative philosophy of Jacob Boehme, most modern references to Theosophy since the late nineteenth century refer to any set of ideas or organizations associated with the Theosophical Society, organized in New York City in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Q. Judge.¹⁵ The foundational doctrines of Theosophy were established primarily by Blavatsky; the prolific writings of Olcott, Judge, and Annie Besant, as well as A. P. Sinnett’s “esoteric Buddhism,” also contributed significantly, particularly as more accessible introductions to the movement (the Blavatsky tomes

¹³ Several other movements that might be included in a larger study would include spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, mesmerism, Christian Science, Swedenborgianism, astrology, Egyptology, folk magic, and so forth.

¹⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed August 11, 2009), s.v. “theosophy.”

¹⁵ See Emily B. Sellon and Renée Weber, “Theosophy and the Theosophical Society,” in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. Faivre, 311-29.

are a bit abstruse and more than a bit voluminous).¹⁶ The main canon of the movement was composed of Blavatsky's two-volume *Isis Unveiled* (1877) followed a few years later by another two-volume set, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Through these works she presents a complex cosmology based upon an ancient Wisdom Religion into which she was purportedly initiated by several hidden masters—mortal though highly evolved individuals—whom Blavatsky claims to have met during her many travels in India, Egypt, Tibet, and elsewhere. This ancient tradition revived, Blavatsky argues, offered a reconciliation of science and theology, not in their existing forms but in a higher form possessed by the ancients and about to be possessed again by an evolved humanity. The writings were largely communicated to Blavatsky, she claimed, by her masters, who could transmit their ideas telepathically across long distances.¹⁷

After the deaths of Theosophy's founding trio there was a fracturing of the movement into three major branches with continual fragmenting ever after. Annie Besant was successor as president of a main branch of the Theosophical Society, the Adyar Theosophists. In England. Katherine Tingley led another branch, the Theosophical Society International, to Point Loma, California, where they established a utopian community. And Robert Crosbie formed the United Lodge of Theosophists in Los Angeles. Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy, of Waldorf-school fame, later branched from Besant's society, as did their messianic hopeful Krishnamurti, Alice

¹⁶ On Olcott see Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Judge's *Ocean of Theosophy* (1893) was a highly influential introductory work. On Besant see Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1884) was so influential that the term was often used synonymously with Theosophy.

¹⁷ On Theosophy see Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Robert S. Ellwood, *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of the Wisdom of the Ages* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986); Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995); and Prothero, *White Buddhist*.

Bailey's Arcance School (mentioned in chapter 2), and Max Heindel's Rosicrucian Fellowship.¹⁸ These are just a few of the many Theosophies which scattered, sprouted, morphed, and intermingled during the early to mid-twentieth century and beyond.

The term "Metaphysical Movement," in American usage, seems to have first been associated with a movement more commonly known as New Thought. It is an American movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century, primarily from Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science. Accordingly, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby—healer and mentor of Mary Baker Eddy—is often referred to as a pre-institutional founder (or inspirer) of the movement, along with Warren Felt Evans, author of *The Mental Cure*. Historians have lately recognized Emma Curtis Hopkins as the "forgotten founder" of the movement. Hopkins was one of Eddy's closest students until she broke with her in 1885 and founded her own ministry in Chicago, which was soon followed by other Christian Science dissidents and a flowering of movements, several of which eventually formed a loose alliance under the name New Thought. Nona Brooks's Divine Science, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore's Unity, and Annie Rix Miltz's Home(s) of Truth movement (of particular interest to this study because of the name, even though there is no apparent connection) all fall under the New Thought umbrella, as do the popular writings of the male wing of the movement, including William Walker Atkinson, Ralph Waldo Trine, and later, Napoleon Hill.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, chapter 5 and appendix.

¹⁹ On New Thought see Gail M. Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins : Forgotten Founder of New Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion*; 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 Wessinger, Dell deChant, and William Michael Ashcraft, "Theosophy, New Thought, and New Age Movements," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, 3 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 2: 757-61.

Similar to Christian Science, New Thought is based on the idea that mind constitutes the fundamental basis of reality and that mental states are the primary cause of physical conditions.²⁰ Accordingly, healing is heavily stressed in the movement, with many conversions occurring in relation to such healing. It was accordingly often also referred to as the mental healing or mind cure movement.²¹

Both the Theosophical Society and the New Thought Alliance experienced significant fracturing during the early twentieth century. Many groups and individuals broke off from these movements and started their own. Other new movements were loosely influenced by one or the other or both, though they often did not explicitly identify with either. There was a lot of melding of theosophical and New Thought ideas, with, of course, some innovation and additional influences added into the mix.²² Gradually, this melding, with the addition of other influences such as increased (but by no means new) exposure to Asian religious philosophies and developments in trans-human and interpersonal psychology, led to that movement popularly known as New Age—a movement, which I argue, was much longer “in the making,” even if many in the “mainstream” failed to notice it or chose to ignore it.²³

²⁰ Whereas Christian Science generally involved a thoroughgoing rejection of the physical world as an illusion under the insistence that all is mind, New Thought often seemed more moderate, positing mental states as the cause of physical malady without necessarily rejecting outright (or at least consistently throughout the movement) the reality of a physical world.

²¹ Wessinger, deChant, and Ashcraft, “Theosophy, New Thought, and New Age Movements,” 757; Eugene Taylor, *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1999), 144-53.

²² For an example of such melding see Albanese’s treatment of Guy and Edna Ballard’s I AM movement in *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 467-471.

²³ I have placed these terms in quotes because I want to avoid the teleological idea that earlier movements were simply lesser developed forms of a “mature” New Age religion, i.e., that they simply grew up—a view which does not account for the contingencies and uncertainties of historical development. Also, the term “mainstream” can obscure as much as it enlightens, creating the false sense of a large normative segment of society where “normal”

Dutch scholar of Western esotericism Wouter Hanegraaff, perhaps the most careful and precise scholar of the New Age, divides the New Age movement into what he calls the New Age *sensu stricto* and the New Age *sensu lato*. While sounding a bit tendentious to American ears, he is describing an important perceived change in New Age religion at a point where most people would say it began—a change encapsulated well in New Ager David Spengler’s comment made in 1996: “Thirty-seven years later, I see the New Age as an idea, not as an event.” That is, at some point, the “new age” for the most part lost its millenarian aspect and became New Age, that diffuse (in so many ways) movement we are more familiar with today—the movement that came into the public’s attention primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, spurred into an international movement by the momentum of the 1960s countercultural revolution. It applies to those who view the New Age primarily as a set of ideas or as a stance toward the world. The New Age *sensu stricto*, however, applies to that segment of the movement, now in the minority, who look forward to an actual transformation of human society during a transition into an actual “new age” of peace, harmony, brotherhood, and spiritual enlightenment, often described in astrological terms as the Aquarian Age. For this segment of the New Age community, their focus was on the advent of an actual new age that was imminent, typically in a rather apocalyptic, millenarian sense.²⁴

people dwell, with New Ager and a few others quirks in the margins. Though such terminology can be useful, we ought to be aware of their limits and the complexity involved.

²⁴ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 94-103, and throughout. I am using the term “millenarian” in the sense determined by a group of scholars in the social sciences who gathered at a conference held at the University of Chicago in 1960, which defined a group as millenarian, as historian Grant Underwood has summarized, “when it views salvation as (a) *collective*, to be enjoyed by the faithful as a group; (b) *terrestrial*, to be realized here on earth; (c) *total*, to completely transform life on earth; (d) *imminent*, to come soon and swiftly rather than gradually; and (e) *miraculous*, to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies” (Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991], 5). Marie Ogden’s teachings regarding the new age accord with this definition of millenarian.

It is the New Age *sensu stricto*, the millenarian or apocalyptic aspect of New Age religion, that is most relevant to this study. Whereas as New Age scholar J. Gordon Melton sees British Theosophical “light groups” of the late 1960s and early 1970s as the beginning of what would become the New Age, Hanegraaff backs up another decade and suggests looking at UFO groups of the 1950s—heavily influenced by Alice Bailey—for the roots of a what was becoming a distinctly New Age form of religious expression. Hanegraaff identifies these groups as “proto-New Age movement.”²⁵

Historian Philip Jenkins, however, has recognized the arbitrariness of a classification system that would posit the 1970s or 80s or even the 50s as the beginning of the New Age phenomenon. He instead identifies the period between 1910 and 1935 as a “period of Emergence,” during which time there was an “esoteric boom” that he refers to as the “First New Age.”²⁶ It is within this period that Marie Ogden clearly fits. In his treatment Jenkins identifies, among others, two different individuals (one is a couple, actually) that directly influenced Ogden: William Dudley Pelley and F. Homer and Harriette Augusta Curtiss. I will add Marie Ogden and the Home of Truth to the list Jenkins has begun. Ogden also points to several other obscure early new age thinkers, including Edna Wadsworth Moody, George and Louise Brownell, Wing Anderson, Harry Gardener, Ernest Palmer, N. A. Naden, and several other metaphysical thinkers, writers, and community leaders who at some level shaped, were shaped by, or in some way interacted with Marie Ogden’s Home of Truth (see appendix). This study, therefore, points to a rather significant section of the American religious landscape that has

²⁵ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 95-96.

²⁶ Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 70-99. Jenkins provides a chart that demonstrates that many of the religious leaders during this period, including William Dudley Pelley, were born during a period between 1874 and 1890 (79). Ogden was born in 1883, placing her at about the same age as other significant figures of the era such as Edgar Cayce, Alice Bailey, Aleister Crowley, and Aimee Semple McPherson.

received very little historiographical attention, suggesting several avenues for further study. Rather than Jenkin’s “first new age,” however—since there arguably were “new ages” before that—I refer to Marie Ogden’s period in American religious history as “early new age.”²⁷

A Note on Sources

The main sources for chapters 1 and 3 are the writings of Marie Ogden and few other Home of Truth members. The major source for these writings is the *San Juan Record (SJR)*, the local San Juan County newspaper, which Marie Ogden purchased in the spring of 1934. The Home of Truth ran a weekly column that offered many of their teachings and their history to the public. There are also a few collections of Ogden’s pamphlets, housed in the Utah Historical Society, the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, and the Merrill Library at Utah State University. In chapter one I also refer to a diary Ogden kept for the years 1927-29, which is housed in a display case in the Monticello Visitors Center, Monticello, Utah.

²⁷ Identifying the linguistic genesis of the New Age in English usage—that is, figuring out who first started referring to the “new age” in a sense roughly equivalent to what New Age meant when it became an identifiable movement (as if there is any agreement there!)—is an almost impossible undertaking. Alice Bailey has often been identified but earlier attestations can arguably be posited. Jenkins mistakenly points to John Ballou Newbrough’s 1880 *Oahspe: A New Age Bible* as evidence that the term was used in a roughly equivalent religious sense as early as the 1880s (*Mystics and Messiahs*, 86). This assertion is based on a transcription error however. The title of Newbrough’s book was actually *Oahspe: A New Bible*. Jenkins’s error is probably the result of relying on secondary sources since the erroneous title was previously used in J. Gordon Melton, Jerome Clark, and Aidan Kelly, eds., *New Age Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), xxxv, 260, 481. The error was also perpetuated in Michael York’s *Historical Dictionary of the New Age Movements* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), xx, 70, 225; and in Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, *The Churching of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 239. Peter Occhiogrosso, *The Joy of Sects: A Spirited Guide to the World’s Religious Traditions* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 473, points to usage of the term in the early twentieth century among freemasons and by literary critic A. R. Orage. In chapter two of this thesis I cite earlier references to the coming Aquarian Age as a new age.

CHAPTER 2

TRUTH FINDS A HOME

Dry Valley, Utah, may seem like an unlikely place to establish a home. With flora to match the name, it is not the most inviting place. Scenic, yes: it is a ruggedly beautiful place: rustic, wild. But it is definitely not the most comfortable locale: red sand, red rock, prickly pear cactus, juniper, sage brush. The valley was primarily used, when used at all, for open range grazing of sheep and cattle, and of course by jackrabbits, rattlesnakes, ravens, and lizards. An unlikely place for a home.

Yet here it was that Marie Ogden chose to establish her community of gathered ones: the Home of Truth. She was often asked why she chose such an out-of-the-way spot, such a desolate, barren, desert valley. Her response typically was simply: because that's where she was guided. It was the place the Master had chosen. It was not for her to question, but to obey.

Before Marie Ogden migrated to Dry Valley, she was a New Jersey club woman. A perusal of her diary for the years 1927-1929 reveals a woman who was busily involved in numerous women's clubs, social and civic organizations, musical foundations, and welfare projects.¹ For example, on January 4, 1927, she attended a State Music Committee meeting in the morning, another committee meeting at "Club House" at midday, and a lecture at Wallace Hall in the evening, after which she retired to her desk. On the sixth she attended a board meeting in the morning, a luncheon with the athletic club, a committee meeting in the afternoon,

¹ Ogden's diary for 1927-29 (hereinafter cited as Ogden Diary) is located in a display case in the Monticello Visitors' Center, Monticello, Utah. It is not catalogued and is not a part of a collection. I was given permission to view the diary by the director of the Visitors' Center.

and an American Citizens meeting in the evening. Not every day was this busy, but such busily scheduled days were not by any means an anomaly.

All of this changed, however, when her husband Harry became ill. In October of 1928 Harry had had an attack of “nervous exhaustion” that left him laid up in bed for weeks. When another attack struck in November of that year, he was taken to the hospital for x-rays and was diagnosed with cancer. Marie’s diary entries over the course of the next year chronicle twice-daily trips to the hospital, at first transporting her sick husband back and forth and later going to visit him. She frequently noted her exhaustion, discouragement, and depression: “not feeling very well,” “dead tired,” “all days alike—terrible monotony of daily trips with unhappy outlook ahead,” “The end of a hard year—very unhappy—tonight.”²

On January 23, 1929, her entries take a more positive turn. “Morning Devotion—In a land where Roses never fade.” That evening, Ogden notes, “Evening Prayer and Peace.” The next day she received a disturbing letter from her daughter (contents unknown) and experienced “utter collapse.” The following day was the first time she did not go to the hospital. “Home all day. quiet day and heavenly peaceful evening.” On January 26 she visited the hospital in the morning and then spent a pleasant evening having supper with a friend. Her diary is blank after that. Her husband died a short time later.

Ogden’s morning devotion on that January morning, “In a land where Roses never fade,” seems to have been a turning point. It is the first day since her husband’s diagnosis that she notes anything like “Prayer and Peace.” The morning devotional was probably a radio program, playing the newly released country gospel hit “Where Roses Never Fade.” The song was written that very year by Jane West Metzgar, a Texas English teacher, wife of an Assembly of God

² Ogden Diary entries for November 19, 25, and December 17, 31, 1928.

preacher, and mother of five, who was at the time suffering her own bout with leukemia. The song paints a mental picture of an ideal city “where the streets with gold are laid / where the tree of life is blooming / and the roses never fade.” This picture is juxtaposed against a much drearier image of this temporal world where roses “bloom but for a season” but “soon their beauty is decayed.” The song would prove, in a sense, prophetic for Ogden, but with a slightly different meaning than it had for its writer. To Metzgar the city represented that place where her “loved ones gone to be with Jesus” await her coming “in robes of white arrayed.” But for Ogden, that longing for an immortal city whose citizens—metaphorical roses—would never fade would not merely linger as a future hope but quite literally became a this-worldly pursuit.³

Before her husband’s death, Marie Ogden admittedly gave little attention to spiritual matters. His death, however, precipitated her metaphysical awakening, which she later described as the beginning of a distinct new period in her life, “at which time I began to search for the TRUTH in many of the scientific methods deduction, such as is possible to gain through the study of Astrology, Numerology and kindred subjects.”⁴ Her later writings depict her earlier self, before her husband’s death, as a woman actively engaged in many civic and social causes yet complacent regarding death and the afterlife. A firm “belief in God and in a Spirit world” underlay all that social gospel busyness, but the very busyness of it all distracted her from some of the deeper and more mysterious matters of life and religion.⁵

³ There is also possible resonance with the idea of a city whose “streets with gold are laid.” According to legends that still persist in San Juan County, Ogden anticipated a community in Dry Valley with streets literally paved in gold. While this legend may have no basis in any actual intentions or statements by Marie, it is intriguing to note that the community did engage in gold mining near Camp Jackson in the nearby Blue Mountains.

⁴ Ogden, “Our Corner,” *San Juan Record* (hereinafter cited as *SJR*), June 14, 1934, 4.

⁵ Ogden, “Truth Will Survive,” *SJR*, February 22, 1940, 4.

Ogden was raised as an Episcopalian and “loved the sacredness of the services” as a child, but she refused to attend any longer when she reached age fourteen, as she recalled, because she did not like to wear a hat (apparently a requirement). She married into a Presbyterian family and for a time she and Harry sent their daughter to a Methodist Episcopal Church, “because of its convenient location to our home,” which she credits with inculcating some “spiritual training; according to religious beliefs.” It was to her home, however, that she mostly credited her early spiritual development. “Our home was our religion where we tried to live the golden rule,” she later wrote. It was that rule, the golden one, that she later identified as the hallmark of Home of Truth community life. It thus prepared her, perhaps more than anything, she felt, for the “turn to this new pathway in life when my husband died in 1929.”⁶

For the most part, however, she considered herself at this time—or later remembered herself—as one without any particular religious affiliation but associated with “many organizations doing civic and welfare work,” which provided opportunities to mingle “with all types of people.” After her husband’s death, “Church affiliations did not satisfy,” she recalled, and Ogden found she did not agree with many of the things she read about death. She thus entered upon “an interesting study of ‘life after so-called death’ in order to understand things we [she referred to herself in the plural] somehow knew were true, but had never found time to think much about.”⁷

Ogden’s involvement in civic clubs and women’s organizations did not resume after her husband’s death. Her attention radically shifted from efforts to improve and ameliorate the

⁶ Marie M. Ogden to Rev. H. Baxter and Mrs. Baxter, Monticello, Utah, July 20, 1943, Merrill Library Special Collections, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. This letter is written on Ogden Center—Cooperative Settlement letterhead. There is an apparent contradiction here: in this letter Ogden refers to her and Harry’s daughters, but as far as I can tell Ogden had only one daughter.

⁷ Ogden, “Truth Will Survive,” *SJR*, February 22, 1940, 4.

condition of human life in the present society to a complete rejection of and withdrawal from that society, which, as Ogden came to see it, was bound for destruction.

At some point, between the time of her husband's death in 1929 and her migration to Utah in 1933, Ogden had a chance to remarry. That decision—to marry or not to marry—became something of a crossroads in Ogden's later recollection: a point at which she had to choose between pursuing her present materialistic lifestyle or the spiritual pathway that was opening before her. She chose the latter, of course, and hence our story—her story.

Ogden's sudden interest in the spiritual and theological aspects of religion was given direction and began to take shape under the influence of William Dudley Pelley, an author, former Hollywood screenwriter, spiritualist, occult writer, fascist, and anti-Semite whose fragmented and seemingly contradictory bundle of political and religious identities is captured well in the subtitle of a recent biography, describing Pelley's as "a life in right-wing extremism and the occult."⁸ Pelley would later be tried before Special Committee on Un-American Activities—known popularly as the Dies Committee, after chairman Martin Dies Jr.—and he was convicted and incarcerated for his fascist ideology and his activities as the leader of an extralegal, paramilitary organization known as the Silver Shirts. At the time Ogden became associated with him, Pelley was riding a wave of fame brought on by the enormous success of a published near-death experience titled "Seven Minutes in Eternity."⁹

⁸ Scott Beekman, *William Dudley Pelley: A Life in Right-Wing Extremism and the Occult* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

⁹ William Dudley Pelley, "Seven Minutes in Eternity," *American Magazine* (March 1929): 7-13; republished as a pamphlet titled "*Seven Minutes in Eternity*" with their *Aftermath* (New York: Robert Collier Inc., 1929); and self-published by Pelley as *Seven Minutes in Eternity with the Aftermath* (New York and Washington D.C.: Galahad Press, 1932).

Though Ogden does not cite this essay as being the cause of her interest in Pelley, the timing of its publication in *The American Magazine* in 1929, the very year her husband died, and the content of its message—Pelley experienced death and returned to tell about it—suggest it as a viable possibility. In a later telling, during the time of Pelley’s trial before the Dies Committee,¹⁰ Ogden recalled that in late 1930 she became acquainted with some of Pelley’s writings—“a form of writing new to us, but which included much we accepted as truth”—in a magazine he edited, called *The New Liberator*. She met Pelley in the spring of 1931 and was impressed by his plans to establish Metaphysical Centers and to create an organization called the League of Christian Economists, “for the purpose of uniting all Christ-loving people with the idea to live in accord with the instruction he was then receiving, which was of high order.”¹¹

Pelley was at the time holding a series of seminars known as the League for the Liberation. According to Pelley’s account, Ogden first came to these meetings with a friend but “she thought Christian mysticism was a lot of twaddle” and made fun of her friend for purchasing Pelley’s magazines.¹² If such was the case, Ogden quickly overcame her skepticism

¹⁰ It was clearly Pelley’s hearings before the Dies Committee, held in 1939-1940, that led Ogden to publish a statement emphasizing her disagreement and break with Pelley. Ogden’s name, in fact, was brought up more than once during the trials because of the large sum of money she gave to Pelley (see *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States: Hearings before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives* [Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939], 6:4187-88, 4191; [1940], 12:7274-75). In the statement she published in the *San Juan Record*, however, Ogden did not seem concerned to denounce Pelley’s fascist views or his anti-Semitism and may have in fact shared his views and supported them. “In defense of Mr. Pelley, who is now being so much publicized,” Ogden wrote, “we wish to state that although we have not been in sympathy with his manner of cooperation with those who served with him at the start of his work in 1931, we cannot but admire his determination to expose the fraudulent schemes and practices of those who are living contrary to the Christ principles of living, and his fearlessness in attacking those who sit in high places, regardless of what might befall him” (Ogden, “Truth Will Survive,” *SJR*, February 22, 1940, 4). As further evidence of her anti-Semitism, she dismissed one of her newspaper editors for the *San Juan Record* (which she owned and operated) for denouncing William Kullgren, a one-time associate of Pelley who was also openly and virulently anti-Semitic. See *San Juan Record*, July 27, 1939, 5, 13.

¹¹ Ogden, “Truth Will Survive,” *SJR*, February 22, 1940, 4.

¹² William Dudley Pelley, *The Door to Revelation: An Autobiography* (Asheville, North Carolina: The Pelley Publishers, 1939), 360.

and not only continued to attend meetings but also loaned (Pelley says donated) 14,000 dollars' worth of bonds to the cause and "entered into an agreement" with Pelley. As her part of the agreement Ogden worked to open a Truth Center for studying Pelley's teachings in Newark, called the League of Liberators, into which Ogden apparently invested additional funds. She also expected to receive a position working at the national headquarters Pelley was planning to establish in Washington D.C.¹³

The lessons Ogden would have been using in her study sessions in the Newark Truth Center were published in a booklet series known as the *Liberation Scripts*, popularly known to insiders as Pink Scripts because of their pink covers.¹⁴ They consisted of messages channeled through Pelley from a source he identified as his Oracle as well as articles by Pelley expounding upon themes found in the messages. The purpose of these weekly lessons, Pelley's Oracle explained, was to set forth

a complete exposition of what might be called a new world order, religiously, politically, sociologically, building by a new terminology that which is the essence of a new society,

¹³ Ogden, "Truth Will Survive," *SJR*, February 22, 1940, 4.

¹⁴ In these lessons, some of which Ogden most likely attended, Pelley taught that human beings had their beginning not on this earth but on a different planet. After this earth had been created and animal life had evolved from "protoplasm," a "vast horde of celestial Spirits," i.e. proto-humans, migrated to this earth, where they "would encounter certain conditions that would aid them in attaining a keener sense of Self-Awareness." These "celestial spirits" were already very advanced in their spiritual evolution, but they had not developed a sense of individual identity and character. This finite earth experience was designed for that development, which would take place under the guidance of much wiser "Master Spirits"—beings who were eons older and much further along in their spiritual evolution. After a period of development on this earth, each of these migrant souls, which were apparently either sexless or androgynous, split into halves. One half, possessing the "aggressive, dominant, physical attributes, . . . became known as Man," while the other, possessing the "acquiescent, docile, and emotional attributes, . . . assumed its abode in earthly flesh as Woman." This "cleavage" provided the opportunity for "a method of reproducing physical vehicles." Thus the cycle of life and death on this earth was begun, providing opportunities for these "celestial spirits" to gain experience that would help to develop their individuality while also providing "frequent periods of spiritual rest" during which the separate halves could take stock of their development before returning again to a new body "for another Trial-and-Error sojourn in the mortal encasement"—in other words, reincarnation (William Dudley Pelley, *Program of the Second Assembly of the League for the Liberation; The Garden of Eden: Human Life Came to this Planet out of Interstellar Space* [Washington D.C.: The League for the Liberation, 1932], 7-9). Since it is not clear that these elements in Pelley's teachings, other than reincarnation, were ever explicitly expounded in Ogden's writings, I have relegated them to a footnote.

not conceived by a few men after their own whims but as conceived by those who are planning that new society from the loftier realms of Time and Space.

This “grand work” or “World Program,” Pelley explained, “is the outgrowth of a union of Master Minds who have been many years conceiving and discarding from the fruits of both experience and observation what is both wanted and needed in an entirely new social program for the races.”¹⁵

In 1932 Ogden broke with Pelley—or, rather, he abandoned her—over financial issues, which involved Pelley’s squandering Ogden’s 14,000 dollars’ worth of bonds with no joint stock remuneration and his changing plans regarding the Newark center. It was at this point that Ogden opened her own School of Truth meditation group in the center intended for Pelley’s League of Liberators. Soon she began receiving messages and guidance of her own. When those messages began warning her of the imminent destruction awaiting all urban centers on this planet, Ogden began seeking a place of refuge where she and her followers could practice the sort of spiritual discipline that would usher in a new age of immortal existence. In the meantime, she was not able to make the payments on the School of Truth center and the owner—a “life-long family friend, . . . opposed to our entering into the spiritual pathway” —foreclosed.¹⁶ The School of Truth was without a home.

The first intimations of migration came to Ogden at some point in late 1931 or early 1932, during the time she was leading the School of Truth meditation/study group near her home in Newark, New Jersey. In connection with her meditations and studies she had begun receiving

¹⁵ Pelley, *Door to Revelation*, 357.

¹⁶ Ogden, “Truth Will Survive,” *SJR*, February 22, 1940, 4.

“messages,” or “recordings,” from the Unseen Realms.¹⁷ These messages were printed as a series of pamphlets, or “lessons,” that were distributed under the title *Messages of the Dawn*, followed by two more series, *Messages of Wisdom* and *Messages of Truth*.¹⁸ The first series of messages spoke of an awakening that was occurring across the nation as many individuals now on the earth were beginning to realize the impending disasters awaiting the globe and their respective roles in the New Age about to be ushered in. In particular, many individuals who had lived with the Master, Jesus Christ, as his disciples during a previous incarnation 1900 years prior, were being “awakened” to their true identity. These would become the leaders—the nucleus—of a New Order on the earth. They would build the Kingdom of God.

But first, there would be a period of darkness, of destruction and great calamity, an utter collapse of the present system, politically and economically, attended by great natural disasters. The world was due for great changes: cataclysms. Accordingly, the awakened ones would need to gather and relocate to a distant location, away from major cities, or minor cities even, and away from the coasts (because of tidal waves). There, apart from the destruction, they would experience a more harmonious transition into the New Age and the New Order of living. They would evolve. But first, they had to move.

¹⁷ Terms that appears in capitals, such as Unseen Realms, New Age, New Order, Invisible Helpers, and so forth, are terms which Ogden used frequently and which she typically capitalized. I have preserved, or imitated, her usage throughout, often without the use of quotation marks.

¹⁸ I have only been able to locate extant copies of the *Messages of the Dawn* series, in Marie M. Ogden, Writings, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. These pamphlet series, each consisting of twenty lessons, were often advertised in the *San Juan Record*. The *Messages of Truth* series was described as “20 recorded lessons showing how to contact higher planes of wisdom; man’s relation to man and to God the Father. Rules of conduct and living in the New Age.” The *Messages of Wisdom* series was described as “an explanation of Cosmic or Universal Law; the purpose and goal of man’s spiritual development.” “The Book Shelf,” *SJR*, June 27, 1935, 4, and throughout.

Utah was not the first place Ogden looked. It was not a simple matter of packing up and migrating to Dry Valley. During the summer of 1933 she searched throughout the West for the right place. She first went to Chicago, then to Idaho, Washington, California, lecturing and gathering a following along the way. Near Boise, Idaho, she had gained a small readership, thanks to the U.S. Postal Service, and was apparently offered land for her community project there. She may have had similar offers in California. But neither of those locations seemed quite right. She would return home to the East and resume her search again later that year. But in Chicago, probably entrusted to the care of one of her new-found “awakened ones,” she found a letter awaiting her.¹⁹

This propitious letter was sent by one of Ogden’s followers in New York. She had dreamed a dream, and in that dream she saw a valley, and above the valley, the word “Utah.” Ogden “knew instantly,” she later recalled, “it was the place.” Of course, the New York City visionary had never been to Utah, nor did she know what Ogden “had in mind.” “But she was certain,” Ogden wrote, “that it might help me in locating the spot, and it did.” It did, that is, after Ogden returned to Boise the following month and traveled to southern Utah with her Idaho friends who knew of a place that matched the “mind picture” she described to them.²⁰

The place: San Juan County: a large, wedge-shaped expanse of desert country in southeastern Utah and the largest of the state’s counties. Much of the county was Navajo and Ute reservation land. The major towns—none would have qualified as cities—were primarily Mormon settlements, Bluff having been settled in 1880 at the conclusion of the historic “Hole-

¹⁹ Hector Lee, “Interview with Mrs. Marie Ogden, of Monticello, Utah,” March 5, 1946, in Utah Humanities Research Foundation Records, box 4, fd. 37, Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁰ Lee, “Interview.”

in-the Rock” expedition with the settlements of Blanding and Monticello to the north following shortly thereafter.²¹ Other settlements, consisting of a few buildings each, dotted the landscape. Most of the roads, even the main highways, were dirt or gravel at the time. Ranching, dry farming, and mining were the major industries in the area. Locals often touted the San Juan country—perhaps to boost tourism or to attract back-to-the-landers—as “America’s last frontier.”²²

It is difficult to tell when Ogden made her first venture into San Juan County. She may have made a reconnaissance survey of the area in the summer of 1933, as suggested above, before arriving for permanent settlement in September. Her name appears on several mining claim documents filed in August, along with the names of several other Home of Truth members, but it is not clear whether she was present when the claims were filed or if one of her affiliates who preceded her filed them on her behalf. Nor is it exactly clear where Ogden and her associates²³ at first planned to settle. Local legend, recast through the memoirist’s pen, suggests Ogden’s first choice for settlement was Al Scorup’s ranch on Indian Creek—just west of Dry Valley. Rather than try to purchase the property for the half million Scorup asked, however, Ogden offered him membership in the community and, along with it, escape from destruction,

²¹ The Hole-in-the-Rock expedition, also known as the San Juan Mission, was undertaken by a group of Mormon settlers in 1879-80 in an effort to colonize the present-day San Juan County region. The expedition is named after a particularly difficult passage the settlers quite literally carved out of the red rock in order to descend to the Colorado River. See David E. Miller, *Hole-in-the Rock: An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966).

²² Printed under the masthead of the *San Juan Record* for several years were the words, “Voice of America’s Last Frontier.” See *SJR*, February 10, 1938, 1, and throughout.

²³ I hesitate to say “followers” or “disciples” because I do not get the impression, from the scant sources available, that at this point all those involved considered themselves such, as I will elaborate upon shortly.

which he declined. It was only after this option did not work out that they opted for Dry Valley—or so the story goes.²⁴

There may be some truth to this legend, though it may have been more the work of one of Ogden's associates. For while it is unknown whether Ogden visited San Juan County before late September 1930, an associate of hers, Bentley H. Jackson,²⁵ was in the area at least by mid-August, filing mining claims, securing land titles, and also, apparently, trying to secure options on the Scorup-Sommerville cattle ranch, the largest in the area. He was successful in the former ventures—mining claims and land deeds—but his business with the Scorup-Sommerville cattle company did not pan out.²⁶

The local newspaper, the *San Juan Record*, took notice of Jackson's activities in the county before anyone seemed to notice Ogden or realize anything of her religious plans for the area. On August 31, 1933, the paper noted the lease of the local "Golden Dream" mine and several thousand acres of placer claims to "a group of Montana and Idaho men" (Colorado was also mentioned in subsequent reports). Jackson, himself from Denver, signed the deeds and was soon recognized as the head of the operation. The paper followed developments of the mining operation with enthusiasm. On October 26 the paper reported that between the three mining camps associated with Jackson and the Dream Mine, about 100 new residents—"men, women,

²⁴ See David Lavendar, *One Man's West* (1943; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 161-64. Lavendar recounts his encounter with a Home of Truth member as well as Marie Ogden, who he calls "a charming woman to talk to," though he also makes it clear that the above information comes from locals—"the story as local residents tell it"—and that he "do[es] not pretend to understand the colonists' viewpoint" (162).

²⁵ I do not know how or when Ogden first became associated with Jackson. The first mention of Jackson in the *SJR*, in connection with his negotiated purchase of mining claims, identifies him as "reported to be from New Jersey." "Big Development is Seen in Placer and Lode Mining," *SJR*, August 17, 1933, 5.

²⁶ The rumored sale of the Scorup land and cattle to "eastern men" was reported in the *San Juan Record* on August 17 and 31, 1933, but the story was corrected the following week, on August 31, after Scorup indicated that he had not given any options on the land or cattle. This may be evidence of Jackson's attempted purchase, reported elsewhere. See *SJR*, August 31, September 7, and October 12, 1933.

and children”—had moved into the area.²⁷ No mention was made of the group’s religious beliefs; it appears to have been initially viewed by local residents as a mining enterprise headed up by Jackson.

On November 2, 1933, however, the *Record* reported that Jackson returned his lease on the Dream Mine, “due to some alterations among the stock holders of the company which he represented,” and that he “resigned as their engineer.” Later that month he sold out the rest of his recently acquired claims to Marie Ogden, and the group was identified as “the Ogden Colony of Miners.” It was not until January of the next year (1934) that Marie Ogden was recognized by the paper as “head of the religious colony in this county.”²⁸

Thus, when Marie Ogden and her “faithful friend” Mary Cameron arrived in San Juan County in late September 1933, there were already several Truth Seekers in the area ahead of them in search of gold and other profitable minerals. When they arrived at the Mountain Top Mining Camp, they found a group of eighteen hard at work, the men building a community kitchen and the women cooking. After two days at the camp, Ogden left Cameron and returned to Dry Valley. Ogden and Cameron had apparently already set up a tent and some personal belongings at Church Rock—a massive sandstone formation just east of the main road, marking the entrance to the valley—and another tent a few miles to the west—further “inland”—in Dry Valley, where water was apparently available. Another unnamed follower—probably Clifford Naden—had arrived there in Dry Valley a few days prior. It was at that point, identified then as the “CHURCH ROCK LOCATION,” that Ogden established her headquarters. As newcomers

²⁷ “Mining Continues on Dream Property; 100 Men, Women and Children Move In,” *SJR*, October 26, 1933, 1.

²⁸ *SJR*, November 2, 23, 1933; January 25, 1934.

arrived she took them to the Mountain Top Mining Camp, because of the ample water supply and the larger group waiting there.²⁹ Eventually wells were dug at the Dry Valley settlement and it became the focal point of future development.

Thus, as it began, the Home of Truth settlement originally consisted of a “headquarters” at Dry Valley and an “outpost” mining camp, known to locals as Camp Jackson but to Ogden as the Mountain Top Mining Camp, in the nearby Abajo Mountains. There soon developed two other short-lived mining outposts lower down at Doosit Creek and one near Recapture Wash, near Blanding. There seems to have been a disagreement over these arrangements, however, initially between Ogden and Jackson, that resulted in the severance of many of those located at these lower camps. The Mountain Mining Camp, however, and a temporary lumber camp in the Abajos—known to locals as the Blues—remained outposts of the community for the first several years. Ogden also purchased the Young’s Theatre in Monticello, intending to use it as a meeting place and later as a trading post, though it seems to have mainly been used for music lessons given by community members to local students. Ogden also eventually purchased a tract of farmland near Monticello, after farming efforts in Dry Valley largely failed.³⁰ The Home of Truth, accordingly, consisted of a central valley settlement and at least three different “outposts” at various times.

The group may not have immediately identified themselves as the Home of Truth upon arrival in Dry Valley. They appear to have continued to go by the name of the Newark meditation group, the School of Truth, until that name “resolved” into Home of Truth. Ogden announced this change in the June 7, 1934, edition of the *San Juan Record*, nine months after

²⁹ Ogden, “Special Activities,” *SJR*, December 10, 1936, 4.

³⁰ Ogden, “Home of Truth Activities,” *SJR*, April 1, 1937, 1; Lee Bennett, “Marie Ogden’s Monticello Garden,” *Blue Mountain Shadows* 28 (Spring 2003): 65-71.

they had arrived in the county. After explaining that the name School of Truth—*school* being defined as “a place of instruction”—had allowed them “much freedom to delve into many channels, and to discover many ways of expressing in our daily methods of living that which we learned,” she offered ruminations on the definition of the word *home*:

The dictionary analyzes the word as “one’s dwelling place” or “the abiding place of the affections” and since we mean to give expression to the highest form of LOVE, known as SPIRITUAL or UNIVERSAL LOVE, we shall resolve the former word SCHOOL into HOME and we shall therefore call our present place of abode, and also our meeting place in Monticello, the “HOME OF TRUTH.”³¹

The Dry Valley settlement quickly expanded and was divided into three settlements. In most retellings today, these sections are logically referred to as the Outer Portal, the Middle Portal, and the Inner Portal. That is not quite how Ogden and her followers identified the settlements, however—at least not in their earliest descriptions. What locals now generally refer to as the Inner Portal, where Marie Ogden’s home was located, was originally referred to by Ogden and her followers as the Outer Portal, or “Outer Portal Gateway,” called this because of the “peculiar [*sic*] natural arrangement of the land which forms itself into a ‘gateway’ known as Photograph Gap.” The Middle Portal was generally simply referred to as the “middle section” and the so-called Outer Portal was labeled “The Outermost Point.”³² These sections were

³¹ Ogden, “Our Corner,” *SJR*, June 7, 1934, 4. Ogden also stated of the name: “We aim to make of the place we shall call OUR HOME such habitation as will exemplify the highest form of Truth we know how to express.” The name Home of Truth was already used by a New Thought religious organization founded by Annie Rix-Militz in 1887. While I have not found any direct evidence that Ogden was familiar with Militz’s movement, similarities in their teachings suggest she may have been aware of Militz’s Home of Truth.

³² Ogden, “The Origin of the Home of Truth Colony,” *SJR*, December 10, 1936, 1, 4; Daisy Naden, “The Outermost Point,” *SJR*, December 17, 1936, 1.

sometimes collectively referred to by community members as “the portals,” which may have led to the later construction.³³

The comings and goings and community development for the first nine months are difficult to document, due to the paucity of sources. In May of 1934, however, a certain development took place that makes the movement much easier to document. On the front cover of the *San Juan Record* for May 10, 1934, Marie Ogden announced her new ownership of the paper.³⁴ On June 21, a new column was started, titled “Dry Valley News,” which documented many of the arrivals and happenings in the Home of Truth colony, and later a column titled “Special Activities of the Home of Truth” retold some of the earlier history of the settlement.

In retrospect, Home of Truth members can be divided into four general categories: (1) those who came into the community early on but fell away and left the community either before or during the trying events of 1935-37 (which will be dealt with in chapter 3); (2) those who endured that difficult period, becoming the “charter members” of the Home of Truth; (3) those who came after 1937, some staying on and some drifting away; and finally, (4) those who became “Judases” by betraying the group.

To provide an idea of what community members and life in the community were like, I will give brief sketches of the involvement of a few members who fit, more or less, into category (1). Those in the other categories will be discussed in chapter 3.

³³ It is of course also possible that community members themselves used the Outer, Middle, Inner terminology, though I have not found this in any of their writings.

³⁴ See also “Religious Cult Head buys San Juan Paper,” *Times Independent* [Moab, Utah], May 10, 1934, 5; and J. Cecil Alter, *Early Utah Journalism* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1938), 125-26. According to Alter, the paper had apparently either defaulted or had been resold to the Monticello State Bank three times in the past thirteen years.

The Gamblings, a family of nine from Boise, Idaho, were among the first of the colonists to settle. Robert C. Gambling, the father, age 47, had previously been involved in dairy farming and had worked as a lens grinder in an optical clinic.³⁵ He and his oldest son Howard, age 18, included their signatures on the mining claims filed in August 1933, and each accordingly had a claim named after them: Gambling no. 1 and Gambling no. 2. The family lived in Blanding, south of Monticello, while a home was being constructed for them in Dry Valley.³⁶ It does not appear that they ever took up residence in Dry Valley, however.³⁷ By July of 1935 two of the Gambling sons had moved to California in search of work, and the rest of the family returned to their home in Boise in June 1936.³⁸

Former nurseryman Ray O. Bush and his family of four—Edith, Ray Jr., and Bobby—arrived in San Juan County on September 16, 1933, from Twin Falls, Idaho, and took up residence at the Mountain Top Mining Camp. Ray had apparently had some reservations about joining the community, but, as one of the community editors reported, after a “five day fight with himself” he chose to “give up a good position and salary in the outer world” and to “give all and join the work here wholeheartedly.” Bush considered the Home of Truth “a preparatory place in

³⁵ In the 1930 U.S. Federal Census for Whitney, Ada, Idaho, Robert C. Gambling was listed as a dairy farmer. His WWI Civilian Draft Registration card, dated 1918, listed his occupation as a lens grinder at Globe Optical in Boise, Idaho, and the 1920 U.S. Federal Census for Boise, Ada, Idaho, listed his occupation as “optician.” Censuses are available at Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com/> (accessed August 11, 2009).

³⁶ See “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, May 31, July 19, August 9, 1934.

³⁷ If they did, it was only for a brief time and they were back in Blanding by at least November 1935 and probably before that; Gambling family members were frequently mentioned in the Blanding section of the *SJR* at this time. See, for example, *SJR*, July 4, November 7, 1935.

³⁸ See Blanding section of *SJR*, July 11, 1935; May 21, June 4, 1936. Robert Gambling appears to have made a trip to Boise before this point, perhaps to work out living arrangements; the June 4 article indicates that he came from Idaho with his son at this time and returned with his family. Their decision not to settle in Dry Valley and their departure in 1936 may have been related to the death of Edith Peshak and events surrounding it (see chapter 3).

which to build ones forces toward a future and much higher form of spiritual development.” He further expressed his “absolute faith that all Messages were given to the Recorder [Marie Ogden] directly from the Master, Jesus the Christ, or relayed through his inspiration.”³⁹

The Bush family spent the following two years at the Mountain Top mining camp, enduring harsh winters, though with frequent trips to Dry Valley and with frequent visitations from Marie Ogden and other community members. By the fall of 1935 they had completed about 400 feet of tunnel in the lode mine they were leasing. They were then allowed to spend the following winter in Dry Valley and returned to the Mountain Top in the spring of 1936 to work their own claim. Having apparently had enough of the cold weather, they spent that winter at a lower-elevation placer ground claim in Doosit Creek, south of Blanding. When the opportunity arose in 1936 for Bush to relate his family’s experience in writing, after three years in the community, he stated that “he and his family have been very happy in their work.”⁴⁰ Two years later, however, things had changed. Ray Bush Jr. was living in Salt Lake City and his parents, though still in San Juan County and engaged in mining, do not appear to have been involved in the Home of Truth anymore. A year later they were in Durango, Colorado. By 1942 Ray Jr. had been drafted into WWII and his parents were living in Sun Valley, Idaho, working for the Union Pacific Railroad. In 1944, Marie made mention of Ray Bush’s passing and noted his former activities in the Home of Truth. Ray Jr. was at the time, she also noted, “somewhere in Africa” while Bobby was in a training camp in the East and Edith was living in Twin Falls.⁴¹

³⁹ “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, November 1, 1934, 4. Ray Bush’s occupation was listed as “nurseryman” in the 1930 United States Federal Census. He and Edith, according to census estimates, would have been 42 years old in 1933, Ray Jr. 15, and Robert Lee (Bobby) 9.

⁴⁰ Ray O. Bush, “Mining Activities of the Home of Truth,” *SJR*, November 19, 1936, 1.

⁴¹ See Local News section of *SJR*, June 2, 1938; January 26, 1939; December 24, 1942; and Ogden, “Home of Truth,” January 20, 1944, 5.

One of the more prominent early members of the Home of Truth was Harry Dana Abbott. He was a part of the community when the “Dry Valley News” column began in June of 1934. At that time he was residing with his family—his wife Rose Abbott and stepchildren, Vernita and Justin Greed—in a home at the Outer Portal. Each Thursday evening he held a meeting in his home where participants discussed various topics—generally using Ogden’s Messages as curriculum—with Abbott leading the discussion and giving explanatory readings.⁴² Sunday meetings were occasionally held in his home as well.⁴³ In July of 1934 Abbott was appointed as the acting editor of the *San Juan Record*. He continued to lead weekly meetings in addition to performing his editorial duties until October or November of that year, when editorial work detained him and others frequently substituted for him at the weekly study meetings.⁴⁴ He seems to have expanded his editorial output about this time, which became increasingly political—critical of the present administration and promoting his ideas for a “new order”—and spent most of his time in Monticello, apparently living there (probably in the printing office).⁴⁵

When the first issue of 1935 was published Abbott had chosen to withdraw his name from print as acting editor, though he continued in that capacity, with the assistance of local resident Elwyn Blake.⁴⁶ On May 9, 1935, Abbott’s position was demoted from “acting editor” to

⁴² See, for example, “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, July 26, August 2, 9, 23, September 13, 20, 1934, and throughout.

⁴³ “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, September 13, 1934, 4.

⁴⁴ See “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, November 8, December 13, 1934, 4.

⁴⁵ See “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, November 29, December 6, 27, 1934; January 17, 1935, 4. In the spring of 1935 Abbott appears to have been a fairly regular participant and lecturer for the local *Entre Nous* club. See the Society section of *SJR*, February 7 and March 8, 1935.

⁴⁶ In “Our Corner,” of *SJR*, March 14, 1935, Marie Ogden specified which columns she wrote and what material Abbott was responsible for. She mentioned his desire not to have his name printed any longer. He apparently spent the week in Monticello and weekends in Dry Valley, where he prepared the monthly newsletter and

that of “staff writer,” along with Elwyn Blake, Aletheia Chamberlain, and Ernest Palmer, each of whom had been writing columns all along without recognition. He also returned to his home at the Outer Portal to continue his editorial duties there as well as resume other unspecified “duties.”⁴⁷ On July 18 of that year, however, Abbott’s name was no longer included among the staff writers.

Then in May of 1936, Harry and his wife Rose were placed under arrest and faced with charges of assault and battery against Rose’s 14-year-old daughter Vernita.⁴⁸ After that Harry’s name disappears from the columns of the *San Juan Record*. Rose and her children, however, stayed in the area. At some point (perhaps even before Harry disappeared) they had moved to Monticello. In February of 1938 they moved into (former?) Home of Truth member Elva Sprague’s home in Monticello.⁴⁹ Rose was employed at that time as the Monticello representative for a tailoring and cleaning company in Moab.⁵⁰ She eventually moved to Moab and then to California to live with her daughter, Vernita, though she made return visits to Moab.⁵¹ Her son Justin was drafted into the military during WWII and became a part of the U.S. Army engineers.⁵²

other mimeographed material. Ogden also mentions unspecified “changes in our ‘family relationships’” that had occurred over the past few months, which had impacted all members, causing them to “work ‘over time.’” Presumably she is referring to his position as acting editor for the paper.

⁴⁷ “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, May 9, 1935, 4.

⁴⁸ “Couple Held For Assault & Battery,” *SJR*, May 28, 1; see also Monticello section of Moab’s *Times Independent*, May 28, 1936, 8.

⁴⁹ “Local News,” *SJR*, February 24, 1938, 16.

⁵⁰ Advertisements for Moab Tailoring and Cleaning Co., listing Mrs. Rose Abbott as Monticello representative, appear frequently in the *SJR* after February 10, 1938.

⁵¹ Rose Abbott, sometime by her maiden name, Rose Greed, was frequently mentioned in the Local News section of the Moab *Times Independent*; see for example December 9, 1948, and throughout.

⁵² “With Our Boys in the Service,” Moab *Times Independent*, June 10 and 17, 1943; Ogden, “Home of Truth,” *SJR*, March 20, 1944, 5.

Elva Sprague, a divorced fifty-five-year-old piano teacher from Chicago, joined the community in June of 1934. Her daughter, Ava S. Turcot, age 25 and apparently recently separated from her husband (though they got back together later), joined her in September of the same year.⁵³ Elva became the community's music director, providing music for their meetings and instruction for the children of the community.⁵⁴ Before long her talent spread beyond Dry Valley to the local communities of Monticello and Blanding. By October of that year advertisements began appearing in the *San Juan Record* for Sprague's piano and voice lessons, which she initially gave on Tuesdays in Monticello. Payment for the lessons, "accepted in cash or trade," presumably went into community funds, as that seems to have been the community policy.⁵⁵

Elva spent her first nine and a half months living in a tent before moving on March 31, 1935, into a cabin built for her at the middle section. She was surprised and delighted to find an upright piano waiting for her when she moved in.⁵⁶ Due to her musical talent and her voice and piano lessons, Sprague was perhaps more involved in the local communities than most other Home of Truth members. For example, she and Ava performed at an annual Old Folks Banquet

⁵³ In the 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Elva S. and Ava E. Sprague were listed as "roomers" in Ward 1 in Racine, Wisconsin. Ava, age 42 and divorced (she had married at age 29), was listed as a pianist and Ava, 11, as a cook. By 1930 Elva ran her own piano teaching business and Ava was a saleslady in a music store, both living in Chicago (1930 U.S. Federal Census for Chicago, Cook, Illinois; Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com/> [accessed August 11, 2009]). On October 28, 1930, Ava Eloise Sprague married Newton Turcot, a clerk in a stock brokerage (see Cook County, Illinois Marriage Index, 1930-1960; and 1930 U.S. Federal Census for Chicago, Cook, IL, at Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com/> [accessed August 11, 2009]). They were apparently separated at the time Ava joined her mother in Utah. Ava came to the community with Marie Ogden, who picked her up in Memphis while returning from a trip to Chattanooga, Tennessee ("Dry Valley News," *SJR*, September 20, 1934, 4). On Elva's arrival see "Dry Valley News," *SJR*, June 21, 1934, 4.

⁵⁴ "Dry Valley News," *SJR*, July 5, 1934, 4, and throughout.

⁵⁵ *SJR*, October 11, 1934, 5, et passim.

⁵⁶ "Dry Valley News," *SJR*, April 4, 1935, 4.

held in Monticello on December 28, 1934, and before long Elva was acting as accompanist for her students' performances at local Mormon Relief Society meetings.⁵⁷ Frequent student recitals were held at LDS chapels in Monticello and Blanding and in Sprague's music studio in Monticello. As demand for lessons grew, Sprague increased their frequency and by 1936 was giving lessons in Monticello and Blanding three days per week.⁵⁸ So that she would not have to travel back and forth so much, she began staying at the home of Lucy Adams in Blanding Monday through Wednesday and used the district school building as her studio.⁵⁹

Her close involvement with the local community seems to have been what gradually drew Sprague away from the Home of Truth. In June 1937 she was inducted into the local Rebus Rota Club.⁶⁰ In September 1937 Sprague moved to Monticello, presumably to be closer to her students' lessons, and then moved again further south to Blanding in February 1938 for that same reason. In Blanding she moved into a "cosy four-room cottage" with her daughter, Ava, and her son-in-law Newton Turcot.⁶¹ She seems to have remained on good terms with Marie Ogden, who paid her occasional visits after her move to Blanding, though Ogden seems to have considered

⁵⁷ "Old Folks Party Fine Entertainment," *SJR*, January 3, 1935, 1; and the Society section of *SJR*, May 23, 1935, 5. The Relief Society is a women's organization in the Mormon Church. Elva accompanied Mildred Black, presumably one of her pupils, at this event and at a Pioneer Day celebration (also a Mormon event) held on July 24, 1935 (see "Utah Pioneer Day Celebrated Yesterday," July 25, 1935, 1). Elva held occasional recitals with her pupils in Monticello and Blanding at the LDS (Mormon) chapels (*SJR*, September 5 and 19, 1935; June 4, 1936) and at other community functions, such as local PTA meetings (*SJR*, January 9 and 16 and April 23, 1936) and a Rebus Rota flower show (*SJR*, September 19, 1935, 1); Sprague was later a special guest of this society and was inducted as a member in June 1937 (see *SJR*, June 3 and 17, 1937, 1). She also held recitals at her studio in Monticello (*SJR*, August 13, 1936). Elva donated "a number" of books to the local library, for which she was recognized (*SJR*, May 28, 1936).

⁵⁸ "Piano and Vocal Recital," *SJR*, August 27, 1936, 1.

⁵⁹ "Blanding News," *SJR*, June 24, 1937, 8.

⁶⁰ "Rebus Rota Club Selects New Committees," *SJR*, June 17, 1937, 1. Sprague is mentioned in social settings with a local Dr. I. M. Cohn several times, either at her or his home (see *SJR*, May 6, 1937, 8; March 13, 1941, 9).

⁶¹ *SJR*, September 9, 1937; February 24, 1938.

her as a former member at this point.⁶² In 1941 she moved back to Chicago to live with her daughter, who had apparently preceded her, and then back West in 1944 to Twin Falls, Idaho.⁶³

These are just a few examples of several that could be given. All told, between the time Bentley Jackson drew off a segment of his initial mining crew in the fall of 1933, who did not seem to have any real commitment to the Home of Truth, and the conclusion of the events of 1935-37, I have been able to identify at least fifty members of the Home of Truth. And as we will see in chapter 3, there were more to follow. But before we move on to the trying events of 1935-37, it is necessary to back up in order to put the story in context, to back up beyond the worlds of Marie Ogden and William Dudley Pelley to the trans-Atlantic world of metaphysical religion and Western esotericism—the larger intellectual milieu of which Marie Ogden was a part. I have categorized this intellectual ferment, in chapter two, under four headings: a new race, a new age, a new order, and a new world.

⁶² “Home of Truth News,” February 15, 1940, 8; Berkeley Coryell, “Home of Truth,” *SJR*, March 13, 1941, 9.

⁶³ Ogden, “Home of Truth,” *SJR*, August 27, 1942, 8; January 20, 1944, 5.

CHAPTER 3

ALL THINGS NEW

A New Age

In accordance with Astrology and the science of Numbers, Time has a way of moving in cycles which we call “an age” and because we are now entering upon a new age and wherein an accounting of time must again be made, and a new dispensation must be ushered in, we are come to the time of many forms of adjustment.

–Marie M. Ogden, *San Juan Record*, 1937

Do you know that we are approaching a New Dispensation—the Aquarian Age; the beginning of the true Christian Era when the principles of Divine law will be universally practiced as well as preached: lived as well as taught?

– Marie M. Ogden, “Metaphysical Truths,” 1934

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

– W. B. Yeats, “The Second Coming,” 1919

With the advent of the rock opera *Hair*, American popular culture was ushered into the “Age of Aquarius.” The band Fifth Dimension carried the musical’s opening number—with its popular refrain: “It is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius”—to the top of the music charts, where it remained for six straight weeks. Thereafter in English usage, the Aquarian Age became largely synonymous with the peace-love movement of the hippie generation.¹ The conflation of the Aquarian Age with the hippie movement of the 1960s and 70s, however, obscures the Age’s much earlier provenance.

It all started much, much earlier, with precession. Though several ancient star-gazing civilizations seem to have understood the phenomenon, credit for its discovery and articulation in

¹ Jimi Hendrix, for example, in the subtitle of a recent biography, is identified as the “voodoo child of the Aquarian Age.” David Henderson, *Jimi Hendrix: Voodoo Child of the Aquarian Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1978).

the Western world typically goes to the Hellenistic-era Greek astronomer Hipparchus. Here is precession in a nutshell: the earth is not a perfect sphere; because it revolves, and because the sun and the moon tug on it, gravitationally speaking, it bulges slightly in the middle, and because it bulges slightly in the middle, it wobbles as it rotates, and because it wobbles as it rotates, the poles shift position, in relation to the heavens, ever so slightly with each and every revolutionary year. The upshot is that the vernal equinox—that site in the heavens where the celestial equator and the sun’s ecliptic intersect on that day of the year when night and day are of the exact same length—that equinoctial point is in a slightly different position on the sun’s ecliptic with each coming year. And the upshot of that is that roughly every 2,100 years or so, the equinox shifts into a new sign in the zodiac.² In astrology, each of these periods is identified as a separate “age,” identified by the zodiacal sign in which the vernal equinox is located. In Hipparchus’s day that sign would have been Aries, and hence, the Age of Aries, followed a few millennia later by the Age of Pisces, and next in line on the zodiac—Aquarius. The timing of this transition was (and is) a point of (ongoing) debate, which seems to have begun in the late nineteenth century.³

According to amateur Egyptologist and self-styled British “evolutionist” Gerald Massey, writing in 1883, the Samaritans, who were then still looking forward to the coming of their Messiah, expected that coming to occur “about the year A.D. 1910—that is, at the time the

² Approximately every 26,000 years the equinox runs the gamut of zodiacal constellations, coming full circle. Translated into astrology, this period is known as a “Great Year,” which can then be subdivided into twelve “Great Months,” each a separate astrological age of roughly 2,100 years bearing the name of the zodiacal sign in which the vernal equinox is located.

³ For more scientific explanations of precession see Mark L. Kutner, *Astronomy: A Physical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 468-69; or Dinah L. Moche, *Astronomy: A Self-Teaching Guide* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 25-26. On astrological ages see Joanna Martine Woolfolk, *The Only Astrology Book You’ll Ever Need* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 399-400.

vernal equinox enters the sign of Aquarius.”⁴ At other instances in Massey’s telling, the date varied slightly—1900 or “about the end of this [the 19th] century.”⁵ The earth was also due about this time, according to astronomical calculation—and despite the promise made to Noah—for another deluge. Accordingly, Massey presumed, quite presciently, that “from now until then there will probably be rumours and prophecies of great changes.”⁶ And there were.

Massey himself was relatively unconcerned, however, for he understood that, according to the ancient Egyptian mythos—which, Massey asserts, is where the evolutionary germs of all religious, astronomical, and any other human idea (or humans themselves, for that matter, speaking of Africa more generally) find their origin—it was not to be a literal deluge, just as there was never any *literal* “end of the world” prophesied—at least not legitimately. Rather, these things were to be taken symbolically as representations indicating the ending of one astronomical era and the beginning of a new era, during which time, according to ancient understanding, the earth was supposed to renew and regenerate itself.⁷ Thus, fear of apocalypse, Massey argued, stemmed purely from ignorance of that mythos upon which all these prophecies are mere repetitions and imitations. To make this point perfectly clear, Massey placed as the frontispiece to his 1881 publication, *The Book of Beginnings*, a reference to Mother Shipton’s

⁴ Gerald Massey, *The Natural Genesis*, 2 vols. (1883; repr. Baltimore, MD: Black Classics Press, 1998), 376-77. Massey did not mention, however, just where he obtained this information regarding the Samaritans, and I have as yet not been able to corroborate it with anything one might term evidence; but no matter—it is the date and the Aquarianness of the statement, not the bit about Samaritans, that concerns us here.

⁵ Massey, *Natural Genesis*, 175; Gerald Massey, “The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ” (pamphlet published by Hay Nisbet and Company, cir. 1887), 8; bound in *Massey’s Lectures* (n.p., n.d.). L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁶ Massey, *Natural Genesis*, 175.

⁷ One of the paradoxes in Massey is that while he iconoclastically debunks and dismisses all Christian millenarian prophecy, he seems to accept the Egyptian astronomical mythos as legitimate; yet he asserts that the “regeneration” the earth undergoes at the transition of the ages will not involve any sort of natural disturbances. He seems to understand it as purely symbolic, as a sort of time-measuring device, rather than literal, regardless of how ancient Egyptians may have viewed it.

reputed “Prophecy of the ‘End of the World’ in 1881,” explaining that, “in common with the Hebrew,” we have often misinterpreted this phrase which actually indicates “the end of an æon, age or cycle of Time...the ending of an Old World...and commencement of a New.”⁸

While Massey’s belittlement of Christian apocalyptic and millenarian prophecy gives him the air of an iconoclast, he was by no means a “materialist.” He was an ardent spiritualist who dabbled in mesmerism, clairvoyance, and other psychisms; he belonged to the Most Ancient Order of Druids; and he was influenced by close friends who were also Theosophists.⁹ And that last-mentioned influence seems to have been mutual: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Theosophy’s founder herself, in fact, declared herself an admirer.¹⁰ Thus, Massey may have influenced, may even be responsible for, the place the Aquarian Age would soon take in Theosophical circles.¹¹ And he was quite certain that the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth marked this transition into this new astronomical era. He suggested, in fact, that since the traditional timing

⁸ The natural phenomenon that led to Shipton’s false conclusion, Massey suggests, was a “rare lunar and planetary conjunction which occurred on the 3rd of March.” Gerald Massey, *The Book of Beginnings* (1881; repr. Baltimore, MD: Black Classics Press, 1995). Ursula Southeil, popularly known as Mother Shipton, is a legendary (though possibly real) sixteenth-century prophetess to whom, in later centuries, numerous prophecies were attributed. One of the most popular, passed on through folklore and alluded to here, was captured in the couplet, “The world to an end shall come, / in eighteen hundred and eighty-one.” See “Shipton, Mother,” in *Encyclopedia of Prophecy*, ed. Geoffrey Ashe (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO), 228-29.

⁹ See “Chronology of Massey’s Life,” at Masseuriana [website], <http://www.masseiana.org/chron.html> (accessed August 11, 2009).

¹⁰ H.P.B. [Helena Petrovna Blavatsky] to Gerald Massey, November 2, 1887, published in *The Agnostic Journal* (October 3, 1891): 214.

¹¹ The British poet William Butler Yeats, one-time Theosophist and member of the Golden Dawn (who, like Massey, also had druidic interests), developed a view of history, based on his occult studies, that consisted of gyrating positive and negative astrological cycles. Yeats’s well-known poem, “The Second Coming,” from which I quote at the beginning of the chapter, encapsulates this idea. See James Pethica, ed., *Yeats’s Poetry, Drama, and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 76. In 1896 he wrote to his friend and fellow Theosophist George Russell (pseudonym AE), who was also president of the Dublin Astrological Society, and expressed his belief that a new cycle was about to begin and that they were a part of it. Russell concurred: “I agree with you that we belong to the new cycle. The sun passes from Pisces into Aquarius in a few years. Pisces is phallic in its influence. The waterman is spiritual so the inward turning souls will catch the first rays of the new Aeon.” Richard Ellman, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 124; George Mills Harper, ed. *Yeats and the Occult* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), 106.

for Christ's birth was based in error anyway—255 B.C. was the actual birth date of the historical person onto whom the Christ myth was later grafted—causing our calendars to go askew, then we ought to declare 1901 the first “year of the Waterman [Aquarius],” bringing our measure of time once more into sync with the stars and based in astronomical science.¹²

Perhaps nothing else did as much to facilitate popular consciousness of the Aquarian Age—before *Hair*, that is—than *The Aquarian Gospel*, channeled by Levi Dowling and published in 1907. Religious historian John Benedict Buescher has speculated that it may have been the writings of Gerald Massey that first introduced Dowling to the idea of the Aquarian Age, and the idea that the Piscean Age was the Christian era.¹³ Dowling claimed a much higher source; or perhaps diffuse is a better descriptive for his source—diffuse and esoteric. It is the “Akashic Record” to which I am referring, from the Sanskrit word *akasha*, meaning, as Dowling interpreted it, “primary substance.” As Levi's wife Eva explained in her forward to Dowling's posthumously published gospel, after forty years spent in study and silent meditation, Levi “found himself in that stage of spiritual consciousness that permitted him to enter the domain of these superfine ethers and become familiar with their mysteries.” The idea is that the “finer ethers” were “in some manner...sensitized plates on which sounds, even thoughts, were recorded.” To discern any portion of these ethers was to “read” the Akashic records. The *Aquarian Gospel* then was simply a transcription of Levi's reading of the Akashic record,

¹² Massey, *Natural Genesis*, 488.

¹³ John Benedict Buescher, “Aquarian Evangelist: The Age of Aquarius as it Dawned in the Mind of Levi Dowling,” *Theosophical History Occasional Papers* 11 (2008): 30. As Buescher has shown, Dowling was heavily involved in Theosophy, astrology, and holistic medicine.

“transcribed [apparently by Eva] between the early morning hours of two and six—the absolutely ‘quiet hours’.”¹⁴

The Dowlings’ understanding of precession, at least as explained in Eva’s introduction, varies a bit from most astronomy, which focuses on this solar system. In Eva’s telling “our sun and his family of planets revolve around a central sun” and the orbit of our solar system—sun included—around this central sun is called the Zodiac. This larger Zodiac is also divided into twelve signs and the entire orbit, similarly, takes 26,000 years, with each Age or Dispensation consisting of a little over 2,100 years. History can be measured and understood accordingly: the historic Adam heralded the Taurian Age, Abraham the Arian Age, and Jesus the Piscean Age, which began around the time of the rise of the Roman Empire.¹⁵ The Dowlings interpreted their own time—the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century—to be one of transition. “The human race is today standing upon the cusp of the Piscean-Aquarian Ages,” Eva wrote. “The Aquarian Age is pre-eminently a spiritual age, and the spiritual side of the great lessons that Jesus gave to the world may now be comprehended by multitudes of people for the many are now coming into an advanced stage of spiritual consciousness.”¹⁶

Aside from Marie Ogden’s own recordings, the *Aquarian Gospel* formed the central canon of the Home of Truth, read from in most of their worship services and quoted frequently in

¹⁴ Levi [Dowling], *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ: The Philosophic and Practical Basis of the Religion of the Aquarian Age of the World and of the Church Universal* (London and Los Angeles: L. N. Fowler and Company, 1925), 3, 10-11. It may have been her familiarity with the *Aquarian Gospel*, introduction included, that at least in part influenced Ogden’s practice of arising early to receive her guidance.

¹⁵ [Dowling], *Aquarian Gospel*, 5.

¹⁶ [Dowling], *Aquarian Gospel*, 6.

Ogden's writings. Her personal copy is exceedingly marked up and is cross-referenced in the margins, in pencil notation, with her own "messages."¹⁷

A New Race

For many and many a century, nay, even for millennia, the slow course of evolution goes on quietly without much observation, and then suddenly comes a change—a change of a dying and a birthing race, a transition stage, a transition age in which all movement is rapid, in which catastrophes are frequent, in which sudden changes make themselves felt, in which men grow in a year more than their forefathers grew in perhaps a century. In such a transition age the world is standing at the present time.

—Annie Besant, *The Changing World*, 1910

Mr. Tawney, who has a work of his own in Grand Junction, feels that the work here is the beginning of great centre of learning for the instruction of a new race of people: that meantime, it is a school for the training of leaders and teachers and has great possibilities of growth. We greatly enjoyed his visit here.

—Aletheia Chamberlain, Home of Truth Member, "Dry Valley News," 1934

Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton charged the Victorian imagination with the publication of his 1871 novel *The Coming Race*. It relates the observations of an unnamed narrator who descended into a mine cavern and discovered there, deep in the bowels of the earth, a perfect utopia inhabited by a race of beings far superior to humans: the Vril-ya. They had once been human, apparently, but their ancestors were forced underground at the time of a great flood—most likely one predating the Noachian deluge (but they were not exactly sure). As a result of the struggles they endured, they became highly evolved—those who survived (read: were naturally selected), that is—attaining, among other traits, a specialized nerve in their hands that allowed them to

¹⁷ Ogden's personal copy of the *Aquarian Gospel* is included with her diary in a display case at the Monticello Visitors' Center, Monticello, Utah.

control an occult force that permeates all space, known as *vril*.¹⁸ Through manipulation of this ethereal element, or energy, they were able to illuminate their cavernous home. They also could wield the force to destroy and to heal, to influence thought among lesser species, and to manipulate inanimate matter.

Though they lived in perfect peace, harmony, and technological splendor in their subterranean home, a legend existed among them, recorded in their ancient books and still popularly believed by some, that some day they would emerge from their cavernous abode into the upper world where they would “supplant all the inferior races now existing therein.”¹⁹ The human race was about to be displaced—naturally unselected—by a superior “coming race.”

Though the novel was intended as fiction, it would be taken quite seriously—even literally, in some ways—by Theosophists.²⁰ Madame Blavatsky did not shy away from referencing Bulwer-Lytton’s *vril* in her *Secret Doctrine*, recognizing that, though the name was fictitious, “the Force itself is a fact,” and one that was well known in India.²¹ Blavatsky did not

¹⁸ This could of course be compared to the luminiferous ether, a subject that so preoccupied nineteenth-century scientific thought, and to James Clerk Maxwell’s unified field theory of electromagnetism, which was based on Michael Faraday’s then-recent experimentation (see Mendel Sachs, *Concepts of Modern Physics: The Haifa Lectures* [London: Imperial College Press, 2007], 32-36), as well as to the “ethereal oxygen” of Dr. Robert Lewins, a comparison Lytton himself draws. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* (New York: Freeddeeds Library, 1972), 76. The novel was originally published as *The Coming Race*.

¹⁹ Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*, 106.

²⁰ S. B. Liljegren has shown how Madame Blavatsky was influenced by Bulwer-Lytton’s works—in particular *The Coming Race* but also *Zanoni* and other novels—in her construction of *Isis Unveiled*. S. B. Liljegren, *Bulwer-Lytton’s Novels and Isis Unveiled* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). Indeed, Bulwer-Lytton, as an English Rosicrucian and thus a bit of an esotericist/occultist himself, may well have intended it to be taken quite seriously, as an imaginative critique on the social and scientific propensities that might be available to humans through the development of the occult sciences. His novel also spawned a succession of hollow earth theories, influenced Nazi ideology, and has been referred to as the first science fiction novel. See David Seed’s introduction to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*, ed. David Seed (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), xlii.

²¹ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 2 vols. (1888; repr. Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1970), I:563. Blavatsky identified this force as a “vibratory Force” and as a “terrible sidereal Force” known anciently to Atlanteans as MASH-MAK and to the “Aryan Rishis in their *Ashtar Vidya* by a name that

stop at invoking vril; moving one step beyond Alfred Russel Wallace's forward-looking deductions of a future, nearly homogenous, and perfect race, attained through the principle of "survival of the fittest," Blavatsky deduced "the possibility—nay the assurance of a race, which, like the Vril-ya of Bulwer-Lytton's *Coming Race*, will be but one remove from the primitive 'Sons of God.'"²² Human beings would themselves become the "coming race." But not all humans: only the fittest (from among the Aryans) would survive.

The "fittest" in this evolution, however, were not exactly those whom one would naturally infer. This race was neither the swift nor to the strong but, ironically, to the degenerate.

Max Nordau had not quite yet published his scathing social criticism of *fin-de-siècle* culture—*Degeneration* (1892)—at the time Blavatsky was writing her *Secret Doctrine* (1888), but the ideas he synthesized largely preceded him. Before Darwinian evolution and its spawn, social Darwinism, came to dominate European thought, French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, had put forth the idea that species degenerated, becoming weaker, when confronted with harsh environments. By the late nineteenth century, this idea of degeneration had taken on a cultural dimension. The prevalence of crime and alcoholism and the perception that madness, disease, and nervous disorders were increasing in European society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led many to believe that Western civilization was in

we do not like to give" and she equated it with contemporary ether theory, particularly as expounded by John W. Keely (*Secret Doctrine*, 562-3).

²² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (1877; repr. Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1972), 296. Alfred Russel Wallace, identified by one biographer as "the heretic in Darwin's court," was the co-creator of the theory of natural selection, contemporaneous with Charles Darwin. See Ross A. Slotten, *The Heretic in Darwin's Court: The Life of Alfred Russel Wallace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). In her final comment in this passage, Blavatsky alludes to a passage in the biblical book of Genesis (6:2, 4) that refers to the "sons of God" marrying the "daughters of men."

decline.²³ In 1892, Nordau identified modernist artists, writers, and philosophers such as Oscar Wilde, Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, and Friedrich Nietzsche as evidence of decadence and moral degeneration among the upper class as well as among the poor. He reserved the largest section of his critique, however, for mysticism. If modern literature betokened decadence, mysticism was the preeminent characteristic of degeneration.²⁴

Theosophists, perhaps feeling a bit stung, turned Nordau's critique on its head. Annie Besant, Blavatsky's successor in the Theosophical Society, seems to have been well aware of Nordau's critique—or the general attitude his critique represented. “If you look around you at the present time [London, 1909], what is one of the marks of the bodies in the most advanced races of the earth? Nervous troubles of every kind, and most marked among the highly developed.” Thus, Besant seemed to accept degeneration theory at face value, as a given—“It is needless to turn your attention to that; everyone knows it”—even as she maintained the idea of Aryan supremacy (the “most advanced races” she referred to). To Besant, however—viewing the world through eyes bestowed by Blavatsky—this “instability, this “degeneration,” was a “mark of progress,” for it revealed that an evolutionary change was taking place among a segment of the Aryan race through which they were developing new, finely tuned nervous systems—a development not unlike that Bulwer-Lytton's *Vril-ya* experienced. “When there is going to be a variation which will start a new evolutionary type,” Besant explained, “it is always noted that

²³ This idea reached its fullest expression with the publication of Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West [Der Untergang des Abendlandes]*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1926-28).

²⁴ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895).

those out of whom the variation grows are what is called unstable.” These were the germs of the “Coming Race.”²⁵ Degeneration was, in fact, a sort of regeneration.

Besant understood her times in light of a Theosophical worldview bestowed upon her by Madame Blavatsky. Engaged in Socialist reform activism before their propitious introduction, Besant could not shake the nagging feeling that something was missing, that her “philosophy was not sufficient” and “something more than I had was needed.” That “something more” was discovered when, after some initial forays into the occult, she was introduced to Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*—which she reviewed for a journal—and was subsequently introduced to Blavatsky herself.²⁶ Blavatsky’s racial and evolutionary worldview gave her a framework through which to make sense of her crumbling world.

In *The Secret Doctrine* Blavatsky divided human history and anthropology into seven successive periods, each characterized by a separate root-race centered on a separate continent. The first and second root-races were ethereal and self-created, reproducing asexually. It was not until the third root-race, the Lemurians of the lost continent Lemuria, that humankind’s ancestors—though still not quite human—separated into two sexes and descended into material bodies. Eventually Lemuria was inundated by cataclysm and deluge as the Lemurians were gradually succeeded by Atlanteans, who in turn met a similar fate, being succeeded by the fifth and currently dominating root-race, the Aryans.²⁷

²⁵ Annie Besant, *The Changing World* (Chicago: The Theosophical Book Concern; London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1910), 120-21. This book consists of fifteen lectures delivered in London during May, June, and July 1909. Five thousand copies were printed in 1909 and 4,500 in 1910.

²⁶ *Annie Besant: An Autobiography*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), 338-40.

²⁷ See Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243.

Each root-race could be subdivided into seven sub-races. The Aryan root-race, for example, was said to have begun in India with the first sub-race, which then branched into the Mediterranean basin, forming another root-race, and successively into Persia, Greece and Rome, Europe, Britain, and on to America. The contemporary world of Blavatsky and Besant had evolved up to the fifth sub-race—Teutonic—of the fifth root-race, Aryan. The sixth sub-race was at the moment in process of emergence in America, and it was from this sixth sub-race of the Aryan race that the sixth root-race—the “Coming Race”—would emerge.²⁸

Each of these successive root-races was characterized by a dominant trait that both typified the race and marked its evolutionary development. The Lemurian, the third-root race, represented animal-man; the fourth, the Atlanteans, represented the passional, or savage-man; and the fifth, the Aryan race, the intellectual man. It was during the fifth root-race, dominated by intellect, that humans largely lost the lower form of psychism they had previously possessed, which can be observed in animals as instinct or in some inferior humans as an undeveloped sort of intuition. It was this lower form of psychism that was beginning to be exhibited among the so-called “degenerate” of the fifth-subrace—spiritualists and neophyte occultists. This psychic ability would become even more pronounced and honed among the sixth sub-race, currently emerging, and would evolve into the higher psychism of the spiritual-man that would characterize the coming, sixth root-race. Intellect was being replaced by a deeper and more

²⁸ Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 243; Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II:446; Annie Besant, *Evolution and Man's Destiny*, ed. Olive Stevenson-Howell (Bedford, Eng.: Theosophical Society in England, 1924), 124-25. There would also be a seventh sub-race of the Aryan root-race who would carry that civilization to its zenith. They, with the rest of the Aryan race, however, would become extinct, as the new, sixth root-race emerged from among the sixth sub-race of the fifth root-race. As Besant explained elsewhere, “each new Mother-Race [root-race] is chosen from the sub-race of its predecessor that bears the numerical number of the coming type.” Besant, *The Theosophist* 48, no. 7 (April 1927): 6e.

highly evolved form of intuition or spirituality—the higher psychism.²⁹ The degenerate evolve, in other words, and the gods arrive.

On the North American continent, Canadian psychiatrist (they were also called alienists in those days) Richard Bucke developed a similar evolutionary theory, which he outlined in his book *Cosmic Consciousness*, published in 1901. The work suggests that mankind was on the threshold of a great evolutionary change—a stepping up of human awareness to a new plane: cosmic consciousness. Mankind, Bucke explained, had progressed, and was then progressing, through three general stages or “grades of consciousness.”³⁰ The first, simple consciousness, was shared with the “upper half of the animal kingdom” and was simply that somatic awareness of one’s own body as being discrete from other bodies, i.e., rocks, trees, other animals.³¹ “Self Consciousness,” however, is unique to human beings. It is humankind’s awareness of themselves as “a distinct entity apart from all the rest of the universe” and the ability to treat one’s own mental states as objects of contemplation. It is encapsulated in the human propensity for deliberate introspection. This capability is a trait humankind developed over time.³² “Cosmic Consciousness,” Bucke states, “is a third form which is as far above Self Consciousness as is that above Simple Consciousness.” The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness, Bucke states,

²⁹ Besant, *The Changing World*, 112-118. Elsewhere Besant stated her belief that she had observed evidence of the new race’s emergence in California, which she took as a confirmation of Blavatsky’s teachings.

³⁰ He also refers to them as “forms” of consciousness. His positing of three stages suggests resonance with and probable influence of Comtean positivism—an influence Bucke himself recognized. Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1959), 9.

³¹ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 1; S. E. D. Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy: Richard M. Bucke and the Practice of Late Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 112, described Bucke’s category of simple consciousness as “an awareness of both the environment and the somatic self.”

³² Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 1-2; Shortt, *Victorian Lunacy*, 112, points out that Bucke described Self Consciousness as an evolutionary process “largely through mechanisms explained by associationist psychology.”

“is, as the name implies, a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe.” It is brought about, or attended, by “an intellectual enlightenment or illumination which alone,” Bucke states, “would place the individual on a new plane of existence—would make him almost a member of a new species.”³³ Attending this moment and resultant state of illumination is both a heightened “moral sense” and “what may be called a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life, not a conviction that he shall have this, but the consciousness that he already has it.”³⁴

Bucke identifies several historical and contemporary individuals who had achieved such illumination of cosmic consciousness, such as Jesus the Christ, Gautama the Buddha, Mohammed, Paul, Plotinus, Francis Bacon, William Blake, Edward Carpenter, and Walt Whitman. Bucke’s interest in the topic stemmed directly from his own such experience of illumination, which occurred in England in the spring of 1872, after an evening spent with friends, reading and discussing Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Browning, and, preeminently, Whitman.³⁵

³³ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 3. One who experiences this enlightenment also attains “a state of moral exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation, and joyousness, and a quickening of the moral sense, which is fully as striking and more important to the individual and the race than is the enhanced intellectual power.”

³⁴ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 3. Further on Bucke expounded on this point: “This [cosmic] consciousness shows the cosmos to consist not of dead matter governed by unconscious, rigid, and unending law; it shows it on the contrary as entirely immaterial, entirely spiritual and entirely alive; it shows that death is an absurdity, that every one and everything has eternal life; it shows that the universe is God and that God is the universe, and that no evil ever did or ever will enter into it” (17).

³⁵ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 9-10. Bucke described (in the third person) his experience of illumination thus: “His mind, deeply under the influence of the ideas, images and emotions called up by the reading and talk of the evening was calm and peaceful. He was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around, as it were, by a flame colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire. . . . The next [instant] he knew that the light was within himself. Directly after there came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic Splendor which ever since lightened his life. Upon his heart fell one drop of the Brahmic Bliss, leaving thenceforward for always an aftertaste of Heaven” (9-10).

While select few individuals had achieved this state in the past, the time was rapidly approaching, perhaps had even arrived, when large numbers of people would experience this sort of enlightenment. “This step in evolution is even now being made,” Bucke wrote. “Men with the faculty in question are becoming more and more common and also . . . as a race we are approaching nearer and nearer to that stage of the self conscious mind from which the transition to the cosmic conscious is effected.”³⁶ Bucke identified three impending “revolutions” that would attend and facilitate the transition to cosmic consciousness. The first two were described as material, economic and social revolutions brought about by establishment of aerial navigation and by the abolishment of private ownership of property. The third revolution was to be psychical and was to have a greatly multiplied effect. “These three operating (as they will) together will literally create a new heaven and a new earth. Old things will be done away and all will become new.”³⁷

As a result of these revolutions cities would be depopulated (a theme that shows up later in Ogden’s teachings, though more cataclysmically). “Great cities will no longer have reason for being and will melt away.” Instead, people will live in the mountains and on the seashores in the summer—“building often in airy and beautiful spots, now almost or quite inaccessible”—and in the winter they will “probably dwell in communities of moderate size.” Both over-concentration and isolation will be solved. “Space will be practically annihilated, there will be no crowding together and no enforced solitude.” Organized religion, as currently constituted, would be replaced by a new form of religion that would “absolutely dominate the race.” It would not be a

³⁶ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 3-4.

³⁷ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 4. Bucke’s vision is of a piece with Bellamy’s Nationalism; he in fact identifies Socialism as that before which “crushing toil, cruel anxiety, insulting and demoralizing riches, poverty and its ills” will all fade away and “become subjects for historical novels” (5).

religion of churches, priests, forms, creeds, prayers, or any sort of “agent” or “intermediary” between the individual and God. Such would all be “permanently replaced by direct unmistakable intercourse.” Such religion cannot be compartmentalized but will “govern every minute of every day of all life.”³⁸

While the attainment of Cosmic Consciousness as described is thus largely an individual attainment, it is also a communal affair, on a cosmic, or at least global, scale. Bucke’s vision also had a premillennialist or millenarian tinge to it.³⁹ Humanity as a whole would eventually transition to this higher consciousness. But, up to his time, it had been an individual attainment, and those historical figures who had attained such illumination were so few in number they could be “accommodated all at one time in a modern drawing-room.” These were the creators of the great world religions and the creators, through religion and literature, of civilization. They are those distinguished from others by one trait: “Their spiritual eyes have been opened and they have seen.” Together they form a family, a family one joins by passing through “the new birth” and rising “to a higher spiritual plane.” And the family was growing. The great prophets and poets were the forerunners of “this new race” dawning upon mankind. Though it might take thousands of years for the change to become universal, it was occurring at an accelerated pace. Humankind’s true potential was being awakened.⁴⁰

³⁸ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 4-5.

³⁹ This evolved consciousness itself was to be the Messiah of Bucke’s envisioned millennium. “The Saviour of man is Cosmic Consciousness—in Paul’s language—the Christ. The cosmic sense (in whatever mind it appears) crushes the serpent’s head—destroys sin, shame, the sense of good and evil as contrasted one with the other, and will annihilate labor, though not human activity” (Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 6-7).

⁴⁰ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 11.

I do not know if Marie Ogden read the works of Richard Bucke, but there are clear resonances: the mystical awakening, spiritual-physical evolution, the de-population of cities, a revolution of the world order. I do not know to what extent—if any at all—she read the writings of Blavatsky or Besant, but in that case, she did not need to: their influence on modern Theosophy—Blavatsky being the primary creator of it—was so foundational that any Theosophical text will bear their imprint. Thus, the Theosophical worldview of a cyclical racial evolution, supplemented by other mystical ideas and a melding of New Thought, seem to be the major currents flowing into Marie Ogden’s formation of a new world.

A New Order

What will be the effect of the work of a group Saviour? What will be the potency emanating from the work of a group of Knowers of God, enunciating truth and banded together subjectively in the work of saving the world? What will be the result of the mission of such a band of world workers, who supplement each others efforts, reinforce each other’s message and constitute an organism through which spiritual energy can make its presence felt in the world?

Such a body of workers now exists. . . . In them is vested the spirit of construction; they are the builders of the new age. They are the new group of world servers.

—Alice Bailey, *The Next Three Years*, 1934

Marie Ogden may have considered her Home of Truth colony to be a part of Alice Bailey’s envisioned “body of workers”—this “group Saviour” banded together for the salvation of humanity. And she may have wanted Bailey to be aware of it. She in fact advertised the very pamphlet quoted from above in the *San Juan Record*, calling it an “interesting booklet,” excerpting a couple of “paragraphs of truth,” and recommending it—since it was available by

mail order—as “worth reading”: “Address your request to Mrs. Alice Bailey 11 West 42nd Street, New York City, and please mention this paper when you write.”⁴¹

Alice Bailey was a Theosophist; or, at least she had been one. She was born an Englishwoman but moved to the United States in the early twentieth century—California in particular, where, after a bitter divorce and in the midst of struggling through single-motherhood, she was introduced to Theosophy. She soon became not only a member of the Theosophical Society but editor of their periodical *The Messenger* and wife of the society’s secretary, Foster Bailey. Not long afterwards she received a visitation from a Hidden Master, whom she identified as “the Tibetan.” From this Tibetan she received clairaudient messages, which, when published, aroused controversy over their legitimacy. Accordingly, the Baileys broke with the Theosophical Society and started their own program—the Lucis Trust, which was divided into three branches: The Arcane School, dedicated to esoteric philosophy; the Men of Goodwill, dedicated to political, cultural, and interfaith initiative; and a meditation network known as Triangles.⁴²

There are two types of people in the world, Bailey taught. There are backward-looking people—by far the majority—hanging onto old ways and ancient theologies while bowing to authority rather than thinking for themselves. Of these, the more forward-thinking individuals (the other type) need not be overly concerned, for by and by “evolution itself will inevitably carry them forward into the second group of thinkers.” The second group was still in the minority, as Bailey wrote—an “inner group” composed of “lovers of God, the intellectual mystics and knowers of reality.” They were not organized into a Church, religion, or any sort of

⁴¹ “The Next Three Years by Alice A. Bailey,” *San Juan Record* (hereinafter cited as *SJR*), August 15, 1935, 4.

⁴² Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003), 46-47.

organization but belonged to the “Church universal, . . . the one Temple of Truth, and therefore as members one of another.” They were a group in the sense that they were subjectively linked—that is, by a sort of telepathic interplay—having “rejected the same non-essentials” and having “isolated the same body of essential beliefs.” Though as yet scattered among the nations, some here and some there, collectively they formed “the subjective background of the new world, and constitute the spiritual nucleus of the coming world religion, for they are the unifying principle which must eventually save the world.”⁴³

Eventually this scattered group of awakening mystics, knowers, and world servers would begin to organize themselves. Some had in fact already begun to do so. These Bailey referred to as “seed groups of the new age.” Many had already been formed, Bailey taught, but they were “as yet so small and so undeveloped that the success of their effort remains for the future to decide.”⁴⁴ Even if some efforts failed, however, eventually group unification would succeed, for as Bailey emphasized, “*the newer truths of the Aquarian Age can only be grasped as a result of a group endeavour. . . . It is a group activity, a group recognition, and the result of group at-onement.*” Of this eventual global unification of humanity, the present seed-groups were “an embryonic state.”⁴⁵

In Bailey’s teachings ideas about an emergent new race and the dawning of a new age come together. For the past four hundred years, Bailey taught, an invisible hierarchy of Knowers—the “Servers of the Race”—had been guiding world events to prepare humanity for the new age about to dawn. “They work slowly and with deliberation, free from any sense of

⁴³ Alice A. Bailey, *The Next Three Years (1934-1935-1936)* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1934), 4-5.

⁴⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1957), 31. Bailey’s teachings on “seed groups” date from at least as early as 1937, at which date the above quote was recorded.

⁴⁵ Bailey, *Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 30-31.

speed, toward Their objective,” Bailey explained. However, they also faced a deadline. This “time limit” was based on a “Law of Cycles” and was directly related to the advent of the Aquarian Age, which would last, according to Bailey’s calculation, “astronomically 2500 years.” If this opportunity presented by the new cycle were properly utilized, it would “bring about the unification, consciously and intelligently, of mankind.”⁴⁶

A New World

The point to keep in mind is that while . . . changes in the arrangement of the Earth’s surface are cyclic, periodic and inevitable, by taking proper measures and by heeding the prophecies of the enlightened Seers, mankind can accommodate itself to such changes without serious disaster. The vital point is that while these changes are ultimately inevitable, they can take place gradually and harmoniously, giving mankind time to adapt itself without too great loss if they will obey their Seers, or they can take place rapidly and destructively, according as [whether] the vibration of harmony and cooperation or the vibration of inharmony, antagonism and evil is the keynote sounded by mankind as a whole.

—Harriette Augusta and F. Homer Curtiss, *Coming World Changes*, 1929

With the coming of a new world there also comes the passing of the old. While both Bucke and Bailey seemed to suggest that mankind at large would gradually evolve into the new race, with some (r)evolutionary jostling, other models called for more large-scale destruction of large segments of the population. Blavatsky’s model of cycles, for example, is predicated upon the idea that the coming of each root race is attended by the destruction of the prior race, which, in the case of the Atlanteans and Lemurians, involved complete inundation—destruction by cataclysm. Such “house-cleaning,” as it came to be called—with clear eugenicist overtones—was necessary for the advancement of the race.

Catastrophism had of course long been associated with evolution and Noah’s flood was ever the great symbol. It was simply a part of God’s plan to occasionally wipe the globe clean,

⁴⁶ Bailey, *Next Three Years*, 9.

leaving behind a select few to carry on the new race—a righteous seed. Such was the case in much of the literature Marie Ogden read on the subject. One work in particular that was frequently cited and often advertised in the columns of the *San Juan Record*—available for purchase through the *Record* office, 35 cents per copy or three for a dollar—was a booklet titled *Prophecies of Great World Changes* by George B. Brownell, co-founder with his wife, Louise B. Brownell, of the Aquarian Ministry in Santa Barbara, California.⁴⁷

The booklet was offered to the public as a voice of warning. Its purpose was to arouse an awareness among people of the prophesied cataclysmic changes awaiting the earth. But Brownell’s point was not simply to instill fear. Rather, he sought to enlist others in a great cooperative effort to forestall the prophesied destruction—for there was a contingent nature to the prophecies in question. “Anything of a cataclysmic nature,” Brownell explained, “can be removed by concerted prayer. There are many accounts of wonderful things done in which the forces of nature were subdued and great menaces removed by people getting together and uniting in prayer.”⁴⁸

He offered two biblical examples: one success story and one failure. The success story was that of Jonah, whose warning to the Ninevahns of their prophesied destruction brought about a change in their manner of living—they forsook their “increasing materialism and idolatry”—which in turn “re-established their relationship with the true God and the city was saved.” The failure story was that of Noah, though Brownell gave a rather unorthodox version of the story: It was the Atlanteans—inhabitants of the fabled lost continent of Atlantis—to whom Noah and

⁴⁷ George B. Brownell, *Prophecies of Great World Changes* (Santa Barbara, CA: The Aquarian Ministry, 1927).

⁴⁸ Brownell, *Prophecies of Great World Changes*, 3.

other prophets were sent to give warning. They, however, rejected the warnings and “the continent with its millions of people then sank beneath the waves.”⁴⁹

There are also modern examples and modern application. “Had the Belgians and the French united in prayer for protection,” Brownell avers, “the Germans would have been stayed absolutely at the border line.” This is because “a spiritual barrier would have been imposed that nothing could penetrate.” Some felt that just such a spiritual barrier was just what was holding off another war, which so many seemed to anticipate. Brownell recounts a conversation, presumably his own, in which “a woman stated that she did not believe that there would be another great war because she felt the New Thought people would prevent it.” Brownell agreed in principle but expressed doubts in particular: the New Thought people did not, after all, succeed in preventing the last war.⁵⁰

Brownell provided a catalogue of just what it would take to “dissolve the causes of the coming great war, which so many are predicting.” It would entail “changing people’s natures, rooting out of their consciousness the qualities that create war and building in them a reverence for God, a love for their fellowmen, the use of their talents and Divine Gifts and superior mental powers to lift their brothers instead of exploiting them and holding them in serfdom that they themselves might rise again and prosper.”⁵¹ Brownell, like many others, summed these efforts up

⁴⁹ Brownell, *Prophecies of Great World Changes*, 3. The idea that the Noah story was related to legends about a lost continent of Atlantis was not unique to Brownell but has a rather long and varied history. Ignatius Donnelly’s immensely popular 1884 publication *Atlantis the Antediluvian World*, for example, was just one of many works on the subject. A recent introduction to Donnelly’s work describes it as “one of the best constructed Atlantis theories, as it makes no recourse to occult or ‘channeled’ information,” suggesting that the legend has become largely associated with occult thought. “Atlantis the Antediluvian World: Introduction by J. B. Hare,” at Sacred Texts, <http://www.sacredtexts.com/atl/ataw/atawintr.htm> (accessed August 11, 2009).

⁵⁰ Brownell, *Prophecies of Great World Changes*, 4. Brownell seems to be intentionally demarcating himself from New Thought, suggesting that there was a loose classification system of self- and group-identity going on, muddled and confusing as it may be.

⁵¹ Brownell, *Prophecies of Great World Changes*, 4.

under the term “co-operation”—a term that found particular resonance in Marie Ogden’s collective venture in Dry Valley. (The Home of Truth was often referred to in Ogden’s pamphlets as a “cooperative settlement.”)

Despite his conviction that the coming cataclysms could be avoided if enough people were to join in prayerful effort, however, Brownell seems to have also been quite certain that these changes were nevertheless fated to come about. They were necessary, even—part of God’s plan for advancing humanity. “The changes prophesied,” Brownell explained, “are to give the world a great house cleaning that the New Heavenly Order may come in and become established for the ages to come.” Part of that cleaning up would involve removing those who would not “co-operate,” for “every obstacle to the coming of this heavenly order is to be swept away.”⁵²

Much of Brownell’s message for the future was incorporated, or at least found resonance, in the teachings of Marie Ogden. The prophesied and imminent coming disasters were the result of the materialistic thinking that prevailed in Western society, particularly in the cities. There was thus the necessity of a “house-cleaning.” (There is a bit of a paradox here, since the “house-cleaning” is also part of the astrological cycles and is thus basically inevitable.)⁵³ But there was hope. Some would be spared. For Ogden this required not only a change of thinking, however, but a migration. For though she sometimes expressed the change that would occur as a qualitative change—a stepping up of the earth’s vibratory rate—which would suggest that those in tune would be spared wherever they were—in city or country—she also believed that the destruction would come by way of natural disaster: earthquakes, tidal waves, floods, tornadoes,

⁵² Brownell, *Prophecies of Great World Changes*, 3-4.

⁵³ “Why Fear?” *SJR*, February 28, 1935, 4.

and so forth. Thus, in addition to a change in lifestyle, repentance, there was also the necessity of changing one's location: migration.

The first recorded intimation of migration came in Ogden's *Messages of the Dawn* series, recorded in 1931-32. Lesson 15 advised truth seekers to "gather together . . . only such things as are necessary" and to "strive not to hold on to anything that cannot be removed safely and easily, for there cometh a time when thou shalt be advised to take up thy bed and walk, if thou wouldst be saved."⁵⁴ Earlier messages had already spoken of a gathering of "a band of . . . faithful servants who will set up . . . a joyous Kingdom on earth."⁵⁵ The final message of the *Dawn* series indicated that these "awakened ones" who were being called upon to initiate the new order "shall be forced to begin all over again in new places where they can live and work according to Divine Law." This was to be a work of "rehabilitation" and "reconstruction" that would occur in "places far removed from the present abode of all who are willing and ready to begin life anew." In these far-off places they would construct "new habitations," and the divine laws that governed life there would eventually become "Universal Law, whereby all parts of the world will be united."⁵⁶

Around 1940 Ogden was asked in an interview why she chose "this more than out-of-the-way place." She responded by promptly reminding her interviewer "that it indeed was not her choice nor her selection. Rather it is the selection of her Mentors, who have in mind many, many reasons that transcend the thoughts of men." By this time she had come to understand, through communication with the higher realms, some of the reasons why this particular spot had been chosen. First and foremost among reasons was the area's desolation—its rural nature and its

⁵⁴ The phrase "take up thy bed and walk" is most likely alluding to the New Testament story recorded in Mark 2:1-12 (also Matthew 9:1-8) in which Christ healed a lame man and commanded him to take up his bed and walk.

⁵⁵ *Messages of the Dawn*, Lesson 6, in Marie M. Ogden, Writings, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereinafter cited as USHS).

⁵⁶ *Messages of the Dawn*, Lesson 20.

distance from any large urban center. The reason such characteristics were desirable was generally expressed as a need to escape the destruction that would come in urban areas, particularly coastal areas, caused by both natural disaster and a collapse of the present economic and political order. But eventually a more metaphysical explanation was provided as well—what I call Ogden’s philosophy or metaphysic of land. It suggests a correlation—a sort of symbiotic or sometimes parasitic relationship—between thought and land—that is, between the thinking of individuals and societies and the landscape they inhabit. Whereas most, if not all, urban areas had become soaked in materialistic and selfish thinking, “fewer thoughts of competition have been entertained, out in the open spaces,” Ogden explained to her interviewer. “Here it is easy to think and live, co-operatively. One is not so selfish where thoughts of self have not overly predominated for centuries.”⁵⁷

It was thus, as Ogden viewed it, Dry Valley’s lack of human history that made it desirable. It was virgin land, uncorrupted by the avaricious thoughts of materialistically minded men.⁵⁸ It was free from the burden of history and thus was a better place to begin a new kind of life—a new age and a new order in a place unencumbered by the old. Ogden also explained Dry Valley’s significance in terms of world changes that would occur: both undesirable changes that the Home of Truth would be for the most part protected from—destruction—and desirable changes that would transform Dry Valley and the surrounding region. The general area was protected by the presence of two great mountain chains.⁵⁹ More specifically, Dry Valley was

⁵⁷ Berkeley K. Coryell, “Authentic Facts Concerning the Kingdom that is Being Built,” in *Home of Truth Cooperative Settlement*, Booklet One, 7, in Ogden, Writings, USHS.

⁵⁸ On the “virgin land” myth see Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950).

⁵⁹ In a message dated March 3, 1945, printed as “Special Message” (Ogden, Writings, USHS), Ogden parenthetically interpolated “the admonition to seek refuge within the more sheltered area of this great domain” with the explanatory statement, “we think this means between the two important mountain ranges.” The mountain ranges

protected not only by the great expanse of uninhabited land that surrounded it, but it was also hemmed in by sandstone formations at each end and along the north side with tall hills to the south, surely reinforcing a greater sense of protectedness among Home of Truth members. It in essence became the *axis mundi* to community members as “‘the One Spot’ to be least affected, when the world changes occur.” The idea of an axis was made explicit, and all the more central, when Ogden explained the coming changes in terms of a shift in the earth’s axis as the earth “slips back” into its proper position.⁶⁰

Dry Valley, which Home of Truth members eventually renamed Rainbow Valley (“because of the wonderful double rainbows we see there so frequently”),⁶¹ was not only to be protected from disastrous coming world changes but was also to be ameliorated by positive transformation. After warning potential newcomers of the extremes of hot and cold experienced in the high-elevation Utah desert, Ogden explained that “when the greater changes come we expect to have a semi-tropical climate and other changes in regard to water supply which will enable us to grow every kind of fruit and vegetable we may desire.”⁶²

she alludes to may refer, locally, to the Abajos, just west of Monticello, and the La Sals, to the northeast; or, perhaps (and I think more likely), she may be referring to the Rockies to the east and the Sierra Nevadas to the west, each major mountain chain rising between Utah and the coasts.

⁶⁰ Berkeley Coryell, “Authentic Facts,” 8. Local legends state that Ogden taught that Dry Valley was the actual axis of the earth, which may be related to her teachings on axis shifting. Wing Anderson, *Seven Years that Change the World, 1941-1948* (Los Angeles: Kosmon Press, 1940), 76-77, also mentions Ogden’s teachings “pertaining to a change in the axis of the earth” and states that the idea “is in harmony with the prophecies received during the nineteenth century by the Essenes.” The idea of a transition into the Aquarian Age is also related to the idea of the “axis shifting” related to the precession of the equinoxes.

⁶¹ *Home of Truth Cooperative Settlement*, Booklet Two, 2, in Ogden, Writings, USHS.

⁶² *Home of Truth Cooperative Settlement*, Booklet Two, 12, in Ogden, Writings, USHS. If a newspaper journalist can be trusted (and for Ogden in particular, that is a big *if*), Ogden may have interpreted this anticipated edenic transformation as an actual restoration of the literal Garden of Eden. She reportedly told a *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter that in the vast expanse lying just west of Dry Valley, seen from the veranda of her cabin, “lies the real Garden of Eden. She pointed to a great white conical rock,” the journalist reported. “Out of it some day would spout a great fountain of water, bringing flowers and fruits to the valley.” “Leader Reveals Mysteries of South Utah Wilderness Cult to Tribune Reporter,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 24, 1935.

It was not the landscape only that would experience transformation, however. Just as the land was to overcome its own barrenness and infertility—so painfully apparent to these settlers with their so-far failed attempts at farming the desert—Home of Truth members would undergo a qualitative change that would push them beyond the normal bounds of mortality. They would become spiritualized, not in the sense of becoming incorporeal, but their eating habits and their procreative patterns would change—they would become less “material.”⁶³ Death itself, as we know death—“death so-called”—would be overcome.⁶⁴ In the new world the new race would be immortal. For such were Home of Truth members training and preparing themselves. Accordingly, they would know no death in Rainbow Valley.

As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, there were several streams of metaphysical thought flowing into Dry Valley, feeding Home of Truth members’ expectations of a new age, a new race, a new order, and a new world—quite literally, as the Book of Revelation put it, “all things new.”⁶⁵ Ogden’s expectation of the coming Aquarian Age, her belief that they were developing into a new, spiritualized race, her attempts to be a part of a newly forming spiritual

⁶³ So far as I have been able to tell, Ogden does not ever spell out clearly just how they changes were to occur—she was very circumspect in her public writing on these matters—but alludes to them in numerous places.

⁶⁴ Marie M. Ogden, “What Others Think,” *SJR*, October 25, 1934, 4. Based on her readings, Marie Ogden came to believe that humans on earth could overcome death. In her “What Others Think” column she cited the writings of an unnamed author who spoke of an unfolding “plan of life” within us—the “inner voice” or “voice of God speaking daily, hourly to us”—which, if we listen to and obey, will allow us to be accepted upon Christ’s second coming and to live in His Kingdom during his thousand-year reign. Under the heading “Overcoming Death,” Ogden explained that “this would imply that we may LIVE ON IN FLESH.” “It is my firm belief,” Ogden wrote, “that as we will prepare ourselves to live in this Kingdom on Earth we may be among those who will be privileged to enjoy many years of association with Him.” In fact, in the messages Ogden had received they had been assured that “HE WILL COME TO US HERE, as we will make ready to receive Him.” Thus, the ability to overcome death was directly related to the second coming of Jesus the Christ. But it was not something that was immediately bestowed upon His coming. One had to prepare for it. Because “no time is set,” Ogden explained, we must “begin NOW to perfect ourselves in human form, in order that we may be deserving of the blessings to come to us as we progress into this new age of living” (*SJR*, October 25, 1934, 4).

⁶⁵ Revelation 21:5.

order, and her expectation of a new world where there would be no death—all of these currents, I argue, place Ogden firmly in the early stages—though obviously not the newest—of American new age religion.

At some point during the first half of the twentieth century the subject of death had become, as Geoffrey Gorer put it, “pornographic.”⁶⁶ It was a taboo topic, not to be mentioned in polite society, avoided as much as possible. This pejoration in the public perception of death, which, as Philippe Ariès argues, was related to both the medicalization and institutionalization of death, led many to a psychological “denial of death,” or, as another historian put it, a “mass negation of reality.”⁶⁷ Death moved out of the home and the neighborhood and was tucked away in hospitals and hospices. People preferred to ignore the reality of death and chose rather to live their lives as if they would never die—as if there was no death.⁶⁸ Marie Ogden carried this tendency to deny death to the extreme—literalizing what for most Americans was simply a comfortable and temporary illusion. In the “new age,” as Marie Ogden envisioned it, there would be no death.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Gorer, “The Pornography of Death,” first published in *Encounter* in October 1955; reprinted in Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 192-99.

⁶⁷ John S. Stephenson, *Death, Grief, and Mourning: Individual and Social Realities* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 44.

⁶⁸ While most scholars of death seem to view this as a rather unhealthy psychological position, Ernest Becker presents the denial of death as a necessary strategy to allow humans to cope in the face of an otherwise paralyzing fear. See Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York : Free Press Paperbacks, 1997).

CHAPTER 4

DEATH, SO-CALLED, AND ITS AFTERMATH

The sound of hurried footsteps on the porch of the cabin roused Marie from the first moments of the much-earned, much-needed sleep she had just drifted into. “Are you asleep?” came the whisper of Elmer Peshak, his voice, as Ogden later described it, “full of pathos and alarm.”

“No, what is it?” she responded.

“I think Edith has passed on.”

“NO,” Marie gasped, “IT CANNOT BE.”

Marie was not expecting this: she was unprepared for it. It was not supposed to happen this way. Her guidance had assured her it would not happen this way. “Imagine, if you can, the utter hopelessness of the moment,” Ogden later wrote, “for I was not expecting such a condition, and was at a loss to account for the suddenness of the happening which occurred.”¹

Had Mary Cameron, their “faithful nurse,” been informed? she inquired. Yes, Mary was with Edith now, Elmer assured her, and she had sent him for Marie. Then go, Ogden responded, and she would be there shortly.

Alone now and feeling “non-pulsed” [*sic*], Ogden was torn with indecision. Should she “ask for guidance,” or should she go immediately to Edith’s bedside? She received an impression to “go immediately” so she hurried from her cabin through the chill desert air to the cabin below where Edith Peshak lay in repose. This is what she found:

Our patient was in a sitting position at the foot of the bed, a position she often changed to, but without any appearances of life within her body. Our nurse was bending

¹ Marie M. Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *San Juan Record* (hereinafter cited as *SJR*), August 8, 1935, 4.

over her, and her first words as I entered the room was, “There is no pulse.” I felt of her hands, and while there was slight warmth left, I realized that we were in a most precarious position. Again, I was at a loss to know what to do, and reflected for a moment, asking for guidance. Instantly came the flash of understanding that I must take up my usual position with her, so I asked that she be placed in the position I was accustomed to see her during the morning period of contact.

Edith was propped up on pillows at the head of the bed as Marie took up her usual position, sitting at the bedside holding both of Edith’s hands in her own.

“What COULD BE THE MEANING OF THIS UNEXPECTED TURN[?]” Marie was perplexed, but she knew that she did not have much time, for a change was taking place that had “every appearance of death,” though death it could not be—for “there is no death.” She dismissed Elmer and Mary, asking them to go to the outer room, leaving her alone with Edith for a time. “Without knowing why,” Ogden later remembered, “I said: ‘It may take several hours, or longer, but you may come in from time to time as you please.’” And with those words she turned her full attention “to the work at hand.”²

The Peshaks were Idaho people, dairy farmers and orchardists. Before moving to San Juan County, they owned and operated a forty-acre ranch five miles south of Boise in Ada County. They were a family of four when they lived in Idaho, though they should have been five. Elmer and Edith met at Iowa State Agricultural College, where she studied domestic science and he electrical engineering, and they were married in 1903. Their first son, whom they named Russell, died in 1909, only two months shy of his third birthday. Their second child, Helen Dorothy, was one year old at the time. They were living in Omaha, Nebraska, and had previously lived in Ohio and “various eastern and middle west states,” frequently on the move. Health troubles compelled Elmer to quit the engineering business so they moved to Idaho and bought a

² Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, August 8, 1935, 4.

ranch at \$150 dollars an acre. Edith gave birth to Frank Carlton on September 21, 1912. Elmer immediately set to work improving the place, putting up a silo and outbuildings, and five acres in prunes. “It is generally conceded,” a *History of Idaho* published in 1920 said of the farm, “to be one of the best kept and most compact in the district, the prune orchard being a special feature.” It was estimated that their land was at the time worth “in the neighborhood of four hundred dollars an acre.” Elmer soon expanded his holdings even further, “proving up” on a 160-acre homestead in nearby Sunnyside.³ All of this they gave up when they moved to Dry Valley and joined the Home of Truth in 1934.

The Peshak family’s first contact with Marie Ogden may have been by mail.⁴ Or it may have been through a friend who lived in the area and told Marie about this family who were “so interested in the deeper things of life” and who had indicated their interest in possibly becoming members of the community Ogden planned to establish. Helen Dorothy, the Peshaks’ daughter, had apparently moved away from home at this point. When Ogden met the family of three she was particularly impressed with Frank, the son—about nineteen or twenty at this time—who “seemed to be especially well informed concerning Metaphysical Truths.” Frank was apparently

³ James H. Hawley, *History of Idaho: The Gem of the Mountains* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1920), 3:622.

⁴ Ogden’s wording is a bit ambiguous on this point. She stated that at a time when she was receiving a lot of correspondence regarding the messages she was sending out, in 1931-32, she heard from “a woman in the northwestern part of the country,” in a region Ogden was already planning to visit (she apparently already had other “friends”—her term for supporters of her movement or those who express interest—in the area). “In due time we met,” Ogden writes, “and it was pleasant to realize that a family living on the outskirts of a large city were so interested in the deeper things of life, and in such manner indicated that they might become members of the Community.” The family mentioned here is the Peshak family but it is not clear if the woman Ogden refers to—whom she met—is Edith Peshak or someone else who told Ogden about the Peshak family and their interest in possibly joining the community she planned to organize. Ogden, “Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, April 4, 1935, 4. Frank Peshak later recalled to a reporter—after he had left the community and tried to dissociate himself from any past involvement—that his mother “first became acquainted with Mrs. Ogden when the latter was in Boise lecturing” and that she “became convinced she could be cured of cancer.” The newspaper report placed this meeting in the spring of 1934, though it most likely would have been in 1932 or 33 (“‘Living Dead’ Woman’s Son Asks Seeress Prosecution,” *Salt Lake Telegram*, April 30, 1937, 8).

already familiar with Ogden's writings, having "made a careful study of the messages and other information" that Marie had sent out from the School of Truth in Newark. When the community was finally established in Dry Valley in the fall of 1933, Frank was one of the first arrivals, preceding his parents who arrived the following spring.⁵

In a reminiscent account written after Edith Peshak's death, Ogden described the Peshak family as being very willing and cooperative during the early establishment of the Home of Truth. Their optimism was tintured only by Edith's desire for a more immediate upgrade in living quarters, but even this she bore with relative patience. Nonetheless, Ogden confessed to having known "for a long time that there was a cloud overhanging the home of this family," the result of "some physical disability affecting the health of the little mother." Frank Peshak later recalled that his mother became interested in the Home of Truth because listening to Ogden speak convinced her that she could be cured of her cancer. Ogden had been asked by the family early on if she "had power to 'treat' any of the so-called incurable ailments." Her reply was, "No, although at some future time I know that some such power will be given to me and to others." Thus while she declined their petitions, she held out hope, a hope which kept the family rooted in participation in the community.⁶

Messages Ogden received around this time referred to a "healing power" that might be developed within those willing "to prepare for the inflow of such power." It required a "strenuous period of reconstruction and upbuilding" similar to that which Jesus Christ went

⁵ Ogden, "Rebirth of a Soul," *SJR*, April 4, 1935, 4. Frank Peshak married Geneva Gillam on June 18, 1934, in Boise, Idaho, after which they returned to the Home of Truth where a two-room cabin was being erected for them at the Outer Portal. "Shower for Bride," [Boise] *Idaho Statesman*, June 19, 1934, 7; this article reported their new home as Moab, Utah, while Dry Valley is about 35 miles south of Moab. See also "Dry Valley News," *SJR*, June 28, 1934, 4.

⁶ Ogden, "The Rebirth of a Soul," *SJR*, April 11, 1935, 4; "'Living Dead' Woman's Son Asks Seeress Prosecution," *Salt Lake Telegram*, April 30, 1937, 8.

through—presumably alluding to his forty days in the wilderness—when “He was given Power to overcome the negative conditions and influences which prevailed during His time of ministry to mankind.”⁷ This is in accordance with the idea among many metaphysical groups that Jesus was one of many Christs or Buddhas or avatars. He was special insofar as he realized the power inherent in all humankind.⁸ Accordingly, Ogden—who may have, according to local legend, believed she was a reincarnation of the Virgin Mary⁹—believed she was capable of developing such healing power as that exemplified by the Christ of the Gospels.

Ogden described this healing power she was fostering within herself as a “more modern method of procedure” than the contemporary—and, by implication, less modern—medical profession.¹⁰ Ideally, according Ogden’s revealed procedure, Peshak could cure herself by ignoring her pain and by focusing her faith on removing the negative thought-matter that had accumulated within her over the course of her many incarnations. This was not exactly Christian Science, which posited that all illness was illusion because all matter was illusion (mind is the only reality). Edith’s malady was considered to be an actual blockage in her system. But it still was not exactly—not completely or even primarily—a physical malady, though it was physically expressed. It was described more in terms of spiritual energy than of physical matter. It was

⁷ Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, April 11, 1935, 4.

⁸ As J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 14, explains, many metaphysical groups identified themselves as Christian, but they typically separated Jesus the man from the Christ principle, “which is one with God and is every man’s inner nature. Jesus is the way-shower, one who was more aware of his divine nature than others, and who therefore has pointed out the path.”

⁹ Several abstruse passages in Ogden’s writings hint at what may be read as a confirmation of this idea. At some point it apparently came to Ogden’s remembrance that Peshak was a faithful friend of hers during a previous incarnation, nineteen hundred years prior, and that she also served alongside the master, meaning Jesus Christ. Therefore, Ogden appears to have envisioned herself as a reincarnation of someone who was contemporary with and associated with Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, May 16, 1935, 4.

basically bad karma, though Ogden did not typically use that term, that had accumulated within her and needed to be removed. Peshak could, through an exercise of faith, excise the blockage herself. But if her faith continued to falter, she could receive assistance. The power to provide that assistance was exactly that gift whose bestowal Ogden anticipated and was seeking.

But this power was slow in coming—too slow for Edith Peshak and her son. When Ogden was again approached by Edith about the matter, she “began to realize that her [Peshak’s] faith was wavering,” not only in regard to her eventual healing but also other “unfulfilled promises.” She attributed this decline in faith to a “bond of love between the mother and son”—what she would later refer to as a form of selfish (non-communal, private) love—that fostered an inordinate concern for each other’s circumstances over those of the community. Edith and her son apparently met together often to discuss the messages Ogden had received and, as Ogden believed, to make “note of ‘things that seemed not right.’” When Edith brought these matters to Ogden for “analization,” Ogden discerned “a tendency toward disappointment” and felt “that a ‘time limit’ was being set for a certain cure to be effected.” Such an attitude, and Edith’s continued importuning for “a boost,” was what Ogden recognized as “the surest way to prevent fulfillment of the desired object.”¹¹ Peshak was proving her own undoing.

When Peshak’s condition rapidly declined that fall and winter, Ogden attributed it to a lack of faith that had been fostered by a “medical profession” that had previously told Peshak “that there is no cure for the ailment in progress and in this case in particular.” By December Edith had reached a point, Ogden noted, that was beyond any hope of “self help.” She had become a “‘patient’ . . . in every sense of the word.” The matter of healing now lay completely in the hands of others—in Ogden’s much-anticipated but as-yet-unattained healing power, and in

¹¹ Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, April 18, 1935, 4.

the care of Ogden's "faithful nurse-companion-friend," Mary Cameron, a former medical nurse who had recently returned to the community.¹²

When the gift of healing failed to materialize within Ogden, she held the entire community accountable. The development of the healing power Ogden sought required extended periods of silent and solitary meditation. The individual in pursuit of this gift had to completely relinquish any attachment to the material world. "I was obliged," Ogden wrote, "to retire into semi-seclusion and 'to divorce myself from the material demands put upon me.'" Ogden's efforts to establish this solitary communion with the infinite were frequently disrupted, however, by "materially-minded ones" in the community. The frustrations of governing a community of material bodies with material needs and wants conflicted with Ogden's individual spiritual pursuit. These needs and the frustration of meeting them were compounded with each departure of a disaffected community member. As some members left, their responsibilities in the community devolved upon the other more faithful members who remained. This put increased pressure on the remaining members, who then took their frustrations to Ogden. It was the failures of those who refused to do their part in the community and the complaints of those remaining, Ogden believed, that held her back and prevented her from developing the healing power at a time when a community member needed it.¹³

¹² Ogden, "The Rebirth of a Soul," *SJR*, April 18, 1935, 4.

¹³ The above dilemma illustrates one of the many striking paradoxes of the community. While the self distracts from community unity and development, community distracts Ogden from the spiritual development of self requisite for healing. There is a fundamental tension between the contradictory impulses of communitarianism and individualism, cooperation and meditation, in Ogden's community. Peshak's death was the result both of an individual's failure to live in the community and also of the community's failure to respect the individual's need for solitary meditation. Spiritual progress required individual development through solitary meditation, yet it also required a renunciation of selfish concerns in favor of the greater good of the community.

The failings of certain members of the Home of Truth community, as Ogden construed them, were reflective of a larger societal failing—one that had perpetuated a history of unnecessary illness and death throughout every age of human history. This perpetual failure was rooted in fear. The failure to “put fear well into the background of consciousness” was the cause of “all incurable ailments.” If humans could only overcome this fear, they could overcome death. “When this lesson is learned there will be no more sickness or death, as we know death, and it is the one thing we have failed to accomplish in this or in any other period of earth-life,” Ogden wrote. As the macrocosm corresponds to the microcosm, so the history of human suffering and dying was the story of Edith Peshak and the Home of Truth community writ large.

But Ogden was helping to usher in a new era—the Aquarian Age—an age in which the spiritually prepared would finally overcome fear and death. “No matter what had been accomplished in former periods of earth life,” wrote Ogden, “the PRESENT PERIOD IS A THING APART and must be reckoned with as if past achievements never existed.”¹⁴ Marie Ogden stood at the apex of her own unique modernity and on the cusp of a New Age, an age in which there would be no death.

Ogden was not the only metaphysical thinker to challenge conventional ideas about death or to think along these lines. Charles Fillmore (1854–1948), co-founder of the Unity School of Christianity, for example, similarly taught that those who “spiritualize” the atoms that make up their bodies through “soul concentration” could gain such power over their bodies that they would be able to make themselves invisible and to live upon this earthly plane for as long as they

¹⁴ Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, May 16, 1935, 4.

desired.¹⁵ Annie Rix Millitz (1856-1924), founder of the similarly named Homes of Truth movement in Alameda, California, taught a doctrine known as “regeneration” by which, through a spiritual cleansing of every cell in the body, one could overcome corruption and preserve the body indefinitely in this life.¹⁶ When Militz finally passed from this life, a cadre of her followers was so convinced that she would rise again—believing that she had simply departed temporarily to learn about heaven first-hand—that they initially refused to turn the body over for embalming—a striking analog to the Peshak affair.¹⁷

Ogden borrowed many of her ideas from other metaphysical thinkers. The doctrine of reincarnation, for example, was a widely held belief among many metaphysical religionists. But the doctrine, as Ogden construed it, poses an apparent paradox: Ogden believed in reincarnation, yet she also taught that it was not necessary for any of her followers to die. The unity of these ideas is related to her view of death as simply a failure to realize one’s potential for immortality here and now. Those who do not learn that lesson during earth life must return for another round, after receiving some lessons in the interim. This cycle of rebirth could be broken, however, during any incarnation, once enlightened souls realized their capacity for eternal earth life. As typical of the New Thought and New Age movements, an eastern religious idea was thus incorporated into Ogden’s belief system, yet it was tintured by western proclivities—in this case, the continuance of the ego. The cycle of rebirth is broken not by annihilation of the self, as in nirvana or moksha, but by the continuance of an embodied (albeit spiritualized) self. Rather

¹⁵ See J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 238.

¹⁶ Annie Rix Militz, *The Renewal of the Body* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., n.d.), 34.

¹⁷ See Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 323 n34.

than many rivers flowing into one great sea, the rivers simply continued to flow on through eternity. East did not simply meet West; it was transformed in the process.

But if many of Ogden's ideas were drawn from other sources and fit within a typical metaphysical framework, they were also highly personal and can be linked to events in her own life. While a rejection of modern medicine, for example, can be found among many New Thought and New Age thinkers—à la Christian Science—Ogden's antipathy cannot be understood separately from her experience with her husband's death. She experienced first hand the failure of the medical establishment to heal her husband. Living in an age in which death had become medicalized, Ogden's defiance of death equated to a defiance of western medicine. A study of the occult had allowed William Dudley Pelley to return from death, something medical doctors failed to effect for Ogden's husband. Now through such study, Ogden would accomplish for Peshak what medical doctors could not do.

Yet, Ogden's rejection of the medical profession was not wholesale. She described the healing method that was eventually revealed to her basically as a surgical procedure. The "Invisible Helpers" who were to aid her in the healing process were portrayed as "physicians." Their function was to "rebuild . . . the afflicted cells' at the seat of trouble" in Peshak, making it possible for the "growth" to be removed without any injury to Peshak.¹⁸ It was thus not the function of modern medicine Ogden rejected but the inadequacy of it—its failure to achieve its purported function: to save the dying. Perhaps not too unlike a child who compensates for her mortal acquaintances' shortcomings with the creation of an imaginary friend, Ogden simply replaced a failed medical establishment with a spiritual one.

¹⁸ Ogden, "The Rebirth of a Soul," *SJR*, July 18, 1935, 4.

Accordingly, the “more modern method” of healing revealed to Ogden had more in common with a hospital operating room than an empty tomb. It was not simply a “Lazarus arise” sort of procedure, nor was it a simple method of faith-healing through the laying on of hands. Instead, it involved a rather elaborate network of interconnected energy sources and agencies for transference of that energy. She emphasized that it was not of the “miracle healing sort” but was rather a “slow process of healing.” Ogden described this procedure, or “method of contact,” in terms of a daily routine she and others were to carry out for a forty-day period. She arose early each morning, around 5:00 or 5:30, and gave herself to study and meditation. In this way she “‘tuned in’ to the Divine Source for ‘renewal of the Power I was expected to relay to our patient.’” Mary Cameron and Elmer Peshak attended to Edith daily and on alternate days Ogden met with Peshak in her cabin at 9:30 AM. Taking both of Peshak’s hands in her own, Ogden sought communion with the innermost part of Peshak’s soul in order to commit her to the care of the invisible helpers—basically medicalized elementals. As she did so, she simultaneously imparted the power she had stored up from each morning’s meditation into Peshak. This power or energy was then “‘picked up’ by the Unseen Friends and used according to their need.”¹⁹ They in turn attended to Peshak “in somewhat the same manner as an attending physician would.”²⁰ Ogden, meanwhile, was absorbing impurities out of Peshak’s system, sort of like a mesmerist healer. This routine was to be continued for a forty-day period—a number of biblical significance—which would be followed by a new phase of work, the nature of which would be revealed to her at that point.

¹⁹ Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, July 18, 1935, 4.

²⁰ Ogden, “The Rebirth of a Soul,” *SJR*, June 20, 1935, 4.

Since Ogden interpreted Peshak's condition as the result of a mental or spiritual blockage in her system, it was disturbing to her when Peshak developed a "dropsical condition" (edema) and her limbs swelled to twice their usual size. This apparently was not the first time unseen forces had been expressed physically, however. There had previously been a change in the appearance of "the region of the seat of trouble." When the appearance of this "afflicted part of the body" improved, she interpreted this improvement as evidence that the work of the Unseen Helpers was "correcting certain condition[s] within."²¹

According to Ogden's reminiscence of the account, written only months after the event, on February 11 she "received a definite impression that the time of the real work was at hand." That night Edith died.²²

In the May 23, 1935, edition of the *San Juan Record*, under the headlines "Life After Death" and "'Dead' Girl Revived," Ogden (or her one of her staff writers) included alongside her usual column two articles citing examples of resuscitation: four guinea pigs and a young girl, each of whom had been presumed "dead," were subsequently revived. The guinea pigs were part of a scientific experiment in which they were "frozen to death" and then "restored...to life" by blood transfusion and "injections of adrenaline-ephedrine." The young girl died during surgery and was revived by "an injection of adrenalin into the heart." These examples illustrated, the author asserted, that "life after death, in the sense of prolonging life after death, according to what we term 'death' is fast becoming a 'Science Feat.'"²³ In other words, science was

²¹ Ogden, "The Rebirth of a Soul," *SJR*, August 1 and 8, 1935, 4.

²² Ogden, "The Rebirth of a Soul," *SJR*, August 8, 1935, 4.

²³ "Life After Death," "Guinea Pig Revived," and "'Dead' Girl Revived," *San Juan Record*, May 23, 1935, 4.

discovering how to prolong life. Death, it would seem, was no longer inevitable—or, at least, it wouldn't be for long.

Not everyone saw it that way though. For most Americans, death was death, and dead people needed to be buried. We saw at the beginning of our narrative the legal imbroglio that County Attorney Donald Adams found himself in when he was sent out to the Home of Truth to investigate the burial—or lack thereof—of Edith Peshak's body. This ordeal proved to be a difficult trial for the Home of Truth colony, and many members left during this time. But perhaps even more difficult to endure, and more embarrassing, was the media spectacle carried on in national newspapers that had picked up on the story. By November of 1935 the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, the Peshaks' hometown *Idaho Statesman*, and doubtless several other national newspapers ran stories on this "Strange Cult" who were "Trying to Bring Dead Woman to Life."²⁴ The issue was raised again with another spate of Associated Press articles in the spring of 1936 and once again in the spring of 1937 when Utah State health officials made one more final press on the colony and finally obtained a signed death certificate, laying the issue at least legally to rest.²⁵

²⁴ See *Chicago Tribune*, November 23, December 1, 1935; "Cultists Guard Body Awaiting Second Life," *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1935; "Cult Holds Daily Rites to Restore Woman to Life," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 23, 1935, 10; "Utah Cult Refuses to Bury Dead Woman in Belief She will be Resurrected," *Idaho Statesman*, November 23, 1935, 2. The story also appeared in several Utah newspapers.

²⁵ "Strange Cult in Wild Utah Desert Retreat Labors to Bring Dead Members Back to Life," *The Anniston Star* [Anniston, Alabama], April 2, 1936; "Strange Cult in Wild Utah Desert Retreat Labors to Bring Dead Members Back to Life," *The Sheboygan Press* [Wisconsin], April 2, 1936; "Strange Cult in Desert Trying to Bring Dead Woman to Life," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 4, 1936; "Strange Cult Would Bring Back Life," *Reno Evening Gazette*, April 10, 1936; *The Ellensburg Capital* [Ellensburg, Washington], July 17, 1936, 2; "Say Dead Woman To Come to Life," *The Evening Independent* [St. Petersburg, Florida], February 27, 1937, 2; "Cult Faces Fight on Body Utah Demands Death Certificate for Woman 'Coming Back to Life'," *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 1937; "Strange Religious Colony in Utah to be Investigated," *Helena Daily Independent*, April 25, 1937; "'Resurrection' a Failure; Cult Sister Dead to Utah," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 4, 1937; "Cult Cremates Long Dead Body," *Fresno Bee*, April 27, 1937; "Reports Persist Utah Cult Body is Hidden Away," *Fresno Bee*, May 5, 1937; "Climax Near in Weird Cult Case in Utah," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 1, 1937.

The final legal and media debacle regarding the Edith Peshak affair involved the actions of two defected Home of Truth members, one of whom Ogden came to refer to as a “Judas,” the Utah State Board of Health, and the *Salt Lake Telegram* newspaper. The first was Thomas E. Robertson, known to the Home of Truth as Tommy. In April of 1937, Robertson swore out an affidavit in Salt Lake City stating that he had cremated Edith Peshak’s corpse under the direction of Marie Ogden. Robertson claimed that during a time when Elmer Peshak was away and the community members were at worship services, Ogden directed Robertson to take Edith Peshak’s body to a previously selected location, where he had been instructed to construct a pyre, and to cremate the corpse. This he accordingly did, he swore, as Ogden stood looking on, communing with the spirit world. Ogden afterward, Robertson averred, kept this cremation secret, telling Elmer and other community members that Edith’s body had been “spirited away from curious and prying eyes.” The story was run, quoting copiously from the Robertson affidavit, in the *Salt Lake Telegram*.²⁶

The claims made by Robertson in his affidavit are complicated, however, if not contradicted, by a story told by another source. This time the informant is a reporter, one Jack DeWitt, who visited the Home of Truth colony in May 1937, just weeks following Robertson’s sworn out affidavit. Aware that the case was being investigated but apparently unaware of Robertson’s affidavit, DeWitt pressed Ogden in an interview to allow him to view Peshak’s body. While he did not succeed in persuading her to let him see the body, he was able to finagle her into revealing its location, in a small natural cave in some nearby cliffs, the entrance of

²⁶ “Weird ‘Living Dead’ Cremation Related,” *Salt Lake Telegram*, April 26, 1937, 1, 8. When the *Telegram* contacted Marie Ogden for a statement regarding Robertson’s affidavit, she replied that she would “confirm nothing” but that the story would be “published when the proper time comes.” She further warned that “the hand of God will fall upon those who are given to gossip or to enact any form of evil against us” (*Salt Lake Telegram*, April 26, 1937, 8).

which was blocked by a small boulder rolled into place. DeWitt returned that night, while community members were sleeping, rolled away the stone, and snapped a photo of what he described as the partially charred, mummified remains of Peshak's body.²⁷ And thus concluded the unusual search for Edith Peshak: in contradiction and mystery.

A short time after Robertson's affidavit was released, the *Telegram* reported that Frank Peshak, son of Elmer and Edith Peshak, had written a letter to the Utah State Board of Health requesting prosecution of Marie Ogden for her refusal to cooperate with state efforts to obtain a death certificate for his mother. Frank accused Ogden of censoring his father's letters and of hypnotizing his father and other Home of Truth members. "Mrs. Ogden wields a wicked influence over that group," Frank averred, disingenuously claiming that he never did "believe in the cult."²⁸

Accordingly, State Board of Health representative Eva Ramsey traveled to the Home of Truth in early May 1937 and finally obtained a death certificate, threatening legal action for non-compliance. To the certificate, Ogden appended a statement pleading ignorance of the law regarding the necessity of obtaining a permit for removal of a body and further stating that only when the work was complete would "the sacredness and beauty of our difficult task be appreciated."²⁹

²⁷ Jack DeWitt, "Utah's Mystery of the Living Mummy," 24-29, 87-99, clipping of an article from an unidentified source, housed in the Utah State Historical Society. DeWitt's photograph of Peshak's charred remains is included in the article (29). DeWitt also describes in the article—perhaps simply as a rhetorical flourish to maintain a sense of the bizarre—an apparition in "the form of a woman" that he saw in the cave after taking the photo, though he speculates that it may have just been "a trick of the moonlight from without" or "imagination combined with the floating smoke from the flashlight powder" (99).

²⁸ "'Living Dead' Woman's Son Asks Seeress Prosecution," *Salt Lake Telegram*, April 30, 1937, 1.

²⁹ "Activities of the Home of Truth," *SJR*, May 13, 1937, 1.

These incidents and the media and legal attention surrounding them were difficult for the community to endure. By early summer 1937, the Home of Truth had dwindled to twelve members.³⁰ To compound existing difficulties, in late June of that year the *San Juan Record* building was completely destroyed by fire. Ogden suspected arson by one of their “enemies,” perhaps from a disloyal member who could not endure correction.³¹

In the years following, a few members came and went, and the community maintained a membership of about ten members. Aside from Ogden, only seven from among the large group who initially came to the community in the fall of 1933 and spring of 1934 remained. These became what Ogden identified as the “charter members”: Mary Cameron, R. Huebner, David De Bruine, A. D. Miller, Nellie Reid, Daisy Naden, and Elmer Peshak.³² Edith Peshak might also have been included, as she was still, in a sense, considered a part of the community. Elmer Peshak did not consider himself a widower. In fact, at a Thanksgiving dinner the community held, two empty seats were placed at the table. One, at the head of the table beside Marie, was reserved for the Master, Jesus the Christ, whose return was expected at any time. The second chair, at the foot of the table next to Elmer, was reserved for Edith.³³

Ogden continued her operation of the *San Juan Record* until 1949, at which time she sold the paper. She continued to write about the ever-imminent coming world changes. She intended

³⁰ “Home of Truth News Letter,” *SJR*, June 17, 1937, 8.

³¹ *SJR*, July 1, 1937, 1. From July to the end of the year local news was prepared and distributed in type-script mimeograph copies, and syndicated national news was contracted out to Western Newspaper Union, which provided a four-page supplement. See “Announcement,” *SJR*, July 8, 1937, 4.

³² “Fall Re-Union and Dinner-Party at Home of Truth,” *SJR*, September 28, 1939; “Home of Truth Celebrates on Sunday,” *SJR*, October 10, 1940.

³³ “Dry Valley News,” *SJR*, December 5, 1935, 4. In addition to the Virgin Mary legend alluded to previously—Ogden purportedly believed she was a reincarnation of the Virgin Mary—there is also a legend among some locals that Ogden believed herself to be, in some spiritualized sense, married to Christ.

to provide a much fuller explanation of her beliefs in a book. The book was in fact completed in manuscript form and had been tentatively contracted with a publisher. It was to be titled *The Age of Faith versus the Promise of Life*. It was even advertised in the *San Juan Record* for pre-order.³⁴ Presumably it would have explained in a less circumspect and more comprehensive matter just what she expected to occur in Edith Peshak's process of "rebirth." For some reason, however, the book never went to print. After Marie Ogden's death in 1975—she spent her last years in a rest home in Blanding—one of her last followers burned her remaining papers lest they fall into the hands of those who would use them to make fun of her.³⁵ The book manuscript was presumably among these papers. Subsequently, Ogden's personal belongings were sold at public auction on September 30, 1977.³⁶

Perhaps nothing speaks quite as symbolically to the tragic ending of the Home of Truth as the presence of a cemetery. The Home of Truth Cemetery is located at the middle section. It is difficult to find anymore. It took me three different trips to the site before I found it. It is located nearly against the hills on the southern end of the valley. A mostly collapsed picket fence surrounds it. Tumbleweeds have taken up residence within. Four squat, weather-worn sandstone gravestones, the wording eroded to the point that only part of the name on a few of them is discernible, mark the spot. Dates are obliterated. A sun-bleached wooden grave marker bearing the barely discernible name of Mary Cameron lies flat, face up, on the ground. These markers—reminders of the mortality of even our most ardent hopes of eternal life on earth—stand in close

³⁴ "Important Book Nearing Completion," *SJR*, June 24, 1937, 1. The book was advertised in the mimeograph copies of the *SJR* between September 23, 1937, and the December 1937, and also in the *Home of Truth Supplement* between March 3, 1938, and August 8, 1938.

³⁵ "Desert Compound's Resurrection Reopens Utah Cult's Bizarre Story," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 13, 1993.

³⁶ "Antique Auction—Contents of the 'Inner Portal' of the Home of Truth," USHS.

proximity to the few remaining cabins, the vacated and crumbling remains that attest to the former existence of this once ambitious community. The buildings of the Outermost Point are completely razed, only the crumbling foundation of the community house remaining. The Outer Portal Gateway at Photograph Gap, however, has been restored by the subsequent owner, Sue Halliday. A sign hangs over a gate at the entrance bearing the legend "Marie's Place." Passersby stop occasionally and gaze at the few remaining clapboard cabins and wonder, no doubt, what it was all about. Two years after I first started looking into it, I feel a little closer to Truth, but I still marvel no less at the dream.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The myth of the American West as a safety valve to release Eastern congestion, overpopulation, and tensions of various kinds has its roots deep in the early years of the American republic and the idea flourished throughout the nineteenth century.¹ It was primarily the idea of open land that attracted settlers seeking to escape the city—land where they could farm and live independently: live off the land. And the West was just such an area where, in the imagination of Easterners, there was an abundance of open land. The idea gave rise to several cooperative communities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of them in the western United States.²

When the American economy spiraled downward into the Great Depression, following the stock market crash in 1929, making urban life uncertain if not unbearable for many, numerous Americans fell back on this myth of free land and of the West as a safety valve. In 1933, the same year Ogden established the Home of Truth community, journalist Philip Gibbs identified “untilled earth,” the “self-supported community,” and the “back to the land” movement as a “way of escape” for those in an urban crisis.³ Also in 1933, Ralph Borsodi published *Flight from the City*, a book that followed his 1929 publication *This Ugly Civilization*,

¹ The classic work on this and a number of other myths about the American West is Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), ch. 20; see also Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *Frontiers: A Short History of the American West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), chap. 11.

² See Robert V. Hine, *Community on the American Frontier: Separate but Not Alone* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); and *California’s Utopian Colonies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953); and Timothy Miller, *The Quest of Utopia in Twentieth Century America, Volume I: 1900-1960* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

³ Philip Gibbs, *The Way of Escape: A Challenge to the New Generation* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1933), 133-37.

both of which promoted the idea of abandoning urban life for country living.⁴ That same year Borsodi was appointed by President Roosevelt to direct a New Deal Community Program that was designed to help hard-up city dwellers resettle in self-sustaining cooperative communities in the country.⁵ This marked the beginnings of a new wave of “back-to-the-landism,” a recurring movement in American history drawing people away from cities to the country to practice self-sustaining, independent or communal living.

Thus, as eccentric as she might have seemed, Marie Ogden and her Home of Truth colony were, in some ways at least, very much a part of their time. The personal tragedy that launched Ogden into the world of metaphysics—the death of her husband in 1929—coincided with a national crisis when the stock market collapsed that same year. Her founding of the Home of Truth community in 1933 occurred at the same time as the federal government’s efforts to establish similar self-sufficient communities under the aegis of the New Deal Community Program. The Home of Truth colony was only one of many cooperative communities established in the 1930s. Ogden’s followers were doing, in a general way, just what many other Americans were doing: seeking a new life somewhere else—an independent yet communal life in the country. They were seeking a new frontier. The Home of Truth was thus, in a peculiar way, a microcosm of forces at work nationwide.

There were, of course, differences. Every life and every community is unique, but some are more so than others. Marie Ogden and her followers clearly had some ideas that set their community apart from most. Yet even in these peculiarities, as I have tried to demonstrate,

⁴ Ralph Borsodi, *Flight from the City: An Experiment in Creative Living on the Land* (New York: Harper and Row, 1933; *This Ugly Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1929); on Borsodi see Allan Carlson, *The New Agrarian Mind: The Movement Toward Decentralist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), chap. 3.

⁵ See Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959).

Ogden and the Home of Truth can be situated as part of a wider religious era or movement that may properly be identified as proto-New Age.

Though some have recently made the observation that the New Age movement is not all that new,⁶ little has been done as yet to recover many of its earlier manifestations. Indeed, generally it did not come to be recognized as a “movement” movement until the 1980s. Marie Ogden’s Home of Truth is one of those overlooked parts of a broader overlooked segment of the American religious landscape. Early twentieth-century movements such as Ogden’s Home of Truth, which I am categorizing as proto-New Age, looked for a literal “new age,” in a millenarian sense, to be ushered in. This new age was often associated with the astrological Aquarian Age and it was to represent an evolutionary advance of humankind; that is, for those that survived the transition into the new age. It was to prepare for this transition that Ogden and her followers retreated to the Utah desert, separating themselves from the distraction and the materialism of urban American society. This apocalyptic, millenarian sense of the “new age” seems to have gradually disappeared and is largely absent from the later New Age movement.

In this study I have sought to fill in some of the lacuna in American religious history by situating Marie Ogden’s Home of Truth within the larger theme of American metaphysical religion. The Home of Truth is a fitting example of a community that melded theosophical and New Thought ideas while identifying directly with neither movement. Thus, it escapes easy categorization. Still, this thesis demonstrates that it may best be understood as part of an early twentieth-century proto-New Age movement. Because there has been virtually no prior academic

⁶ See, for example, Louis S. Ruprecht, “The Christian Roots of the New Age: The Aquarian Gospel,” at Religion Dispatches, http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/rdbook/1613/the_christian_roots_of_the_new_age:_the_aquarian_gospel (accessed November 7, 2009).

work done on the Home of Truth, some of this study, particularly chapter two, has been descriptive in nature, laying out the basic history of Marie Ogden and the Home of Truth community. The third and fourth chapters, however, situate the Home of Truth within broader historical currents of American religious utopianism and transatlantic Metaphysical religion or Western esotericism.

The Home of Truth community should be of interest to the academic community for a number of reasons. To historians of the American West, the community helps to explain why the West has attracted many religious communities and utopian projects, particularly during the Depression era. To scholars of American religion, reconstructing the Home of Truth episode begins filling in a very underdeveloped part of early twentieth-century historiography. In particular, it points to the existence of a proto-New Age ideology embedded in the broader framework of metaphysical religion generally. This study has also sought to demonstrate how the story of the Home of Truth community can problematize some of the standard scholarly categories typically used to describe religious groups and individuals, such as “Christian,” “millenarian,” and “New Age.” I have also tried to situate Ogden in a time when ideas about death were profoundly influenced by developments in modern, scientific medicine. As has been shown, though, for individuals like those in the Home of Truth community, modern medicine failed to achieve its purpose—to heal disease and prevent death. Thus, in many ways, Ogden's movement can be seen as a reaction to the rise of “scientific” medicine and thus as part of an alternative healing movement.

The truisms that every ending is a new beginning and that every study is a work in progress are particularly true of this work. Because Marie Ogden left no published works

behind—at least not in book format—the Home of Truth’s legacy has been all but forgotten. This thesis represents the beginnings of an effort to recover that memory. I believe that Marie Ogden’s life points outward to a network of religious thinkers and social agents who can tell us much about an era that beckons to be better understood. Recovering the memory of the Home of Truth can offer a much needed corrective by complicating the categories we have imposed on our constructions of the past and by pointing to gaps in the historiography that are just beginning to be filled.

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