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John Haller Jr

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William Walker Atkinson: An Intellectual Biography

by

John S. Haller, Jr.

Anything that is right is possible. That which is necessary will inevitably take place. If something is right it is your duty to do it, though the whole world thinks it to be wrong.

(William Walker Atkinson, *The Power of Concentration*, 1918)

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Introduction

Beyond knowing the inclusive dates of his birth and death, the life of William Walker Atkinson (December 5, 1862—November 22, 1932) remains largely undocumented. What is generally understood is that he was born in Baltimore to William and Emma Atkinson who worked in the grocery business. Around 1882, he started a career in business, and in October of 1889, he married Margaret Foster Black of Beverley, New Jersey. They had two children, one of whom died young. Perhaps before, but certainly during his early years as a businessman, Atkinson experienced episodes of mental and physical stress. Nevertheless, he went on to earn a law degree and was admitted to the Pennsylvania bar in 1894, after which he experienced a relapse due to the stress of the job and financial challenges precipitated by his enemies. Struggling with his demons, one can presume that he sought a variety of allopathic treatments before turning to mental science, or what was popularly known at the time as mind-cure therapeutics. During his recovery and growing self-awareness, he and his family moved to Chicago in the late 1890s, a major center of mental science and its connection to the New Thought Movement where he passed the Illinois bar in 1903 and where he gained fame as an editor, author, and literary representative, contributing to many of its core beliefs.

Mind-cure therapeutics owed its origin to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby of Portland, Maine. Starting as a practitioner of mesmerism, he eventually transitioned to a method for bringing patients to a condition of self-understanding, meaning a state of inner wisdom, peace, and goodness indicative of the Christ within. Convinced that a person's happiness depended on his

or her beliefs, Quimby set out to separate those beliefs considered eternal in the mind from those acquired out of fear and ignorance. In doing this, he developed a form of “Christ Science” that borrowed Jesus’s method of healing as the model for his own practice. Among Quimby’s more famous patients were Mary Baker Patterson (Eddy), the later founder of Christian Science; Emma and Sarah Ware, who collected Quimby’s writings into publishable manuscripts; Julius A. Dresser and Annetta G. Seabury, who opened their own mental healing practice in Boston; and Warren Felt Evans, a Swedenborgian who practiced healing in Claremont, New Hampshire, and followed a spiritual but predominately secular or unchurched path under the umbrella of New Thought.¹

What we know as New Thought represents a predominantly metropolitan phenomenon whose system of mind-power included both a religious and secular side. While Warren Felt Evans and his followers followed an unchurched approach, the theologian and mystic Emma Curtis Hopkins, the so-called “teacher of teachers,” laid the groundwork for the religious side of the movement. Hopkins, who broke from Mary Baker Eddy’s school of Christian Science in 1885, taught her own brand of Christian Science in New York City, Kansas City, San Francisco, and elsewhere before establishing the Hopkins College of Metaphysical Science (1889) in Chicago. Among her many ordained students were Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, the founders of Unity; Ernest Holmes, the founder of Religious Science; Malinda Cramer and Nora L. Brooks, the founders of Divine Science; Annie Rix-Militz, the founder of Home of Truth; Harriet Emilie Cady, author of Unity’s *Lessons in Truth*; and George Edwin Burnell, Dr. E. B. Weeks of Battle Creek,

¹ Horatio W. Dresser, *Health and the Inner Life: An Analytical and Historical Study of Spiritual Healing Theories, with an Account of the Life and Teachings of P. P. Quimby* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1906), 31-32; Ervin Seale (ed.), *Phineas Parkhurst Quimby: The Complete Writings* (3 vols.; Marina del Rey, CA: DeVore and Co., 1988), I, 191-93; D. T. Schmit, “Warren Felt Evans: 19th Century Mystic, Wounded Healer, and Seminal Theorist-Practitioner of Mind Cure,” *History of Psychology*, 21 (2018), 187-207.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Helen Wilmans, and Elizabeth Towne—all whose works found broad appeal among American audiences.²

The transformative philosophy of New Thought continues into the present day due in no small measure to Atkinson who practiced the so-called “plain-style,” a rhetorical form of speech and writing that was simple and direct. Common among the early Puritan divines, it represented a form of deductive and didactic rhetoric that began with doctrine, followed by a definition, an exposition of the doctrine’s meaning using examples from the New and Old Testament, and finally its application to the community. In place of textual material drawn from the bible, Atkinson substituted secularized sources. Nevertheless, the results were the same. Instead of using the biblical statement, “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he,” Atkinson restated the doctrine: “We are what we think ourselves into being.” This became the text which he defined: “We are all creatures of our own mental creating.” From this explanation, he provided examples of how a repeated thought affected not just the character but the physical appearance of the thinker. Vigorous thinking that began with the assertive “I AM,” grew into “I CAN” and “I WILL” by putting the mind to work by doing or making something.³

The author of an estimated one hundred books and over seven hundred articles, Atkinson’s interests were broadly eclectic, covering a wide range of fields—from occult

² See John S. Haller, Jr., “New Thought,” in <https://wrlldrels.org/2017/12/31/new-thought/> (accessed July 11, 2021). Also Read G. M. Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins: Forgotten Founder of New Thought* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); John S. Haller, Jr., *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2012); S. E. Knee, *Christian Science in the Age of Mary Baker Eddy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994). Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, the founders of Unity, preferred the term “Modern Thought” to “New Thought” but due to the confusion it created, deferred quickly to the latter term.

³ William Walker Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life Being a Series of Lessons in Personal Magnetism Psychic Influence, Thought-Force Concentration, Will Power and Practical Mental Science* (NY: Sidney Flower, 1900), 10.

breathing to logical thinking, psychology, salesmanship, magnetism, memory, telepathy, psychic training, thought-force, and healing. Many of his books began as serialized articles in magazines or as correspondence courses copyrighted under his own name or one of several pseudonyms, some of which may still be unknown. In 1932, at the age of 69, he died in Los Angeles, California.

Owing to the paucity of information on Atkinson as an individual, this book focuses on his publications and how their content contributed to the New Thought Movement. Although I will sometimes speculate on the hidden aspects of his life, I am aware that speculation can spiral into fantasy if not disciplined. Recognizing this possibility, I will do so sparingly and with full cognizance of its dangers. The alternative is to leave Atkinson's works untouched, a choice that makes little sense given the impact of his writings. While not lengthy, this intellectual biography attempts to present an honest appraisal of the man and his influence on a society that projected itself onto the world scene as moving inexorably toward greater health, wealth, and happiness when, in fact, the world was inching toward world war.

Chapter 1

Empowering the Self

Thought waves are like ripples on a pond caused by the casting of
of a pebble.

(William Walker Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and
Everyday Life*, 1900)

When reading about or discussing the New Thought Movement, it is hard to dissociate it from the so-called prosperity gospel, a subject that brings to mind televangelists like Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, and Victoria and Joel Osteen. The preaching of these flashy ministers continues almost non-stop from the Christian Broadcasting Network of Pat Robertson, the Trinity Broadcasting Network of Jan and Paul Crouch, and a half dozen other Evangelical and Pentecostal networks that fill the airwaves with a conflation of religion, self-help, wealth acquisition, and conservative politics. With passages drawn from *Malachi* (3:10), *Matthew* (25:14-30), *John* (10:10), and *Philippians* (4:19), their theology contends to represent God's promise to New Covenant Christians of their eventual dominion over society, and teaches that God's chosen people will enjoy financial and physical well-being. These ideas, preached and written about since the last third of the nineteenth century, found safe harbor in this religiously based and secularized gospel of wealth and healthy-mindedness.¹ Using New Thought's language of suggestion, repetition, and self-

¹ Read William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905); Costi W. Hinn, *God, Greed, and the (Prosperity) Gospel: How Truth Overwhelms a Life Built on Lies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019); Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 2012).

assurance, individuals wrapped themselves around an assortment of questionable business practices in anticipation of a better (i.e., more prosperous) life.²

Chicago School of Psychology

The medical hypnotist Dr. Herbert Arthur Parkyn (1879-1927) received his medical degree in 1892 from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, before taking graduate work at McGill Medical College in Montreal and the Medical College at Toronto University. Following his training, he moved to Chicago in 1896 to accept a chair in psychotherapeutics at Illinois Medical College (1894), the first of its kind in the Midwest. His responsibilities also included directing a free clinic attached to the college. News of this position, however, sent shock waves among members of the city's medical profession who equated psychotherapeutics as akin to quackery. Through its local and state societies, the profession derided psychotherapeutics as nothing more than a new term for debunked religious and pseudo-scientific practices, i.e., royal touch, laying-on-hands, animal magnetism, hypnotism, Perkinism, divine healing, electro-biology, patheism, and faith-cure. Pressure eventually forced William F. Waugh, dean of the Illinois Medical College, and Randolph N. Hall, its president, to rescind Parkyn's appointment.³

Disappointed but undeterred, Parkyn opened his own Chicago School of Psychology and free clinic on Bowen Avenue on the city's South Side. Several years later, in 1901, he founded the University of Psychic Science located on Cottage Grove Avenue also on the South Side.

Supported by an assemblage of the city's progressive physicians; devotees of hypnotism,

² More recently, Milton Friedman's September 13, 1970 landmark essay in the *New York Times* titled "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits," represents the secular justification for this form of self-destructive greed.

³ Illinois Medical College was founded in 1894 and absorbed by Bennett Medical College (eclectic) in 1910. That same year, Bennett affiliated with Loyola University to become the School of Medicine of Loyola University.

suggestive therapeutics, New Thought, and holistic health; and sectarian healers from osteopathy, chiropractic, vitopathy, and homeopathy, the school and university became an integral part of a national movement in psychotherapeutics, with Parkyn serving as its leading spokesman in Chicago. In some ways, the school followed in the tradition of the Boston School of Psychotherapy (1880) under the formative guidance of William James, James Jackson Putnam, Richard Cabot, and Boris Sidis who provided spiritual and auto-suggestive advice for the treatment of patients suffering from a broad range of organic and functional disorders.⁴

Soon after the founding of the Chicago School of Psychology, Sydney Blanchard Flower (1867-1943), an ambitious immigrant to Canada from England, moved to Chicago where he found employment as secretary and business manager for Parkyn's school and clinic. In June of 1896, he published *Hypnotism Up to Date* consisting of a series of interviews of Parkyn designed to promote the school. Flower also began publication of the *Hypnotic Magazine* (1896-97) which served as "house organ" for the school. Each issue recounted case studies carried out at the school's clinic along with more general interest articles on hypnotic and suggestive therapeutics. Flower served as the magazine's editor, business manager, proof-reader, publisher, and proprietor—everything but printer and office boy. Operating out of his newly created Psychic Publishing Company on Fifth Avenue in Chicago, he soon became a self-proclaimed authority on the science of hypnotism and its therapeutic possibilities.

⁴ John M. Andrick, "The 'Chicago School of Psychology' and Hypnotic Magazine: Suggestive Therapeutics, Public Psychologies, and New Thought Pluralism, 1895-1900," *History of Psychology*, 23 (2020), 2, 6; Read G. E. G. Gifford, Jr., *Psychoanalysis, Psychotherapy, and the New England Medical Scene* (NY: Science History Publications, 1987); E. Taylor, "Essay Review, More on the Unwritten History of Medical Psychology," *Medical History*, 40 (1996), 340-43; John S. Haller, Jr., "Cincinnati's Notorious Charlatan, John Bunyan Campbell," *Queen City Heritage*, LV (Summer, 1997), 21-39; and J. C. Burnham, "Psychiatry, Psychology, and the Progressive Movement," *American Quarterly*, 12 (1960), 457-65.

As a way of promoting Parkyn's school and university, Flower used the pages of the magazine to teach hypnotism to a skeptical medical profession including instructions on how and when to use it on patients.⁵ At the same time, he employed the magazine to attack the ragtag of pseudo professors and lay healers who dominated the field of suggestive therapeutics. This included Mary Baker Eddy with her Christian Science healers and their fixation on MAM ("Malicious Animal Magnetism"), and the "success treatments" offered by the Rev. John Alexander Dowie, a Scottish-Australian evangelist and minister of divine healing who settled in Chicago where he treated a broad range of psychosomatic illnesses.⁶

Recognizing the magazine was purchased by the very pseudo healers he so publicly rebuked, Flower reversed his policy and reached out to all occultists, spiritualists, and lay healers. This included policemen and detectives interested in using hypnotism in criminology; attorneys curious as to its potential application in the courts; those treating alcoholism; others interested in using hypnotism as a method of education during natural sleep; and those who saw its potential use in homeopathy and anesthesiology. No longer a spokesperson for only medical orthodoxy, Flower now played to much larger audiences, causing an increase in the circulation of *Hypnotic Magazine* to 4,000 copies.

Recognizing the potential growth of the psychotherapeutic healing industry, Flower left the employment of Parkyn and, while still publishing the school's clinical reports, started his own Psychic Publishing Company to sell his *Course in Personal Magnetism, Self-Control and the Development of Character* (1901); *The Power Within: A Work Dealing with the Practical*

⁵ "Editorial Notes," *The Hypnotic Magazine*, I, no. 4 (1896), 238.

⁶ Gordon Lindsay, *John Alexander Dowie: A Life Story of Trials Tragedies and Triumphs* (United States: Christ for the Nations, 1951); Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Allison V. Stewart, 1912).

Developments of Psychic Research (1901); and *Somnopathy: A Method of Healing Disease, Correcting Bad Habits, Educating Young and Old, Improving the Character* (1902). In addition, he sold Annette Dresser's *Philosophy of P. P. Quimby* (1896); Horatio W. Dresser's *The Power of Silence* (1896); Leander Whipple's *The Philosophy of Mental Healing* (1893); and Ralph Waldo Trine's *What All the World's A-Seeking* (1895). Year by year, his inventory expanded to include Mary F. Haydon's *Bible Year Book of the New Thought* (1903); Ella Wheeler Wilcox's *The Heart of the New Thought* (1902); James Escaile's *Mesmerism in India* (1902); Frances Partlow's *Training of Children in the New Thought* (1902); Elizabeth Towne's *Joy Philosophy* (1903); and Uriel Buchanan's *The Mind's Attainment* (1902).

The Neophyte

Sometime in the late 1890s, Atkinson and his family moved to Chicago, a city that Emma Curtis Hopkins had transformed into a center for the New Thought Movement in the Midwest, and where he decided to begin a life again, secure in his belief that support was sufficiently present to address any future issues he might face. Once in Chicago, he gained admittance to the Illinois Bar, an indication that he considered restarting his legal practice. He also found a job lecturing at Parkyn's University of Psychic Science where he delivered a series of lessons on personal magnetism titled "Psychic Influence, Thought Force, Will Power, Concentration, and Practical Mental Science." At the same time, he furnished articles for Parkyn's monthly journal *Suggestion, A New Thought Journal* (1900-1901). Impressed with his abilities, Parkyn hired him as associate editor for the magazine. Soon afterward, Flower hired him away from Parkyn, offering him co-editorship of the *Journal of Medical Magnetism* (formerly *Hypnotic Magazine*).

At Atkinson's urging, Flower renamed it with the more marketable title of *New Thought, the Monthly Journal for the Psychic Club* (1901-1905).⁷

In the magazine's first issue under the new title, Atkinson introduced himself to subscribers, explaining that he had practiced law in an "eastern state" where business thrived to the extent he had "as much as I could possibly take care of." At the time he claimed knowing nothing of New Thought or of the therapeutic application of thought-force but admitted having an interest in the study of the occult. Soon afterward, he became embroiled in a bitter legal fight that caused him to become nervous and irritable, running down his physical and mental vigor. "Certain persons were attempting to make me submit to an intolerable yoke of oppression, under cover of an unconstitutional law," he explained. "I felt that I would rather die than submit without a struggle." The worry precipitated nervous prostration, depression, insomnia, indigestion, headaches, and an inability to attend to the duties of his profession—an illness New York neurologist George Miller Beard labeled with the term neurasthenia, a popular diagnosis that became broadly accepted across urban America.⁸ Only after acting on the teachings of New Thought, however, did he return to health feeling confident, fearless, and happy.⁹ Calling himself a "mental scientist," he informed subscribers that he believed in an infinite power; that humans were immortal; that the real self was spirit; that humanity was

⁷ Andrick, "The Chicago School of Psychology and Hypnotic Magazine: Suggestive Therapeutics, Public Psychologies, and New Thought Pluralism, 1895-1900," 13-16.

⁸ George Beard, "Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 80 (1869), 217-22; John S. Haller, Jr., and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana: University Of Illinois Press, 1974), Chapter 1; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁹ William Walker Atkinson, "A Fore Word," *New Thought*, 10, no. 12 (1901), 1; D. G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

evolving into a plane of greater consciousness; that thought was one of the greatest manifestations of energy; that the law of attraction would draw to each what he or she desired or feared; and that fear-thought was the root cause of most physical and mental illnesses. Above all else, he believed in the brotherhood of all and in the gospel of work.¹⁰

Atkinson's School of Mental Science

In 1902, convinced he had found his niche in the New Thought Movement, and intent on capturing its momentum, Atkinson sought investors in his own School of Mental Science in the Auditorium Building in Chicago. He thanked all whose financial backing had made possible the establishment of the school and saw fit to bestow Atkinson's name on it. Claiming that the school and its free clinic would soon be known worldwide, he invited visitors to see for themselves the work being done so they could carry the news to interested parties.¹¹

Unlike most trained and untrained psychotherapists at the time, Atkinson taught that the different schools of mental healing made the mistake of attributing success to their own proprietary theories and not to the Truth. "I care nothing whatever for theories—they are to me . . . but working hypotheses, to be discarded for better ones tomorrow." In fact, all the different methods of healing by the power of the mind were simply variations of the same standard forces. This applied to Suggestive Therapeutics, Mental Science, Christian Science, Faith-Cure, Mind-Cure, and others. None had a monopoly on the Truth; instead, they were all modifications of the forces latent within the individual and called into play by the power of suggestion. Rather

¹⁰ William Walker Atkinson, *Nuggets of the New Thought; Several Things that Have Helped People* (Chicago, IL: The Psychic Research Company, 1902), 63-65.

¹¹ William Walker Atkinson, "The School of Mental Science," *New Thought*, 11, no. 3 (1902), 11.

than propose or advocate a particular theory, he taught there was but one great power of the mind, and confined his teaching to harnessing its energies for the practical work of healing the sick in mind and body. Atkinson called this power *thought-force* obtainable by anyone who could learn to develop a feeling of calm and restful quiet. Once achieved, individuals could send their thought-forces to all areas of their bodies, causing the nerve currents to reinvigorate the injured parts; alternatively, they could direct them to others who were suffering from similar ailments.¹²

Atkinson's inaugural class, which lasted four weeks, enrolled attendees from Philadelphia, the District of Columbia, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. When the next class failed to produce the anticipated enrollment, he moved the school to smaller quarters in a house on Vincennes Avenue in Chicago. It remains unclear whether he simply failed to recruit sufficient students to sustain the school, or, as Atkinson explained, he was too overwhelmed by the work required to manage the school and fulfill his other responsibilities. "I have enjoyed teaching, and trust that those who have attended the school have reaped some benefit; but there are too many calls upon my time to permit me to continue," he reported. "My correspondence work is too heavy to permit of the encroachment of other duties; much time is necessary to get the journal out on time each month, and to prepare the articles which I contribute to it; and I am about to write a book this summer." Regardless of his explanation, after only two classes, Atkinson closed the school. There is reason to suggest that having taken

¹²William Walker Atkinson, "Self-Healing by Thought Force," *New Thought*, 11, no. 2 (1902), 17-19.

on too much work, he found himself facing the prospect of yet another mental collapse. By closing the school, he acted out a role he would repeat again and again.¹³

Success Circle

As another example of the extra duties, Atkinson accepted responsibility for managing Flower's Psychic Club for whom the magazine was ostensibly intended. Using the club as a means for increasing subscribers and an admirer of Elizabeth Towne's "Success Circles," Atkinson established his own "Success Circle" whose principles consisted of co-operation and brotherly love. These circles were a common phenomenon in the New Thought Movement whose participants used them to espouse healthy minds, loving relationships, prosperity, and personal well-being. By thinking positively and doing so in unison, its members believed it possible to energize the circle's collective mind and setting it on a path for each and all to benefit. The circle became an irresistible thought-force, sweeping away all obstacles before it and reinforcing in each person a strong mental atmosphere of success. Its power of attraction promised to realize for the circle's participants an exact correspondence of their inner intentions.¹⁴

Atkinson's Success Circle, which he started in January 1902 quickly grew in membership with subscribers participating from all parts of the country. Those who joined the circle made the following pledge:

¹³ William Walker Atkinson, "The Atkinson School Closed for the Summer," *New Thought*, 11, no. 6 (1902), 14.

¹⁴ Read Earnest Holmes, *Creative Mind and Success* (Lanham: Dancing Unicorn Books, 2016); Henry Wood, *The New Thought Simplified: How to Gain Harmony and Health* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1903); James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1957); and Florence Scovel Shinn, *Your Word is Your Wand* (Marina de Rey, CA: DeVorss, 1996).

I HEREBY JOIN THE SUCCESS CIRCLE OF THE PSYCHIC CLUB OF AMERICA, WITH THE RIGHT TO WITHDRAW WHENEVER I SEE FIT. WHILE I AM A MEMBER, I PLEDGE MYSELF TO JOIN MY BRETHERN IN SENDING OUT THOUGHTS OF LOVE, ENCOURAGEMENT, HELP AND SUCCESS, TO MYSELF; MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE SUCCESS CIRCLE; AND ALL MANKIND. I WILL DO MY BEST TO REFRAIN FROM ALL THOUGHTS OF FEAR, DISCOURAGEMENT, FAILURE AND HATE, AND I WILL DO MY BEST TO ADD TO THE LOVING AND HELPFUL THOUGHT-WAVE BEING SENT OUT BY THE CIRCLE. MAY PEACE, HARMONY AND SUCCESS ATTEND OUR EFFORTS.¹⁵

Applying themselves to the task, its members created an aura of positive thought to protect them from negative vibrations. “We have assurances from many advanced students of the New Thought, that they will take an active part in the work of the Success Circle, and I know that within twenty-four hours after this magazine reaches the hands of its subscribers there will be many . . . pledged and actively at work. If some of us do not strongly feel the Success Vibrations upon joining, I will be very much mistaken.”¹⁶

Within six months, Atkinson reported adding members to the magazine’s Success Circle at a rate of several hundred weekly. “We could fill these pages with reports and communications from its members, were it not for the fact that the members . . . write us freely, with the understanding that we are not to use their letters for publication.” Many of the

¹⁵ William Walker Atkinson, “The Success Circle,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 1 (1902), 13.

¹⁶ Atkinson, “The Success Circle,” 12.

members conducted investigations of their own on thought transference, mind reading, psychometry, and clairvoyance, reporting to Atkinson the results of their experiments.¹⁷

Despite its success, Atkinson soon found the responsibility too time-consuming. Flower, who understood that Atkinson's strength lay in his writing, hired Ella Wheeler Wilcox as a co-editor to take over management of the Success Circle as well as the day-to-day operations of the magazine.

Challenges

By the end of its first year of publication, *New Thought* subscriptions climbed to over 25,000 with some from as far away as Egypt, South Africa, Australia, India, China, and Japan. Each issue advertised correspondence courses in self-healing, mental science, and every phase of New Thought philosophy, while writers such as Elizabeth Towne, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Uriel Buchanan, Nancy McKay Gordon, and Sydney Flower contributed to its content. By the end of the second year, the magazine once again doubled its circulation to 50,000 copies monthly.¹⁸

Initially, Flower received approval for a bulk mailing rate but lost it by using the magazine as a ploy to advertise Parkyn's College of Psychology. Hoping to win back the second-class postage rate, Flower re-titled the magazine *Suggestive Therapeutics* (June 1898—January 1901) and then *Journal of Magnetism* (January—November 1901) in a slight-of-hand effort to deflect the Post Office from the original magazine. Neither effort worked as Assistant Postmaster E. C. Madden denied the application. "He [Madden] is of the opinion that this magazine is not bought for its own sake, but for the sake of the cloth books which have been offered as

¹⁷ William Walker Atkinson, "The Psychic Club," *New Thought*, 11, no. 6 (1902), 18.

¹⁸ William Walker Atkinson, "One Year After," *New Thought*, 11, no. 12 (1902), 16.

premiums to annual subscribers. In this he is wrong, as the newsstand trade proves,” Flower complained. Disappointed but nonetheless determined to reverse the decision, Flower encouraged subscribers to write Madden and convince him of his mistaken view. Madden, however, remained unmoved, believing that the magazine served as a subterfuge for other purposes, i.e., selling tangibles that had little or no direct bearing on the magazine’s intended purpose. Despite multiple appeals, Flower was repeatedly turned down and forced to pay the higher mailing rate.¹⁹

The case against Flower turned out to be self-inflicted since he used the magazine to sell Home Study Courses on The Law of Mental Currents, Suggestive Therapeutics, Magnetic Healing, Hypnotism, Clairvoyance, Human Magnetism, Concentration, Mind Heading, Psychometry, Phrenology, Palmistry, Astrology, Mediumship, and Homeopathy. Each course was complete and sold for \$1.00 postpaid. He also owned the franchise rights to the Home Study Course of the Columbia College of Osteopathy in Edgewater, Illinois. For those interested in practicing Osteopathy, Flower even offered a fully illustrated manual of instructions at a cost of \$1.00. The entire series formed a working library on Occultism that Flower urged subscribers to purchase.²⁰

Then there were the stocks. During the first several years of the magazine, Flower used its pages to sell stock in three of his own business ventures: the Flower Health Cigar Company,

¹⁹ Sydney Flower, “Second-Class Rates,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 5 (1903), 78. Flower’s troubles with the U.S. Office were similar to the experience of Helen Wilmans who, on account of her soliciting money to cure by means of “absent treatment,” a form of healing that the government insisted was impossible, a Fraud Order was placed on her without notice.

²⁰ George M. Raleigh, “Something about Osteopathy,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 1 (1902), 20; George M. Raleigh, “The New Profession,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 2 (1902), 14. Sydney Flower, “Just Business,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 8 (1902), 17; Norman Gevitz, “Andrew Taylor Still and the Social Origins of Osteopathy,” in R. Cooter (ed.), *Studies in the History of Alternative Medicine*, (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1988), 155-70.

Flower Food Remedy Company, and North Shore Reduction Company. Others, like the Bob Matheson Mining and Milling Company and the Eversharp Razor Company, he simply sold shares on commission. Reminding readers that time was money and “we are all willing to make money when we can do so honestly,” he saw no reason why the magazine should not reach out to New Thinkers willing to invest in money-making prospects.²¹

Flower’s stocks were highly speculative. Nevertheless, he guaranteed a high annual return and promised to refund the full principal with interest if purchasers were disappointed in the transaction. His promises had all the characteristics of a Ponzi, or pyramid scheme, which promised high rates of return with little risk to investors. To no one’s surprise, Flower made himself scarce when asked to return an investment, or when the Post Office requested information to investigate complaints or the legitimacy of his claims. In the latter instance, he instructed his lawyer to provide an array of excuses, none of which satisfied the Post Office.²²

Flower’s earliest stock option, the Flower Health Cigar Company, he incorporated for \$250,000 and sold shares for 3 cents each. However, but because he claimed that demand exceeded his expectations, he accepted only blocks of 500 shares at \$15.00, or 5,000 shares for \$150.00. He stopped selling shares temporarily in June 1902 when he reported having sufficient funds to purchase a factory. “Think money, assume money, believe money, you’ll draw it to you.”²³ Months later, and without explanation, he raised the price to 4 cents and resumed selling shares.²⁴

²¹ Sydney Flower, “Fortune Knocks Once,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 12 (1903), 235-236.

²² Named after Charles Ponzi (1882-1949) whose scheme involved the purchase of postage coupons that one could take to the Post Office and exchange for a priority stamp to send a reply.

²³ Sydney Flower, “Money-Making and Other Things,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 6 (1902), 11-12.

²⁴ Sydney Flower, “Business,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 10 (1902), 16.

Following his success with the Health Cigar Company, Flower informed readers of his Flower Food Remedy Company which offered nutrient foods. Incorporated for \$1,000,000, he set the minimum purchase at \$10.00 for 500 shares. Alternatively, the company offered stockholders in his Health Cigar Company three options: continuing in the company and taking their chances with the business; withdrawing the amount invested in full, together with ten percent interest; or transferring their holdings to the Flower Food Remedy Company.²⁵

ALL WILL BE GOOD FOODS TO ANTIDOTE DISEASE. Our special formulas, purchased from a board of experienced physicians, tried, tested and proven, include A SKIN SOAP, A TOILET POWDER, A TOOTH POWDER, A HAIR RESTORER, A HAIR DESTROYER, A COLD CREAM, A BLOOD TONIC, A DYSPEPSIA CURE, A CURE FOR PIMPLES, A CURE FOR FEMALE WEAKNESS, ASTHMA, HEMORRHOIDS, CATARRH, CONSTIPATION, WEAK EYES, DEAFNESS, DIZZINESS, EPILEPSY, and many other dreaded afflictions. We have FIFTY different FOOD REMEDIES. We will put our remedies into every drug store in the United States. We will sell through agents. We will sell direct by mail. We have A BOARD OF EXPERIENCED and REGISTERED PHYSICIANS to give advice in all cases requiring advice, free gratis and for nothing.²⁶

Included among the fifty food products sold by the company: Flowers Pure Food Soap, a medicated soap for the face priced at 25 cents postpaid; Flower's Complexion Food Tablets for skin eruptions such as blackheads, pimples, blemishes and eczema, priced at 50 cents, postpaid;

²⁵ Flower, "Business," 16.

²⁶ Sydney Flower, "A Golden Opportunity," *New Thought*, 11, no. 6 (1902), 17.

Flower's Kidney Food intended for persons with bladder troubles, Bright's Disease, diabetes, cystitis and backache, priced at \$1.00 postpaid; and Flower's Cough Balsam, a food for those suffering from inflamed conditions of the throat and lungs, for 50 cents a bottle, postpaid. These, he assured readers, were in already in production. Those manufactured next included Flower's Food for the Brain and Nerves; Flower's Food for the Blood to cure blood poison, old sores, ulcers, and scrofula; and Flower's Food for the Hands to make them soft and plump.²⁷

In his October issue of *New Thought*, Flower announced that the price per share in his Food Remedy Company had increased from 2 to 5 cents.

Have you placed your odd cash for investment in The Flower Food Remedy Co.? Better do so at once. Write to 221 Illinois St. for full particulars. Every investor is guaranteed against loss. It looks to me like high profits for all. But remember—no loss! I guarantee that. Stock goes up to six cents a share in January. Buy and hold tight. Buy now. This stock will be at par, ten cents, on April 1st, and by June there will be none to sell. We shall have our full list of 50 remedies out by June— and then for dividends! One year to put out 50 remedies is good work, and I prophesy dividends in the first quarter of the second year.²⁸

During this same period, Flower advertised stock in the North Shore Reduction Company, a venture on the shores of Lake Superior that reputedly separated magnetic iron from wet sand. As a stock-selling proposition he claimed it an immense success, promising dividends

²⁷ Sydney Flower, "The Flower Food Remedy Company," *New Thought*, 11, no. 7 (1902), 11.

²⁸ Flower, "Business," 18.

that could not fail to materialize. In fact, he promised investors they would double their money inside of two years. “And if it is worth my while to hold on to a thousand shares of this stock for myself, you may be very sure that I look to this investment to yield me as much as 5.0 per cent per year. You are therefore advised to make your odd purchases of shares of this stock before the last day of July if you attach any value to my guarantee. During August, the remaining shares of stock will be offered for sale at One Hundred and Fifty Dollars per share upon the merit of this proposition alone.”²⁹

When Flower received complaints from subscribers stating that the publication should not be used to advance such speculations, particularly those of the Bob Matheson gold mine, he pointed out that *New Thinkers* had already purchased over forty thousand dollars’ worth of the mining stock. “You have not hesitated to denounce the Bob Matheson mine as a myth and a fraud. Hard words are cheap, my friends, and it does not become you well to talk in such vein. The Bob Matheson mine is no myth, as you could very easily have satisfied yourselves upon, and work on the shaft is actively progressing to-day.” As with his other stocks, Flower promised refunds to all who requested them. “You have dealt well by me; I have dealt faithfully by you. You have invested your money on my advice; you have never lost a cent through me,” he assured subscribers to the magazine. “Some of you have written me that you wished the cash you invested . . . returned to you. You received it without argument on my part. I have never lied to you; never broken my word to you.”³⁰

The lure of wealth not only drew subscribers to drink freely at the prosperity gospel’s fountain of hopefulness but caused Herbert Parkyn to close his Chicago School of Psychology

²⁹ Sydney Flower, “The North Shore Reduction Co.,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 8 (1903), 130.

³⁰ Sydney Flower, “Fortune Knocks Once,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 12 (1903), 235-236.

and Clinic in 1906 and relocate in Mexico where he became director of Motzorongo Company's 163,000-acre sugar cane estate in which he had purchased stock after being advertised in his magazine. The school's closure marked the end to one era of irregular healing and the beginning of a form of Christian therapeutics known as the Emmanuel Movement which had spread westward from New England.³¹ The movement claimed success using American and European-based psychosomatic cures under the auspices of its church organization and without the accessories of questionable business practices. Its advocates found many disorders previously thought to have purely physical causation were in fact due to mental states and conditions.³²

Going Legitimate

Failing to receive bulk rate postage for the magazine, Atkinson convinced Flower to expand the list of New Thought writers and eliminate using the magazine to advertise his unrelated business ventures. By taking this approach, he argued, the Post Office might consider reversing its decision. With Flower's consent, Atkinson hired Jean Cowgill whose articles in *Harper's Weekly* and the *Chicago Chronicle* had made her a household name in the city. Also known in New York "as a journalist of great ability, with an instinct which leads her right to the heart of the matter in hand, and with a power of expression possessed but by few," she wrote books on clairvoyance and other occult powers of the mind. Atkinson promised the inclusion of

³¹ Read E. Caplan, "Popularizing American Psychotherapy: The Emmanuel Movement, 1906-1910," *History of Psychology*, 1 (1998), 289-314; G. E. Gifford, Jr., *Psychoanalysis, Psychotherapy, and the New England Medical Scene, 1894-1944* (New York: Science History Publications, 1978).

³²William Walker Atkinson, *Suggestion and Auto-Suggestion* (Chicago: The Progress Co., 1909), 114.

her articles every month. They “will be practical, plain, and interesting. It will be the Jean Cowgill kind. You will like it.”³³

Atkinson also introduced a “Letter Box” as a regular part of the magazine’s content to answer questions from subscribers. Explaining that he could not respond to personal inquiries due to the thousands of subscribers, he offered to select those of greatest general interest and answer them in the “Letter Box.” “If you have a question to ask which you think will interest a number of readers as well as yourself, just write us asking the question as clearly and in as few words as possible,” he wrote.³⁴ Within months, however, Ella Wheeler Wilcox took over the chore as Atkinson found the queries too onerous to answer. Once again, he had taken on more responsibility than he could handle.³⁵

Early in 1902, Atkinson moved his office to the southwest corner of Dearborn and Monroe Streets in Chicago while the rest of the magazine’s staff remained at the main office at the Auditorium. From his new office, Atkinson performed minimal editorial duties, managed the sale of his books, and on occasion, welcomed visitors “from our New Thought family of readers.” Clearly, the change minimized Atkinson’s day-to-day responsibilities and interactions with staff and the messy business of running the magazine.³⁶

In the October 1903, Atkinson informed subscribers that the magazine and staff were moving to New York City.³⁷ Along with the change, he hired a new group of writers including Eva Kinney Miller, Louise Radford Wells, Elmer Gates, Nancy McKay Gordon, James Braid, George M. Raleigh, Ralph Waldo Trine, Felicia Blake, Franklin L. Berry, Ida Gatling Pentecost, and Miranda

³³ William Walker Atkinson, “About Jean Cowgill,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 8, (1903), 138.

³⁴ William Walker Atkinson, “Letter Box,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 3 (1903), 44.

³⁵ William Walker Atkinson, “About Personal Letters,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 1 (1903), 15.

³⁶ “Our Downtown Office,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 3 (1902), 49.

³⁷ William Walker Atkinson, “From Chicago to New York,” *New Thought*, 12, no. 10 (1903), 175.

Powers Swenson—all recognized writers in the New Thought Movement. The increase in the magazine's content, due in no small measure to the dramatic increase in readership, made it one of the most highly prized magazines in the country with subscriptions approaching 100,000. Given its popularity, Flower found it easy and highly profitable to sell advertising space that reflected only New Thought subject matter.

By any definition, the magazine had matured into a high-brow publication. Articles and communications from Flower disappeared. In their place, Atkinson and his co-editors exploited the pluralism implicit in the New Thought Movement by writing articles on a wide range of topics—spiritualism, psychical research, psychological medicine, metaphysical religion, popular occultism, mind-cure and self-affirmation techniques, home-study telepathy, and all manner of mental-power cultivation. Nevertheless, there remained a residual of Flower's presence in the form of advertisements from the Columbia College of Osteopathy; offers of drugless healing based on New Thought principles; instruction in the "art of attainment" by Uriel Buchanan; telepathic treatments; and sale of "I CAN and I WILL" buttons.

Unfortunately for the editors, writers, and subscribers of the magazine, the U. S. Post Office continued to have problems with the magazine's publisher. On July 2, 1904, the Postmaster cited Flower and the magazine to show cause why a Fraud Order should not be issued "on the ground that they were using the mails in the conduct of a scheme for obtaining money by means of false or fraudulent pretenses." The citation was based on Flower's continued ownership of the New Thought Publishing Company and for falsely promising dividends from the North Shore Reduction Company at the rate of 50% per annum solely from earnings and not out of the principal.

In an effort to clarify the changes that had taken place, Atkinson informed subscribers that Sydney Flower was the magazine's sole owner and manager of the New Thought Publishing House. In that position, he directed its policy, managed advertising, and handled all matters connected with the business end of the company. As for himself, "I am not the owner, or part owner, of this publication, and my connection therewith is in the position of associate editor and contributor to its columns, my jurisdiction being limited to matters naturally coming before me in such position."³⁸ Similarly, in an editorial, Flower set the record straight with the obvious intent of seeking a bulk-mail status for the magazine. "Mr. Atkinson is the final authority, and nothing is admitted to the magazine, nor any change made, of which he does not approve," assured Flower.³⁹

When Flower refused to allow the Post Office to inspect the magazine's financial books, the Postmaster directed the delivery of all mail, including money orders for subscriptions sent to the "Dead-Letter Office" with the word "Fraudulent" stamped thereon. Without revenue, the magazine was forced to close. Within months, however, a group of financiers revived the magazine which continued to publish until 1910.⁴⁰

Endocrinology

The actions taken by the Post Office did not diminish Flower's interest in speculative enterprises. In 1910, he was jailed in Carson City, Nevada, for promotion of fraudulent stock in

³⁸ William Walker Atkinson, "A Bit of Explanation," *New Thought*, 12, no. 4 (1903), 61.

³⁹ Sydney Flower, "The Publisher's Talk," *New Thought*, 14, no. 2 (1905), 51. In 1905, Atkinson took a six-month leave of absence from the magazine, spending most of his time in Los Angeles and Pasadena, California.

⁴⁰ http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/wing_lessons/1904_sydney_flower_new_thought_fraud_file.pdf (accessed September 19, 2020).

phantom gold mines.⁴¹ A decade later, he partnered with John R. Brinkley, an enterprising surgeon, who proposed a theory that “all energy is sex-energy,” suggesting that the body’s mental and physical health owed its vigor to the robust functioning of the sex-glands. A graduate of Bennett Medical College (eclectic) in Chicago, Brinkley advocated the benefits of glandular extracts and the surgical transplantation of goat glands as a means of correcting or maintaining this energy source. Once a patient of Brinkley, Flower championed the surgeon’s goat-gland operation.⁴² Research on the sex glands originated with Brown-Sequard in the 1880s when he injected himself with ground testicular material with the intention of making himself more youthful and energetic. Based on the theory that excessive expenditures of semen depleted the body’s source of energy, Brinkley urged the use of testicular extracts to recharge the seminal energy to renew the male’s strength and vigor.⁴³

Brinkley began his experiments in 1911 using gland-transplants from goats, sheep, and guinea pigs. His work was temporarily interrupted by the war when he enlisted in the Medical Corps. After the war, he returned to his work, having taken notice of experiments in gland transplantations carried out by physiologist Eugen Steinach of Vienna and urologist Frank Lydston of Chicago. In 1914, Lydston performed his first human gland transplantation when he

⁴¹ [file:///C:/Users/jhall/Dropbox/Public/The%20Yogi%20\[Sydney%20Flower\]%20\(IAPSOP\).html](file:///C:/Users/jhall/Dropbox/Public/The%20Yogi%20[Sydney%20Flower]%20(IAPSOP).html) (accessed October 13, 2020).

⁴² Sydney B. Flower, *The Goat-Gland Transplantation: As Originated and Successfully Performed by J. R. Brinkley, M.D., of Milford, Kansas, U.S.A. in over 600 Operations upon Men and Women* (Chicago: New Thought Book Department, 1921), 19. Brinkley was head of the Brinkley-Jones Hospital and Training School for Nurses at Milford, Kansas, a small town 150 miles west of Kansas City.

⁴³ Diana Long Hall, "Biology, Sex Hormones and Sexism in the 1920s," *Philosophical Forum* 5 (1973-1974): 81-96; Diana E. Long, "Physiological Identity of American Sex Researchers Between the Two World Wars," in *Physiology in the American Context, 1850-1940*, ed. Gerald L. Geison (Bethesda, MD: American Physiological Society, 1987), 263-78; Vern L. Bullough, *Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 92-147; Bullough, "Katharine Bement Davis, Sex Research, and the Rockefeller Foundation," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62 (1988): 74-89; Ben Barker-Benfield, "The Spermatic Economy: A Nineteenth Century View of Sexuality," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1972): 45-74.

transplanted the testicle of a deceased man into his own scrotum.⁴⁴ Brinkley opposed using the glands of humans on other humans, preferring to find suitable material from the animal kingdom. His preference was the Toggenburg breed of Swiss goat whose best age for transplant was three weeks to a month for the male goat, and one year for the ovaries of the female goat. Rather than restore old men with the power “to do as they pleased with their new-found youthful vigor,” he intended transplants to convert the animal’s sexual energy into physical and mental energy. Nevertheless, goat gland transplants were prescribed for impotence, insanity, dementia praecox, sterility, poor eyesight, nervous breakdown, neurasthenia, and chronic diseases. “It is a fact beyond all gainsaying,” wrote Flower, “that Dr. Brinkley’s operation has in truth cheated old age of its toll in very many cases of both sexes, and the improvement, or rejuvenation, affects both the minds and bodies of those treated by this method; and this rejuvenation is lasting to the extent of the doctor’s observation.”⁴⁵

In 1921, Flower published *The Goat-Gland Transplantation*, a layman’s effort to explain to the public the work of Brinkley who, at the time, was prohibited by the American Medical Association from publishing on the subject. The prohibition resulted from a complaint lodged by Dr. Serge Voronoff of Paris that the transplantation of animal glands into humans was “impossible and cannot succeed.”⁴⁶ By the 1930s, rejuvenation surgery lost much of its standing within the medical profession, particularly with the editors of the *Journal of the American*

⁴⁴ <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/November-2018/When-Chicagos-Wealthiest-Man-Maybe-Probably-Got-a-Monkey-Testicle-Transplant/> (accessed, September 19, 2020).

⁴⁵ Flower, *The Goat-Gland Transplantation*, 6-8, 21.

⁴⁶ Flower, *The Goat-Gland Transplantation*, 6.

Medical Association who actively condemned the procedure. Soon afterward, the popular press followed suit.⁴⁷

After Brinkley had his license revoked for reputed fraudulent activity, he acquired a radio station which broadcasted a combination of medical advice, country music, and political populism. During the 1930s, he ran unsuccessfully for governor of Kansas, and then used his radio station to advocate right-wing style of politics.⁴⁸

* * *

Surprisingly, Atkinson remained untainted by the criticism that pursued Flower and his feud with the U.S. Postal Service. Instead, he is credited with separating the magazine from the less decorous side of the publication. Beginning as a freelance writer, then as assistant editor of Dr. Herbert Parkyn's *Suggestion*, followed by co-editor of Flower's *New Thought* magazine, he became one of the more prominent members of the New Thought Movement, making him a household name with his authorship of books and articles. Nevertheless, Atkinson's health issues continued. Manic in his work ethic, he seemed increasingly unable to carry through with his projects or even the everyday responsibilities of an editor. Choosing to operate out of a different location from his staff, he exhibited aspects of agoraphobia, yet another indication that his condition had not lessened, but grown worse. He rarely ever visited the office, leaving the day-to-day management of the magazine to his assistant editors. Eventually, he chose to work from as far away as Southern California. To ensure his peace of mind, Flower and the magazine's co-editors made every effort to ensure his privacy. During the time he was associated with the

⁴⁷ Laura Davidow Hirshbein, "The Glandular Solution: Sex, Masculinity, and Aging in the 1920s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 (2000), 280.

⁴⁸ Michael Pettit, "Becoming Glandular: Endocrinology, Mass Culture, and Experimental Lives in the Interwar Age," *American Historical Review*, 118 (2013), 116

magazine, numerous individuals were hired to lessen his duties. “We want to leave his [Atkinson’s] mind free to think only of his writings,” insisted Flower. “We pondered how to relieve him of the work of planning the magazine’s activities, and as a result enlisted the services of [several] assistant editors.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Sydney Flower, “The Publisher’s Talk,” *New Thought*, 14, no. 2 (1905), 51. In 1905, Atkinson took a six-month leave of absence from the magazine, spending most of his time in Los Angeles and Pasadena, California.

Chapter 2

What's in a Name?

Surely such a mixful mixture ne'er has been mixed before, of the seeds of old Egypt, India, Chaldea, Persia, Greece—Hinduism, Buddhism, Paganism, Christianity, Religion, Metaphysics, Philosophy, Rationalism, Mysticism, Occultism. What shall the harvest be?

(William Walker Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 1910)

Soon after Sydney Flower and William Walker Atkinson introduced the term “New Thought” into the magazine’s title and content, questions arose regarding the meaning and purpose of the term. Was it indicative of something really new, or simply a variation of ideas that had been around from earlier times? Did New Thought present itself as something homogeneous or as a loosely united mix of beliefs and practices that extended from the ancient schools of India (i.e., Hinduism and Buddhism), to the pioneers of philosophical thought among Western philosophers (i.e., Bacon, Giordano Bruno, Rene Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke, Swedenborg, Berkeley, Kant, etc.), to more recent works by William James, Max Müller, Edward Carpenter, Victor Cousins, and Swami Vivekananda, the apostle of the Vedanta school of Hindu thought.

Take a page of Epictetus and a Plato paragraph;

Shake it briskly till the mixture makes the gentle scoffers chaff.

Add a slight Socratic flavor, not in excess of a dram,

And a weak solution formed of Persian epigram.

Mix a bit from old Confucius and from Buddha several drops,
Add Egyptian lore found in the pyramid of great Cheops.
Now some truths not half remembered and some others half forgot,
Boil the mixture, boil it briskly, till it simmers in the pot;
And—Lord bless you now, by brother, and the skeptics all be shrew
Can't you see that your approaching the thought that's labeled 'New?'¹

In Search of a Definition

While Atkinson struggled to define the elements of New Thought for the magazine's enquirers, Flowers offered a cash prize for anyone who provided a workable definition. The competition resulted in hundreds of entries which Atkinson agreed to judge. The outcome resulted in fourteen winning definitions:

1. "Being and doing one's best by repeatedly affirming one's ability."
2. "We are what we assert ourselves to be."
3. "Claim that you are what you desire to be."
4. "The cheerful, persistent assertion of the soul's prerogative to rule."
5. "Continuous affirmation of whatever helps us achieve our highest possibilities."
6. "Attaining the ideal in life through thought-concentration and assertion."
7. "Mental imagery, personally controllable, governs bodily health and individual circumstances."

¹ William Walker Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought* (Chicago: The Progress Company, 1910), 188.

8. "Holding constantly before one's thoughts the omnipotence of man's mind."
9. "Human development through recognition and assertion of human divinity."
10. "The control of mental force by positive concentrated, Ideal suggestion."
11. "Realization of Ideals by becoming them, through Force of Desire."
12. "Benefiting or Injuring others and ourselves reciprocally, through Thought Force."
13. "Fear nothing; love everything. Believe you can do anything."
14. "The recognition, realization, and manifestation of the God in Me."²

Despite his role as judge in the competition, Atkinson continued searching for a more meaningful definition. He found, however, that there was something about New Thought that refused to be labeled, classified, ticketed, or placed on exhibition. For one thing, it did not submit to rules, stated principles, or fences. The moment anyone attempted to put a fence around it, New Thought knocked it down. Nor could it be "churched" since, unlike most spiritual systems, it expressed adherence to no creed. Its life depended upon freedom of expression, and when any aspect of it was placed on exhibition, it withered and died. "It is as if one were to try to secure the life of a rose by picking the flower and placing it in a vase filled with water. The same principle applies in both cases."³

Apropos of this dilemma, Atkinson recalled receiving a letter from a subscriber who asked to sit at his feet, believing he was the true Teacher or Master of New Thought. Atkinson refused the offer stating that he preferred a "fellow student," "brother," or "schoolmate" to a "flock of human sheep trotting after him." New Thought did not subscribe to converting its

² Sydney Flower, "The Prize Competition," *New Thought*, 12, no. 3 (1903), 41-42.

³ Atkinson, "What is New Thought?" 28-29.

adherents into “droves of sheep,” but rather making them stand on their own two feet.

Furthermore, it was not necessary to understand the riddles of the universe before doing anything. The “Great Life Principle” within each person waited for the chance to manifest itself.

This principle became the basis for Atkinson’s “working creed” which he made into a formal statement in 1901 when he assumed the editorship of *New Thought* magazine.⁴

“Atkinson’s Creed”

I believe that the mind of Man contains the greatest of all forces—that Thought is one of the greatest manifestations of energy.

I believe that the man who understands the use of Thought-force can make of himself practically what he will.

I believe that not only is one’s body subject to the control of the mind, but that, also, one may change environment, “luck,” circumstances, by positive thought taking the place of negative. I know that the “I Can and I Will” attitude will carry one forward to Success that will seem miraculous to the man on the “I Can’t” plane.

I believe that “thoughts are things,” and that the Law of Attraction in the thought world will draw to one just what he desires or fears.

I believe in the gospel of work—in “hustling.”

I believe in the I DO, as well as the I AM. I know that the man who will take advantage of the Power of the Mind, and who will manifest that power in action, will go forward to Success as surely and as steadily as the arrow from the bow of the skilled archer.

I believe in the Brotherhood of Man.

I believe in being Kind.

I believe in everyone minding his own business—and allowing everyone else the same

⁴ Franklin L. Berry, editor of *New Thought*, quoted in William Walker Atkinson, *Thought Vibration; Or, The Law of Attraction in the Thought World* (Chicago: The New Thought Publishing Co., 1906), viii, xix-xx.

privilege.

I believe that we have no right to condemn—"let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

I believe that he who Hates is an assassin; that he who Covets is a thief; that he who Lusts is an adulterer; that the gist of a crime is in its desire. Seeing this—looking into our own hearts—how can we condemn?

I believe that Evil is but ignorance.

I believe that "to know all is to forgive all."

I believe that there is good in every man; "let us help him to manifest it."

I believe in the absolute equality of the Man and the Woman—sometimes I think that the odds are slightly in favor of the Woman.

I believe in the sacredness of Sex—but I also believe that Sex manifests on the Spiritual and Mental planes as well as on the Physical.

I believe that to be pure all things are pure.

I believe that man is immortal—that the Real Self is Spirit, which uses mind as body as its tools and manifests itself according to the fitness of the tools.

I believe that Man is rapidly growing into a new plane of consciousness, in which he will know himself as he is—will recognize the I AM—the Something Within.

I believe that there is an Infinite Power in, and of, all things.

I believe that, although today we have but the faintest idea of that Power, still we will steadily grow to comprehend it more fully—will get in closer touch with it. Even now we have momentary glimpses of its existence—a momentary consciousness of Oneness with the Absolute.

I believe that the greatest happiness consists in maintaining toward the Absolute the attitude of the trusting child, who, feeling no doubt of the parent's love—no doubt of his wisdom—places his little hand in that of the parent, and says "Lead Thou me on."

I believe that he who feels toward the Absolute, the trustfulness of the babe which

places its little tired head close to the breast of the mother, will also be conscious of the tender answering pressure, and the babe is drawn just a little closer to the mother-heart.⁵

Different Schools

Atkinson poked fun at those who claimed to have unraveled the secrets of life. One had only to look around to find a multitude of philosophies, cults, and schools brushing off old and forgotten creeds and replacing them with new names. “The wildest dreams of the ancients,” he observed, were “toned down a little, and boldly offered to the eager multitude as the long sought for solution of it all.” He found it hard to know whether “to sigh or weep” as he watched parade after parade of “modern prophets” strutting like Pied Pipers before adoring audiences as if they were “cutting fantastic capers before high heaven.”⁶

Despite the many different individuals who claimed ownership of New Thought, Atkinson chose to focus his attention on the philosophy’s underlying principles rather than choose among its competing contenders. Being the oldest *true* thought in existence, it represented a core of truths “nestled in the bosom of the esoteric teachings of all religions.” Handed down from teachers to students across the ages, its central concept, namely the “Oneness of All,” existed in the works of Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Alexander Pope, Robert Browning, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Edward Carpenter, among others.⁷ New Thought stood for those waves of spiritual and psychic thinkers whose teachings swept through the different cultures, races, and civilizations, educating its believers in the concepts of liberty,

⁵ Atkinson, *Thought Vibration; Or, The Law of Attraction in the Thought World*, xxix.

⁶ William Walker Atkinson, “The Seekers,” *New Thought*, 11, no. 3 (1902), 1-2.

⁷ Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was an English socialist poet, philosopher, and social reformer who advocated for vegetarianism, homosexuality, anti-industrialism, women’s rights, and the importance of manual labor.

self-help, fearlessness, courage, tolerance, success, health, and life. It taught people to stand on their own feet and seek their own salvation by developing capacities latent within each and believing in the concepts of “I CAN” and “I WILL.”⁸

For those sages, prophets, and philosophers who claimed to understand the *whyness* of existence, Atkinson compared their answers to a squirrel in a cage traveling on a wheel only to find itself at the end of its journey at the same place where it started. While some chose a materialistic response, others appealed to more varied creeds and philosophies. A few were honest seekers of Truth, but most drifted aimlessly amid the siren calls of competing prophets. Atkinson challenged his readers to know the Truth. Either the universe was without Law and therefore without meaning or purpose, or, accept that a “Universal Presence” was manifested in everything. Either a “Supreme Intelligence” had knowledge of all things or was aware of nothing. For Atkinson, the answer was clear. Woe to the person who did not know that the Law included everything and everywhere. Everything was connected; nothing happened by chance.⁹

In his search for the Truth, Atkinson observed that, over the centuries, humanity had experienced a gradual unfolding of spiritual consciousness, meaning an understanding that the true God (or whatever name best suited the recognition of a supreme power or universal presence) was other than the God of wrath and punishment depicted in organized religions. He found hidden as a kernel in all the great religions and philosophies of the world three fundamental truths: “God’s love,” the “Oneness of All,” and the “Kingship of Self.” Atkinson expressed the idea of Oneness using the symbol of a circle with rays emanating from its central

⁸ Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought: A Study of Fundamental Principles and Their Application* (Chicago: The Psychic Research Company, 1902), 9-12.

⁹ William Walker Atkinson, *Nuggets of the New Thought; Several Things that Have Helped People* (Chicago, IL: The Psychic Research Company, 1902), 70, 84-86.

point. Though admittedly inadequate as a form of expression, it implied there was nothing outside it. With rays emanating from the center, there was no place, person, or thing left untouched. It stood for God's presence, power, and spirit. Each was a part of the All, and All was One. Separateness was an illusion. With the realization of the Oneness of All came the true understanding of Christ's mission.¹⁰

The Crucible

Much of modern unrest, explained Atkinson, derived from the crumbling foundations in thought that went back thousands of years and affected the conception of life, action, duty, morals, and general conduct. Advances in the physical sciences, including the works of Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, John Tyndall, and Herbert Spencer, undermined the foundations even further. As a consequence, the twentieth century had turned into a "great crucible" with all forms of human knowledge mingled in the hope of being fused into some new combination, the exact nature of which remained unknown.¹¹

This mingling of knowledge recognized not only evolutionary thought but the fact that different fashions of thought appealed during certain times, and that ideas hidden for centuries often reappeared. "Nearly all the great modern philosophical truths have been known in the past and have gone through this period of obscurity and hiding," Atkinson explained, "only to now emerge on the scene of modern thought in full vigor, claiming their rightful place in the evolution of thought." This included the discarded teachings of Hindu Vedantism which Emerson and the Transcendentalists brought back to life; the renewed appreciation of Plato and

¹⁰ Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought*, 13-14, 70-75.

¹¹ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 1-11.

Neo-Platonism by the Concord School of Philosophy; the return of the teachings of Heraclitus and his views of eternal change; and the resurgence of ideas borrowed from Buddhism and the Sufis, the mystic sect of Mohammedanism. Even the philosophy of the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu who taught the Tao, or “Way,” had returned with vigor. “The new bottles of the present are being filled with the old wine of the past.”¹²

Atkinson admitted that for most people, the New Thought Movement lacked a meaningful explanation regarding its origin. “To such a person, it seems as if the essence of the thought continually escapes the mental fingers of him who strives to grasp it.” Nevertheless, he attributed New Thought to the influence of Transcendentalism whose Neo-Platonists laid the groundwork for much of what constituted the New England mind by preparing it to cast off the “old thought” of Calvinism and replacing it with “new thought” that took shape in the 1830s around the nucleus of Emerson, George Ripley, Margaret Fuller, Orestes Brownson and Frederic Henry Hedge. It blossomed in the founding of the Brook Farm community in 1841 and its magazine, *The Dial*, the official organ of the Transcendental movement.¹³ As Margaret Fuller explained:

Transcendentalism was an assertion of the inalienable integrity of man; of the immanence of Divinity in instinct On the somewhat stunted stock of Unitarianism,—whose characteristic dogma was trust in individual reason as correlative to Supreme Wisdom,—had been grafted German Idealism, as taught by masters of most various

¹² Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 22, 29.

¹³ William Walker Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles, Or, The Message of the New Thought* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1915), 4, 10-11.

schools,—by Kant and Jacobi Fichte and Novalis, Schelling and Hegel, Schleiermacher and de Wette, by Madame de Stael, Cousin, Coleridge, and Carlyle; and the result was a vague yet exalting conception of the god-like nature of the human spirit.

Transcendentalism, as viewed by its disciples, was a pilgrimage from the idolatrous world of creeds and rituals to the Temple of the Living God in the soul.¹⁴

When Transcendentalism and Neo-Platonism made their appearance in the first half of the nineteenth century, their advocates revived an interest in mysticism, Idealism, and the idea of an imminent God. Attracted to a higher reason, or intuition, in which the individual experienced “an immediate perception of things above the plane of the ordinary senses and reason,” they taught the presence of a Spirit and a universe animated by a Universal Mind.¹⁵ Atkinson noted that this form of thinking was reflected in the works of many “affiliated thinkers” who, while they held certain fundamental principles in common, differed in their particulars. Working to advance the meaning and purpose of life, they started as a small circle of like-minded individuals before spreading in all directions influencing literature, drama, art, and other popular expressions. While the followers of most religions found their truths “obscured by a mass of theology, form, and custom” and lost sight of their intended purpose, these precursors to New Thought held in common “a conviction that the Divine Power is much nearer to us than is usually taught in the churches and may be relied upon to help and sustain us.” They

¹⁴ Quoted in Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles*, 11.

¹⁵ William Walker Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles, Or, the Message of the New Thought* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1915), 5-6, 34.

“felt” their religion rather than simply listened to what it preached. Behind their thinking stood the “Mind,” a word that expressed “a literal and living truth.”¹⁶

Emerson and his disciples gave much needed nourishment to the age. “These advocates of the earlier ‘new thought’ felt that religion and morality had a higher source than ordinary reason, and must be placed in the category of revelations of the intuition of man, arising from the presence of the Indwelling Spirit.” Clearly, Transcendentalism and the brilliancy of the Brook Farm experiment contributed to the portfolio of American literature whose spiritual needs were increasingly drawn to monistic idealism, pantheism, Oriental religions, and occult philosophies.¹⁷

Atkinson regarded Emerson as a prophet, idealist, and mystic more so than a philosopher. He stood for intuitive thought and affirmed the existence of a World-Spirit to which humanity owed its existence. Emerson’s essays on “Nature” and the “Over-Soul” had a direct bearing on the philosophic spirit of New Thought. In fact, New Thought owed more to Emerson and Transcendentalism than any other source. “We may find Emerson voicing these ‘new’ truths of today, in almost the very words used by the latter-day teachers and writers, many of whom seem unwilling to acknowledge his influence.” At the very heart of Emerson’s philosophy was the idea of Oneness, also expressed in the philosophy of Monism and the religion of Pantheism. All these concepts flowed in an unbroken chain from ancient Greece. “The spirit of Athens,” Atkinson explained, “is walking abroad today in the great universities of Europe and America.”¹⁸

¹⁶ William Walker Atkinson, “What is New Thought?” *New Thought*, 14, no. 3 (1905), 28-31, 54, 57.

¹⁷ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 41-42.

¹⁸ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 51-66.

Equally striking was the development of the New Psychology implying that the mind had a direct effect upon the body, including its condition in health and disease; that the mind possessed many latent powers capable of further development; and that the individual through the exercise of will could transform both his or her character and nature. Among the early followers to apply mind-power to healing were Phineas P. Quimby, Horatio Dresser, and Warren Felt Evans. However, Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, did more to make healing a metaphysical process. Many of her pupils formed schools and became founders of their own forms of faith healing, mind-cure, mental science, and divine science. Investigators of psychotherapy in France and other European countries contributed methods of suggestive therapeutics into New Thought as well. The same applied to the teachings of Theosophy, and the works of Prentice Mulford whose essay “The Drawing Power of the Mind” opened additional avenues of thought.¹⁹

Although Theosophy and Christian Science disclaimed any relationship with New Thought, Atkinson chose to differ, noting that both served as conduits to the religions and philosophies of ancient India and Greece “through which has flowed the older waters of many ancient schools of thought.” From these many sources, Theosophy drew theories of clairvoyance, telepathy, second-sight, spirit-return, and astral bodies, while Christian Science drew its strength from the Divine Spirit-Mind, the only actual immortal reality while evil, sin, sickness, and even death were the result of errors of mortal mind.²⁰

Atkinson initially included the followers of Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science among those native seekers drifting rudderless and performing cures using the power of the mind

¹⁹ Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles*, 12-32.

²⁰ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 189-197.

before “soaring away up in the clouds of transcendentalism, leaving their followers behind gaping upwards like a crowd at a county balloon ascension.”²¹ He revised his evaluation after recognizing that the rudderless nature of American healing had been due to efforts to replicate Eddy’s healing practices. Much like those who constructed their healing modalities from ideas borrowed from Anton Mesmer’s animal magnetism, the numerous competitors of Mary Baker Eddy had outdone themselves with modalities that looked like Christian Science but showed little substance.

I heartily support the Christian Science contention that the majority of these ‘Science’ schools and cults are really imitations. . . . But I cannot avoid seeing that Mrs. Eddy’s work has been largely pirated and used by others, who disclaim the source of their inspiration. . . . I have conversed with many of these ‘Science’ leaders and followers, and it was pitiful, or laughable (according to the point-of-view), to hear the flings and slings at the C. S. following and its leader. This, while they were preaching and practicing a philosophy of healing only slightly differing from the original Eddy article, the source of the same being readily discerned by anyone even slightly acquainted with the subject.²²

Despite the competing claims of the different schools of mental healing, some of which were “almost grotesque,” Atkinson insisted that they all drew upon the same healing power latent within the individual. In other words, all reached into the patient’s sub-conscious plane to restore the body’s broken tissues and cells. Every person had “a certain recuperative power

²¹ Atkinson, “The Seekers,” 1-2.

²² Atkinson, “What is New Thought?” 232.

capable of restoring lost function and strength to diseased organs and parts.” This vital force, as taught by Eddy, provided Nature’s “tonic” restoring the normal conditions of the body.²³

Parliament of Religions

In the history of nineteenth century philosophy, the doctrine of Materialism (i.e., reality consisted of matter and force), made a rapid rise in mid-century. For several decades it flourished before giving way to Agnosticism in the works of Spencer and Huxley for whom reality was unknowable and therefore belief unwarranted. It then turned to Scientific Monism with its roots not only in ancient Greece, but in India and other far-off lands. Despite these materialistic influences, a reaction set in, bringing forth new and invigorated forms of Idealism which led to the acceptance of an indwelling and immanent God which Atkinson attributed to the delegates at Parliament of Religions who met during the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Thanks to its delegates and the labors of Max Müller and other Oriental scholars who were translating many of the sacred books of the East, and the influence of the Theosophical Society in familiarizing the Western world with Oriental ideas, an unbroken thread of thought connected the metaphysical systems of past centuries to the present. As explained by Victor Cousin: “When we read the poetical and philosophical monuments of the far East—above all those of India, which are beginning to spread in Europe, we discover there many a truth, and truths so profound, and which make such a contrast with the meanness of the results at which European genius has sometimes stopped, that we are constrained to bend the knee before the

²³ Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought*, 36-39.

philosophy of the East, and to see in this cradle of the human race the native land of the highest philosophy. . . . India contains the whole history of philosophy in a nutshell.”²⁴

Like others who admired the outcome of the Parliament, Atkinson felt that science and religion were longer foes, an outcome he attributed to Paul Carus, editor of *The Open Court* and *The Monist* journals, a member of the Parliament’s planning committee, and speaker at several of its venues. For Carus, the scientific spirit had become an integral part of the Higher Criticism and the purification and deepening of the God-idea. Science and religion had found points of agreement to the degree there was talk of a “Religion of Science” and a “Science of Religion.” The other characteristic of the age was Meliorism which Atkinson also attributed to Carus. Representing the mid-point between radical optimism and radical pessimism, it held the possibility of improvement through the gradual abatement of evil.²⁵

With the expectation that the future contained “unborn good beyond the wildest dreams, hopes and anticipations of man,” Atkinson predicted the religion of tomorrow would consist of a blending of empiricism and faith based not on blind belief but upon experience. Humanity would eventually develop spiritual faculties with which to experience the spiritual world, eventually acquiring the ability to know God, Truth, and Immortality. New Thought would be largely Monistic, with the underlying reality as Spirit, the eternal energy from which all things proceeded. He predicted reconciliation between the opposing schools of Idealism and Materialism, a blend of both mind and substance affecting philosophy, science, and religion alike. This change would closely follow the ideas of Spencer who postulated the existence of an

²⁴ Quoted in Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern*, 104.

²⁵ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 175-79. Read John S. Haller, Jr., *Buddha’s Midwife: Paul Carus and the Open Court Publishing Company* (Columbia, SC: Amazon Books, 2020).

“ultimate principle” of which the universe was its manifestation and whose underlying reality would be “that infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed.” However, unlike Spencer’s spirit which he declared to be Unknowable, evolution would eventually produce a cosmic consciousness that expanded the mind and made the Unknowable known. There would be an awareness in the unity of the cosmos, the oneness of all, a living universe, and immortality.²⁶ Over time, humanity would acquire a conception of the immanent and indwelling God.

The thinker of the end of the twentieth century will label things “known,” “unknown,” or “to be known,” but never “unknowable.” He will point to the limits of the “known” and say, “here our present knowledge ends,” in the true scientific spirit, but he will never commit the folly of saying “Here knowledge ends and the unknowable begins.” To the coming thinker physics and metaphysics will be branches of one field of investigation, and that field will be called the Science of Truth. I believe that eventually the distinction between physics and metaphysics will be wiped out—that the natural and the supernatural will be seen to be equally phases of the greater nature.²⁷

* * *

The basic principles of New Thought included the existence of an infinite and eternal spiritual principle of being without the limits of time, space, or power; that being was One and immanent in everything; that man is the manifestation of the one Principle; that the mental state determined one’s mental and physical condition; that “thoughts are things;” and therefore

²⁶ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 203-217.

²⁷ Atkinson, *The Crucible of Modern Thought*, 206.

health, happiness, and prosperity belonged to individuals by the “proper exercise of [their] mental powers.” It implied that persons had the ability and the tools to work out their own destiny; that the brotherhood of man was at the heart of New Thought; and that humans were “in a stage of Spiritual Evolution—pursuing the Path of Eternal Progress.”²⁸ Led by the voice of the Spirit, humanity was unfolding the divine essence within, removing the shadow of separateness and taking on the qualities of Oneness and Immortality.

²⁸ Atkinson, *New Thought: Its History and Principles*, 25-32.

Chapter 3

Making His Mark

It seems a peculiar fact that it is easier to concentrate on something that is not good for us, then on something that is beneficial. This tendency is overcome when we learn to concentrate consciously.

(William W. Atkinson, *The Power of Concentration*, 1918)

Atkinson divided New Thought into three broad categories: Physical, Mental, and Spiritual.

Those who joined the New Thought Movement entered by one of these portals. Some like himself looked to relieve their physical ailments by the power of the mind; others chose New Thought philosophy to satisfy their spiritual hunger; and the third group used it to create a mental attitude to attain happiness and prosperity. No longer struggling to find meaning in his own life, Atkinson set his sights on teaching what he had learned through a combination of articles, books, lectures, workshops, and correspondence courses. Having found his true vocation, he applied the same energy he had earlier dedicated to his law practice but now as author, teacher, editor, and publisher. Unlike his earlier careers in business and in the law, he now had the luxury of performing these activities in the relative obscurity of his home where he could write without interacting with other people.¹

Law of Attraction

It seems somewhat counterintuitive that Atkinson's first book concerned the art and science of salesmanship in the business world instead of suggestive therapeutics. Yet, in 1900,

¹ William Walker Atkinson, "Are we Selfish?" *New Thought*, 11, no. 1 (1902), 16.

shortly before becoming editor of *New Thought* magazine, he published *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*. Prepared from his lecture notes at Parkyn's School of Psychology, the book served as a guidepost for those looking for a path to a better and more prosperous life. He dedicated the book to the memory of literary humanist Prentice Mulford who he quoted frequently along with the poetry of mystic Swedenborgian and spiritualist Thomas Lake Harris. Unlike the popular belief in "personal magnetism" which implied a current of magnetic force radiating from each individual, Atkinson substituted *thought-force* which consisted of "vibrations" emanating from the mind. "Every thought created by our minds is a force of greater or lesser intensity, varying in strength according to the impetus imparted to it at the time of its creation." Each thought acted like a "ray of light" which traveled to other minds, including those quite distant. Forceful thoughts "charged with a mighty power" could beat down the resistance of weaker minds. Repeating the term "thoughts are things" which Mulford coined in 1889, Atkinson cautioned his readers that unless they understood the laws governing the psychical world, they could lead by virtue of their mental powers, or become subservient to another's thought-force.²

Building on Mulford's theory, Atkinson described thought as "a finer form of matter, or a grosser form of spirit." Its character depended on the nature of the thought itself. If it exhibited fear or worry, the result was anything but cheerful or confident. Whatever thought waves an individual sent out attracted similar waves from others which further strengthened what one already processed. "If you send out jealous, envious thoughts they will come home bringing

² William Walker Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life Being a Series of Lessons in Personal Magnetism Psychic Influence, Thought-Force Concentration, Will Power and Practical Mental Science* (NY: Sidney Flower, 1900), 1, 8-9. See Prentice Mulford who was a lecturer and columnist for the New York *Daily Graphic*. He was a pivotal figure in the New Thought Movement and author of *Thoughts are Things* (1889), *Your Forces and How to Use Them* (1888), *The Gift of Spirit* (1904), and *The God in You* (1918).

their mates with them, and you will be wretched until the effect passes off.” Essentially, good thoughts attracted good; evil thoughts, evil.³

Of all the laws of nature, the Law of Attraction operated on every plane of life. Not only did it hold the planets in their orbits and even portions of the earth together, but it also served as Atkinson’s key to salesmanship in that it explained how each person attracted to him or herself those “things,” whether material or spiritual, that best reflected the character of their thoughts.⁴ Every thought created its own vibration which traveled through the ether. This occurred every second and in all directions, creating a “thought-aura” surrounding each individual and who accepted or rejected outside vibrations because of an individual’s particular thought-world. Those with confident mental attitudes acted like magnets pulling in outside thoughts, while those with negative or fearful mental attitudes fell victim to thoughts that dragged the individual into despondency. Each individual was the master of his or her mind; nothing entered unless permitted. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”⁵

The Law of Attraction placed in everyone the tools to realize whatever they desired. “Thoughts, things, people, ideas, opportunities, chances, and other things we attract are passing before us all the time. But it takes courage to grasp them.” Essentially the law became one’s master or servant.⁶ “We generally see that for which we look,” Atkinson explained. When

³ Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*, 57-60.

⁴ William Walker Atkinson, *Dynamic Thought; Or, The Law of Vibrant Energy* (Los Angeles: the Segnogram Publishing Co., 1906), 137.

⁵ William Walker Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought: A Study of Fundamental Principles and Their Application* (Chicago: The Psychic Research Company, 1902), 20-22.

⁶ Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought*, 24-26.

accompanied by the proper desire, confidence, faith, and willingness to work, a person could accomplish much.⁷

The Law of Attraction was a “working principle” of Nature and a law which anyone could learn and set into motion. It required mental control by forming a mental picture that resulted in one’s thoughts taking the form of action. Mental force worked best when concentrated; when scattered, the result was less apt to be useful. The more concentrated the mental power the more forceful the thoughts. Examples of this existed in telepathy or thought transference, best exercised when an individual intended to send a command. “In all mental processes the earnest expectation is a prime factor in producing the effect.” Depending on the degree of concentration, one’s thought waves or vibrations could result in startling exhibitions of thought transference. “Anything is yours, if you only want it hard enough.” By this he meant *anything* since it was a “mighty law.” Money was “no unworthy goal for human endeavor,” he assured readers, and therefore felt justified in treating it “as the end to be sought. Nevertheless, persons must be prepared to pay the price for his or her desires. The greater the desire, the greater the price. Nature required compensation.⁸

The Law of Attraction also became the means for influencing others while in their presence. It involved not only the use of direct voluntary suggestions through voice, manner, appearance, and eyes, but involuntarily using thought waves and personal magnetism. The eyes being one of the most important means of influencing others, they had the power to attract,

⁷ In New Thought philosophy, the power of mind translated into whatever positive or negative experiences an individual focused on in life. Considered an element of pseudoscience, it nonetheless became an integral part of Helen Blavatsky’s Theosophy as early as 1877, and discussed as a general principle by Prentice Mulford in his “The Law of Success” (1886-87), Henry Wood’s *God’s Image of Man* (1892), and Ralph Waldo Trine’s *What All the World’s a-Seeking* (1896). William Walker Atkinson, *Thought Vibration; Or, The Law of Attraction in the Thought World* (Chicago: The New Thought Publishing Co., 1906), 2-13.

⁸ Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*, 14, 36-37, 43-64.

fascinate, and “hold spellbound” another individual. Atkinson taught the use of the “magnetic gaze” which he defined as something akin to hypnotism in that it conveyed the equivalent of mental vibrations over a short range. This required the firm, steady, gaze of a salesperson into the eyes of the customer. Such power required exercises that involved staring for fifteen minutes at small quarter-dollar size circles placed on a wall, gazing into a mirror, or practicing on an animal or close friend.⁹

Success in the business world required energy, ambition, determination, courage, confidence, patience, and prudence. This necessitated the replacement of old thought habits with new ways of thinking. This involved the force of will, hypnotic suggestion, auto-suggestion, thought absorption, and fixing the mind upon an idea and picturing through imagination the desired objective. Of the different approaches, Atkinson preferred the combination of thought absorption and auto-suggestion. Together, they formed the ideal method for achieving business success. For each of these approaches, he offered practical exercises that included seeking a quiet space (i.e., “going into the silence”) without distractions, forming a mental picture of the desired quality, repeated practice, and commitment. “You are your own master,” he was fond of saying. “Make of yourself what you will.”¹⁰

Twelve years later, Atkinson wrote *The Psychology of Salesmanship* (1912) describing many of the principles he set forth during the intervening years. Published by Elizabeth Towne, it applied psychology, clairvoyance, and telepathy to business and salesmanship—subjects not much talked about by businessmen at the time. Atkinson understood that psychology played an important role in selling goods, advertising, and the state of mind in both the buyer and seller.

⁹ Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*, 18-35.

¹⁰ Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*, 66-75.

The critical elements of salesmanship entailed attracting attention, arousing interest, creating a sense of desire in the buyer, and moving the will in both seller and purchaser to complete the sale. The true art and science of salesmanship depended upon understanding how to appeal to buyers without knowing much about them. Since every individual differed in his or her particulars, physical conditions were distinct from intellectual or moral motives. Whether advertising or just salesmanship, a mysterious something affected the conscious and subconscious components of the buyer.¹¹

Atkinson began with the assumption that “the buyer’s brain is the board upon which the game is played” and the salesperson “moves or guides these faculties as he would chessmen or checkers on a board.” This meant arousing the attention of the customer, creating, and satisfying the customer’s desire, and moving the will. The psychology of salesmanship applied to both the mind of the salesperson and the mind of the buyer, and their two minds blending in agreement. The mind of the salesperson revolved around the “I” which included the mental qualities involved self-respect, poise, cheerfulness, and understanding human nature; acquisitiveness in wanting the good things in life; and the desire for approval and fame. Other more tangible aspects addressed the person’s personal expression, dress, carriage and walk, consideration of others, shaking hands, voice, looking people in the eyes, and other details in appearance that made the difference in successful salesmanship.¹²

Referring repeatedly to the pseudo-science of phrenology in recounting the qualities of mental makeup, Atkinson explained how the most effective salesmen knew the different

¹¹ William Walker Atkinson, *The Psychology of Salesmanship* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1912), 10-22.

¹² Atkinson, *The Psychology of Salesmanship*, 23-70.

temperaments (i.e., vital, motive, mental) and recognized the predominant physical characteristics (i.e., round head, deep chested, impulsive, creative power, friendship, etc.) of the buyer. Knowing these distinctions gave them the keys to understanding a customer's character and disposition, and allowing him or her to 'play' the different faculties of the customer to their advantage. With chapters titled "the Mind of the Buyer," "The Pre-Approach," "The Psychology of Purchase," "The Approach," "The Demonstration," and "The Closing," he offered a full course in the psychology of the transaction.¹³

Reflective of the influence Atkinson's books had on salesmanship, magazines such as *The Sample Case*, *Success*, and *The Commercial Travelers* published an ever-increasing number of articles on the philosophy of salesmanship. In addition, books ranging from George Horace Lorimer's *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to his Son* (1902), John S. Dearing's *A Drummer's Experience* (1913), Orison Swett Marden's *Selling Things* (1916), R. L. James's *Letters from an Old Time Salesman to His Son* (1922), to Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows* (1926) taught how salesmanship depended upon personality, character-building, theatricality, improvisation, self-esteem, and persuasion in capturing the mind of the customer. Above all else, they stressed the critical importance of face-to-face selling practices that captured the mind of the customer. Dale Breckenridge Carnegie (1888-1955) later built on these books employing the five senses instead of Atkinson's more esoteric spiritual planes, auras, and other paranormal theories. His straightforward plain style of rhetoric, best exemplified in his popular *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) conveyed a vision of a happier life not by discussing philosophical issues

¹³ Atkinson, *The Psychology of Salesmanship*, 71-78.

but by creating a personality based on a combination of self-confidence, enhanced communication, and people skills.¹⁴

“I Am, I Can and I Will.”

Humans functioned on two planes: the conscious and sub-conscious. Without a distinct dividing line, “they shade[d] into each other as do the colors of the spectrum.” Due to the law of evolution, however, the power of the mind was constantly expanding, most of which was manifested in the sub-conscious before emerging into conscious functions. By training the will in the outward manifestation of the “I AM,” one strengthened the power within. If strong enough, its currents spread outwards affecting others. Mind-building required the individual to assert the “I” which Atkinson called “the sovereign of the mind.” Once asserted, he or she could connect their “Individual Will” with the “Universal Will.” Before this could be done, however, the individual had to take mastery of the self and not become the slave of moods, passions, or other appetites of the lower faculties. Self-mastery meant asserting the “I” over the subordinate parts of the self. To obtain this level, Atkinson urged repeating the words: “I am asserting real self” several times during the day, and particularly when tempted to follow a course dictated by the subordinate faculties.¹⁵

Atkinson endorsed the so-called “Leland Method” after Charles Godfrey Leland (1824-1903), a writer who investigated the operation of the will in relation to inner consciousness. Leland taught the individual not only to identify the intended objective but to will it before falling asleep. By repeating the thought on successive nights, it became a command on the sub-

¹⁴ Read Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936).

¹⁵ Atkinson, *Thought Vibration; Or, The Law of Attraction in the Thought World*, 28-42.

conscious mind. He used the term *forethought*, a form of impulse that implied active thought in preparation for auto-suggestion. By cultivating it, and acting promptly, it assisted auto-suggestion in facilitating its objective. As a directing principle, it pointed to the desired state of mind.¹⁶ In such instances, thought took the form of action. “You will feel an influx of strength with each repetition of the words.”¹⁷

Using the term *concenter*, or bringing to a center, Atkinson focused the mind upon the “I AM” and inhibiting all other thoughts. Accomplishing this meant dwelling on the higher regions of the soul which involved knowing and practicing “the silence.” Choosing this meant not offering excuses for inaction, but instead, keeping a positive outlook, removing outside impressions, conquering inattention, training the body to obey the mind, and for the mind to obey the will, each of which entailed specific exercises. Equally important, the full functioning of the mind required understanding and utilizing the elements of remembrance, recollection, and recognition.¹⁸ The secret of the “I AM” consisted of using concentration, meditation, and other mental exercises to awaken the latent faculties in the sub-conscious. Practiced by mystics and occultists in both the West and East, it gave them the ability to *feel* the existence of God. As this power grew in the individual, it reinforced the certainty of immortality. The soul lay at the center of the real self and through it, God made himself known to humanity.¹⁹

The seeds of self-discovery began with a simple statement, “I CAN” and “I WILL.” In making this point, Atkinson assured his readership that the powers latent in everyone could bring forth their true destiny. After centuries of individual and group efforts, the “Promised

¹⁶ Read Charles Godfrey Leland, *The Mystic Will* (Chicago: The Progress Company, 1907).

¹⁷ Atkinson, *Thought Vibration; Or, The Law of Attraction in the Thought World*, 28-42.

¹⁸ Atkinson, *Thought-Force in Business and Everyday Life*, 76-88.

¹⁹ Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought*, 41-56.

Land” no longer remained a utopian dream. For the first time, humankind could “feel” the God-like form within, including a new consciousness which brought humanity to the borderland of “Cosmic Knowing,” an awareness that the body was a temple of the living spirit, and that once filled with the divine breath of life, it became eternal.²⁰ By affirming “I CAN” and “I WILL,” the vibrations manifested themselves and the individual jumped into action. On the other hand, fear kept an individual in bondage. From it, derived worry, jealousy, hate, malice, envy, bigotry, and anger. It was a “foul brood” that paralyzed the individual and even whole cultures. New Thoughters were taught not to fear since it prevented self-advancement. Courage and confidence were the keys to addressing it. This meant courage in one’s ability, and confidence in one’s destiny.²¹

Mind-Power

Atkinson’s *Mind Power: The Secret of Mental Magic*, published in 1912, was advertised as the centerpiece for his work on the phenomena of “dynamic mentation,” a form of thought-force that pervaded all space, was immanent in all things, and manifested in different forms. Not a blind, mechanical energy, but a living, mental force which existed in everyone as “will,” mind-power was “an existent, living, mental, acting force” that could be called into service by anyone just or unjust, good, or bad.²² Immanent in all things organic and inorganic, it controlled the universe. “Nowhere does life and Mind-Power escape us.” Traveling by way of the ether

²⁰ William Walker Atkinson, *Nuggets of the New Thought; Several Things that Have Helped People* (Chicago, IL: The Psychic Research Company, 1902), 9-16.

²¹ Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought*, 28-34.

²² William Walker Atkinson, *Mind-Power: The Secret of Mental Magic* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1912), 9-10.

which existed everywhere in the universe, its “coiled-up” energy acted as a magnetic force, attracting the specific thing, person, or circumstance desired.²³

The idea of thought transference, otherwise known as *telepathy*, derived from the Greek words *tele*, meaning “afar,” and *pathos*, meaning “feeling.” Sometimes called *telesthesia* or *telemention*, it referred to the mental force of one mind on another from a distance and without use of the senses. It was evident in the effect political leaders had on the minds and wills of their constituents; the ability of victors to sometimes bend the wills of their captives; the power of a salesman to impart a sense of trust in the customer; and leaders of cults who acquired an almost magnetic power over their followers. It also existed in mental healing which, from the earliest times to the present, operated on the principle of mental suggestion.²⁴ Although referenced frequently in ancient times and especially in India, telepathy’s verification originated with the Society of Psychical Research (SPR), founded in 1882, where it served as the original focus of the society’s research.

Although the attitudes of the SPR’s members ranged from skeptics like Henry Sidgwick and Frank Podmore, to profound spiritualists like Alfred Russel Wallace and Fredrick Myers, it was best documented in Henry Sidgwick’s experiments in thought-transference in 1889 and 1890. Honored with the Knightbridge Professorship of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, Sidgwick became the first president of the SPR. His experiments involved a bag of eighty-one small wooden blocks having numbers from 10 to 90 stamped upon them in raised letters. From this bag, Sidgwick drew a block and placed in it a wooden box which concealed the number from view of the participant who was in a hypnotic trance and was expected to make a guess at it.

²³ Atkinson, *Mind-Power: The Secret of Mental Magic*, 3-18, 29-30, 154-158.

²⁴ Atkinson, *Mind-Power: The Secret of Mental Magic*, 35, 68-69.

Out of a total of 644 trials, the number was correctly identified 117 times. Sidgwick arrived at the conclusion that the outcomes were sufficient to accept the hypothesis that under certain unknown conditions, communications could pass from one mind to another without the usual intermediation of the senses.²⁵

Sidgwick's experiments, though not conclusive, became important to Atkinson who saw in the statistics sufficient reason to believe that thoughts and images could transfer from one mind to another outside the normal senses. He also referred to the well-known case recounted by Emanuel Swedenborg in 1759 when he reported a fire in Stockholm, some two hundred miles distant and several days before a courier arrived from Stockholm bringing news of the fire. Having this ability allowed for the cultivation of concentration and visualization.²⁶ These additional senses, which Atkinson called the "Astral Senses," allowed one to perceive occurrences at a distance, to see through solid objects, and even read the history of an object.

The mental framework essential for materializing a mental picture necessitated the following applications:

1. I surround myself with an atmosphere of success.
2. I am positive. I have a strong will. I make a positive impression on those coming into my mental atmosphere.
3. I am fearless— absolutely fearless—nothing can harm me.

²⁵ Frank Podmore, "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished," *The North American Review*, 160 (1895), 339-40; Ian Hacking, *Telepathy: Origins of Randomization in Experimental Design*, *Isis*, 79 (1988), 434; William Walker Atkinson, *Telepathy: Its Theory, Facts and Proof* (Chicago: New Thought Publishers, 1910), 5-8.

²⁶ William Walker Atkinson, *Practical Psychomancy and Crystal Gazing: A Course of Lessons on the Psychic Phenomena of Distant Sensing, Clairvoyance, Psychometry, Crystal Gazing, etc.* (Chicago: The Fiduciary Press, 1907), 5-6, 63.

4. I kill out all worry and discouragement—I radiate hope, cheerfulness and good nature.
5. I am bright, cheerful and happy, and make all around me feel the same way.
6. I am well poised, calm and self-controlled.
7. I have a perfect mastery over my temper, emotions and passions, and all recognize this to be a fact.
8. I am at ease here, and all bashfulness and timidity has departed. I am calm, at ease and feel at home.
9. People like me—I am surrounded with a mental atmosphere that causes people to like me.
10. I am master of my surroundings—nothing disturbs me—nothing affects me adversely—I am master.
11. I am surrounded with a mental atmosphere of protection. No one's adverse thoughts, currents or suggestions can penetrate this protective armor. I am safe from mental attacks. I am safe, strong, and positive.²⁷

Modern psychology, for which Atkinson was a strong advocate, was essentially pragmatic, having left to metaphysics the old arguments regarding the nature of the mind. Instead, it focused on discovering the methods needed to train the mind to perform better. In following this approach, he made frequent reference to William James, another member of the SPR, who

²⁷ Atkinson, *Mind-Power: The Secret of Mental Magic*, 177-78.

observed that the mind had better things to do than simply speculation and theorizing.²⁸

Atkinson felt that individuals had far greater power—conscious and unconscious—over their bodily functions than commonly believed. “Matter is never the actor, but is always acted upon.”

Amenable to suggestion, the mind could manifest marked effects on the body in health and disease.²⁹

The subconscious region of the mind operated as the “great record-file of everything we have ever experienced, thought, or known.” Stimulated by suggestion, it could affect the recuperative processes of an organ, the activities of diseased cells, and even the mental response of a crowd. Atkinson wrote frequently about the subconscious, explaining that in all but ten percent of the mental operations of life, every conscious act included some contribution by the subconscious in which memory represented its primary function. The subconscious, a storehouse of mental impressions, lay waiting the moment it was needed by the conscious mind. Though some impressions were so completely forgotten that little could be done to recall them, nothing was ever absolutely forgotten.³⁰ At every moment of one’s outer consciousness the individual could draw upon the planes of memory to use at a moment’s notice. Over time, each person became a reflection of what he or she allowed to surface from mental material accumulated from the storage rooms of the inner consciousness. The Ego, the real master of the

²⁸ William Walker Atkinson, *Your Mind and How to Use It: A Manual of Practical Psychology* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1911), 7. Read William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (2 vols.; New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890).

²⁹ William Walker Atkinson, *Mind and Body; Or, Mental States and Physical Conditions* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1912), 15-24.

³⁰ William Walker Atkinson, *Memory Culture: The Science of Observing, Remembering and Recalling* (Chicago: The Psychic Research Co., 1903), 7-11.

individual, was not the slave of one's environment so much as its inherited ideas and thoughts.³¹

Through the exercise of memory, experts could improve and strengthen remembrance and recollection using orderly steps which cultivated attention, concentration, visualization, association, and practice. Some had this gift and could correctly repeat the contents of extraordinarily difficult documents, including the entire bible; for most, however, improved memory required a lengthy learning process. Memory demanded a quality of mind called "attention," or vivid consciousness of a given topic, a quality analogous to indexing or cross-referencing an item. It also involved training the eyes and ears, and the remembrance of names, faces, places, numbers, music, occurrences, facts, words, books, and stories.³²

* * *

The role and separation of the buyer, seller, and product became matters of major focus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as capitalism demanded more of those making their living as salespersons in the marketplace. With products produced with greater efficiency than ever before, it fell to advertisers and salespersons to understand the mysteries of persuasion and consumer desire. Drawing upon an arsenal of mass advertising with its visual and psychological props, salesmanship entered a new era of persuasion. No longer was the office or laboratory the place of creativity; now it was the marketplace where 'drummers' sold their authenticity along with their products to a consumer confident culture. Whether by pullman car, buggy, or automobile, salespersons learned to do their business on the road. From

³¹ Walker Atkinson, *The Inner Consciousness: A Course of Lessons on the Inner Places of the Mind, Intuition, Instinct, Automatic Mentation and Other Wonderful Phases of Mental Phenomena* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1908), 7-34.

³² William Walker Atkinson, *Memory: How to Develop, Train and Use It* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Co., 1912), 13, 50, 70-71.

religious magazines to the popular *Collier's* and *Saturday Evening Post*, all advertised a path to prosperity. Anything that could be packed into a satchel or case became a saleable item. With such an open marketplace, those salespersons who succeeded knew themselves and their customer's characteristics. The age of the art and science of salesmanship had arrived and, with it, the need for a long-term relationship with the customer took precedence over the single sale.³³

³³ Timothy B. Spears, "All Things to All Men': The Commercial Traveler and the Rise of Modern Salesmanship," *American Quarterly*, 45 (1993), 524-57.

Chapter 4

Towne and Company

Thought is mind in motion, and every activity upon this earth began as a secret thought.

(Annie Rix Militz, *Prosperity Through the Knowledge and Power of Mind*, 1913)

Despite Atkinson's growing popularity as a teacher, writer, editor, and publisher, his circle of friends was never very large owing to his own choice and need for privacy. Besides Sydney Flower and his several assistant editors, there was the journalist and publisher Helen Wilmans, founder of the School of Mental Science, a healing ministry in Chicago. It was in the summer of 1900 that Atkinson first came across an article she had written for the magazine *Freedom*. From that moment on, he felt that the 'I' within him had asserted its presence and equated this awareness to being born again. Shortly afterward, he read her *Conquest of Poverty* (1899) and sought to acquire this inner power which she so carefully described. From then on, he began writing about New Thought and corresponded with her on occasion.¹ Owing to her influence on his life, Atkinson later dedicated his *Secret of Mental Magic* (1907) to Wilmans "whose writings gave me inspiration, courage, determination, and will, when I sorely needed them."² Another source of inspiration came from Elizabeth Towne (1865-1960), owner and proprietor of *Nautilus* magazine and the Elizabeth Towne Publishing Company. Atkinson met Towne through his

¹ William Walker Atkinson, "My Recollections of Helen Wilmans," *New Thought*, 18, no. 10 (December 1909), 436-39.

² William Walker Atkinson, *The Secret of Mental Magic; A Course of Seven Lessons* (Hollister, MO: YOGeBooks, 2010), v.

association with Flower and, in 1912, began writing freelance articles for *Nautilus* until 1915, and published several books through her company as well, including his popular *Psychology of Salesmanship* (1912). Otherwise, his titles were published by Flower or his own Advanced Thought Publishing Company, the Arcane Book Company, and the Yogi Publishing Company. Distribution of his books abroad were handled in England by Lorenzo Niles Fowler.³

Towne Publishing Company

A native Oregonian, Towne married at the age of fourteen to Joseph Holt Struble with whom she had two children. Her first experience with self-healing occurred at age eighteen before she learned of either New Thought or Christian Science. Having fallen into habits of hurry and worry, and knowing that she must change, she practiced quietness (i.e., “going into the silence”). As she cultivated a sense of confidence in herself, she discovered that by acting as she desired to feel, the feeling followed. “In all the years I have lived and healed, I have discovered no profounder principle than that—to act what one desires to feel.”⁴

Rebelling against an unhappy marriage, Elizabeth moved briefly to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which had liberal divorce laws. Once divorced, she took an interest in the New Thought Movement, and with financial support from her father, launched *Nautilus* in 1898, a magazine of four pages with an initial run of 2,800 copies. As the magazine grew in popularity, she moved the publication to Holyoke, Massachusetts, where she married William E. Towne, a publisher

³ Lorenzo Niles Fowler (1811-1896), along with his brother Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887), were born in New York. Both converted to the “science” of phrenology after reading the works of J. G. Spurzheim and George Combe. The brothers became practical phrenologists who lectured, read heads for a fee, manufactured phrenological heads, and published a wide array of phrenological literature. Read M. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: the Phenological Fowlers* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

⁴ Elizabeth Towne, *Elizabeth Towne’s Experiences in Self-Healing* (Holyoke, MA: Elizabeth Towne, 1905), 8.

and distributor of books and magazines, including his own quarterly *American New Life*. In a few short years, circulation grew to over 90,000 and, with its popularity, Towne decided to focus the magazine's attention on the practical demonstration of New Thought principles.⁵

Towne contracted with a wide spectrum of New Thought writers like Kate Atkinson Boehme, Paul Ellsworth, Orison Swett Marden, Edwin Markham, Clara Chamberlain McLean, Helen Rhodes-Wallace, Wallace Wattles, and William Atkinson. Almost all focused on the practical applications of New Thought, including Towne's own *How to Grow Success* (1903) which remains one of the seminal books in self-help. Along with Orison Swett Marden's *Pushing Up Front* (1894), Trine's *In Tune with the Infinite* (1897), and Ernest Holmes' *Creative Mind and Success* (1919), each worked through a Christian-based worldview to bundle human potential with Mind (God).

Similar to Sydney Flower's magazines, *Nautilus* sold space to a host of advertisers, some claiming to have increased yearly incomes of individuals who purchased Frank Channing Haddock's *The Power of Will* (1907) or Bruce MacLelland's *Prosperity Through Thought Force* (1907); building character, health, and wealth using Christie Crystals; or taking correspondence courses on effective public speaking, self-development, developing personality, and willing a higher salary.

Under the umbrella of New Thought, the *Nautilus* treated such topics as: "The Secret of Being Naturally Magnetic;" "How to Influence Others;" "How to Develop a Magnetic Voice;" "Power of Conversation;" "Qualities of the Magnetic Will;" "What Constitutes a Pleasing

⁵ <https://elizabethtowne.wwwhubs.com/> (accessed July 23, 2020). Towne's son, Chester, worked as a managing editor and advertising manager. Publication of the *Nautilus* continued until 1953.

Personality;" "What the Silence Brings in the Way of Power;" "Direct Healing;" "What Part Does Medicine Play in Healing;" "My First Experience with Spiritual Healing;" "Healing Myself of a Serious Organic Trouble;" and "Healing Others." To get results from reading *Nautilus*, explained William Towne, "You must not simply think about what you would like or ought to suggest; YOU MUST FURNISH YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS WITH A DEFINITE PROGRAM OF ACTION." Provided readers showed earnestness in making their affirmations, there was every reason to believe their hopes would be realized.⁶

In her *Fifteen Lessons in the New Thought* (1917), Towne urged readers to look beyond the labyrinth of reason to find God. As with most New Thought writers, she preferred intuition to find and understand the Divine Purpose. This required going inward rather than seeking authority from an outside source, particularly one based on logic or empiricism. The Nature of God was mind, she explained. "The mode of motion of universal mind is thought. God thought or spoke the universe into being, and God is still thinking this universe into greater being; thinking in and through you and me, and through all the lower forms of life as well." The seven principles of God's creation began with *force*, otherwise known as the principle of attraction, drawing atoms, worlds, and people together. The second, *discrimination*, focused on deciding what things one should attract, or otherwise leave alone. The third, *order*, chose where things should be placed. The fourth, *cohesion*, meant the binding of things into a single organization. The fifth, *fermentation*, implied the destroying principle of life that tears down that which once served its purpose. The sixth, *transmutation*, took that which disintegrated and readied it for greater usefulness. It brought reorganization and replacing old habits for a larger view of life.

⁶William Towne, "Increase Your Production Through Auto-Suggestion," *Nautilus*, 25 (1923), 31.

Finally, the seventh, *sensation*, took possession of the organism and used it “for the good of you as a whole.” Thus began the process of consciousness.⁷

Imagining the Self

In preparing herself as a healer, Towne read Thomson J. Hudson’s *Law of Psychic Phenomena* (1893) which taught the use of the subjective mind to heal while sleeping.

To the subjective mind he [Hudson] attributes practically unlimited power and wisdom, which he says is subject to suggestions from the objective mind. So just for the sake of convenience, Hudson divides the human being into two minds—the waking or objective mind, and the mind which rules when we before going to sleep he (objective self) talks to his subjective mind as if it were a separate individual; he directs it to do certain work whilst he (objective self) sleeps. To each of these 100 incurables in succession he sent his subjective for healing, one person to a night. And all responded and recovered.⁸

Towne’s advice on self-healing stressed meditation, breathing exercises, positive affirmations, and silence. As a healer, she typically “went into the silence” with her patients and concentrated for fifteen or twenty minutes on one idea such as “God is love” before sending the concept to the individual she was treating. She considered silence essential for success. “You go into the silence to find wisdom, love, and power,” she insisted. “If, when you come out, you

⁷ Elizabeth Towne, *Fifteen Lessons in New Thought; or Lessons in Living* (Holyoke, MA: The Elizabeth Towne Company, 1917), 7-35.

⁸ Towne, *Elizabeth Towne’s Experiences in Self-Healing*, 15-16.

don't use the wisdom, love, power, you are not fit to go into the silence again. You take an emptied vessel into the silence to be filled; when not 'sitting in the silence,' you empty your vessel of love, wisdom, power, into what you do."⁹

"To know thyself is to know the Divine Presence and its ways within you." These words represented the core of Towne's philosophy. Thought was key to understanding the body, and like Atkinson, she believed thought could galvanize the body to fear, wisdom, idiocy, doubt, introspection, or command. Right living resolved itself into right thinking. "Whatsoever things you desire you can manifest in your body by sending forth your mandates in LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, FAITH, TEMPERANCE, and trusting the life in you to do the rest." As for prosperity, Towne taught that "the right attitude of mind will bring wealth through any business channel that does not run counter to the individual's belief in right." This meant loving your work, loving those you meet, loving yourself, and your methods and goods. Her treatment for success paralleled the importance of health in that it required "repeated affirmations, present tense, positive mood. I AM what I desire to manifest."¹⁰

Most New Thinkers, including Towne, interpreted evolution as man and God working together "to create whatsoever things they desire" and between them, putting "things into being." With such help as came from God, "any man's desire is but the prophecy of its own fulfillment." When the desired thing was not realized, it was due to something in the individual that inhibited the action. When the inhibiting element was removed, the desired outcome would materialize. It was simply a matter of time, patience, and desire-persistence.¹¹

⁹ Towne, *Elizabeth Towne's Experiences in Self-Healing*, 17-18, 74, 122.

¹⁰ Towne, *Fifteen Lessons in New Thought*, 123-147.

¹¹ Towne, *Fifteen Lessons in New Thought*, 53.

Towne offered her readership the opportunity under the cloak of anonymity to ask questions of a personal nature that she could provide a response.

E.W.M.--You certainly did make a big mistake in repeating the unpleasant things the girl told you. You are reaping the reward of your own rashness. The only way out is for you to live it down. The less you talk about it the better. Don't try to explain; don't take to heart the reproachful looks of your neighbors. Perhaps what you take for a reproachful look is only a pitying one, or a look of curiosity. Let this be a lesson to you so that you will never again repeat unkind things about your neighbors, no matter whether they are true or not go straight ahead living New Thought, resenting nothing, letting your light of kindness shine as best you can. And dig into the housework and keep it right up to the scratch, no matter whether you feel like it or not. Read plenty of New Thought. In time you will doubtless come to realize that this was a very good thing to have happen to you. It may save you from a worse experience, and from the evil and dangerous habit of repeating ugly stories. Learn your lesson and make your life over!¹²

Towne advocated a "cosmic consciousness," meaning the consciousness of self in relation to the universe of God. While some individuals were born with the ability to connect to this level of consciousness, most could achieve it only by practice. As with Atkinson, she believed in experiences that an individual could "feel." It was what the Methodists called

¹² Elizabeth Towne, "The Department of Consultation and Suggestion," *Nautilus Magazine*, 18 (1916), 50.

sanctification which meant “giving to God yourself, all you know and all you don’t know, and finding yourself in him and him in you as your very heart, desire, and moving impulse.”

To achieve the cosmic consciousness, affirm it, affirm it. Take special seasons every day, preferably the first minutes after waking and the last before going to sleep, for special realization practice. First, breathe fully and relax every muscle. Then affirm positively to yourself that the universe is a living and loving presence and that all things work together for the good and joy of each and all. Affirm this several times, positively.¹³

New Thought Alliance

The International New Thought Alliance (INTA), an umbrella organization for the New Thought Movement, went through several name changes from its original founding in 1895 to its renaming in 1914. Atkinson, Charles Brodie Patterson, Annie Rix Miltz, Rev. Dr. Blaine C. Mays, and Horatio W. Dresser were among its presidents. After her ordination in 1924 as a minister in the Church of Truth, Towne became an active lecturer in the INTA, editor of its *Bulletin*, and a prominent voice in the suffrage and prohibition movements. Besides proposing a new “Statement of Principles,” she developed a “New Thought Platform” which contained twelve planks of instruction:

1. God is all-present Mind, whose mode of motion is thought.

¹³ Towne, *Fifteen Lessons in New Thought*, 76-81.

2. Man is God's Idea, men are trains of thought in God's Mind; "man is a statement of beliefs."
3. Thought on its active side is Will or Desire, on its negative side it is Wisdom.
4. Desire and Wisdom adhere in God and in all his thoughts and in man and in man's thoughts. Desire and Wisdom hold planets in their orbits and project comets on their course.
5. Desire is the primal force of Attraction inherent in every atom and in every organization of atoms through all creation.
6. Wisdom is the Pattern, the Idea, inherent in God, and every atom, and in every organization of atoms in all creation.
7. Desire and Wisdom constitute also the free ethers (or God) in which all creation moves and has its being, and by inspiring which it lives and grows.
8. Life is a Great School in which we learn wisdom by doing things.
9. All ways of doing things—or people—are open to us, wise and unwise.
10. Man's desire is inseparable from his wisdom—he desires what he thinks is for his good.
11. The things that are unseen are the true forces and substances of life—Wisdom, Love or Desire, Ideals.

12. But it is not all resignation. Next comes creation. Being mental creatures we think new things into being.¹⁴

Orison Swett Marden

Towne maintained a stable of authors, each capable of presenting their own particular brand of New Thought. Some, like the inspirational writer Orison Swett Marden (1848-1924) became a permanent fixture in her constellation of publications. Orphaned at age seven, he overcame this impediment after reading Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859), a book that motivated him to improve his life. While supporting himself working various jobs in the hotel management business, he attended Hampton Institute (1873), Boston University (1877), and Harvard (1882) where he earned the M.D. degree. Rather than practice medicine, he continued working in the hotel management business, eventually acquiring several hotels. After losing his businesses in the economic recession of 1892, he started again in Chicago where he published *Pushing to the Front* (1894), explaining his journey of self-awareness. It quickly became a widely praised and best-selling personal development book. Marden's books made him a wealthy man. In all, he published over fifty, many of which were translated into other languages. Most of the books consisted of stories about great men who demonstrated an "I WILL" or "I CAN" mentality.

Marden's *Character: The Grandest Thing in the World* (1899) and *Do It to a Finish* (1909), consisted of short essays carrying titles such as "Where Only the Best is Good Enough," "What Every Employer is Looking For," "Thoroughness the Handmaid of Genius," "The Relation of Work to Character," and "The Crime of Carelessness." Other inspirational books included *Rising in the*

¹⁴ Towne, *Fifteen Lessons in New Thought*, 39-43; Elizabeth Towne, "Editorial," *Nautilus Magazine*, 25 (1923), 17.

World; Or, Architects of Fate (1895); *Talks With Great Workers* (1901); *The Young Man Entering Business* (1903); *Success Nuggets* (1906); *Every Man a King; Or, Might in Mind Mastery* (1906); *The Optimistic Life* (1907); *He Can Who Thinks He Can* (1908); *Miracle of Right Thought* (1910); *Victorious Attitude* (1916); *Selling Things* (1916); and *How to Get What You Want* (1917).

In all his books, Marden made frequent reference to Andrew Carnegie, Marshall Field, Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Schwab, John D. Rockefeller, Emerson, Lincoln, Disraeli, and Luther to make his points. His *Selling Things* (1916), which he dedicated to Charles M. Schwab, explained that employers looked for people who could get things done no matter the conditions, and this was particularly applicable to salesmanship. Although some had a natural gift for selling things, most had to learn it through study and training. Business was fast becoming a science whose experts were in high demand. Successful salesmanship demanded the finest of training, good insight into human nature, and approaching customers with confidence, honesty, character, and integrity. It also required the individual to radiate a positive attitude, wear the right clothes, and show enthusiasm for the product.¹⁵

When a person became conscious of him or herself, and realized their being was connected with the omnipotent power of God, the individual could never again be timid, hesitating, or fearful. At that moment, he or she knew their mission on earth was “divinely planned and divinely protected.” When someone attended a Christian Science or New Thought meeting, that person usually heard the call and was never again satisfied with their past. “Then and there you may have tasted another power, something which answered a higher call in your

¹⁵ Read Orison Swett Marden, *Selling Things* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1916)

nature.” This new philosophy produced “the master man . . . the Christlike man with the God Consciousness.”¹⁶

Like other New Thought authors, Marden taught that it was not wrong to want things. God would not have given humanity that longing if they had no ability to obtain it. If a person only saw obstacles, it was because he or she allowed it to happen. Instead, it was essential to visualize that which they wanted to realize. Each succeeded in proportion to the fixity of the vision and the invincibility of purpose. All great achievements began as longings or desires. To the extent one regarded the world as a legitimate field for realizing personal gratification, they were welcome to materialize visions that dominated their lives. Happiness or misery were merely the products of one’s thoughts. While the old religions focused on worshipping an absentee God whose heaven lay in some far off place, Christian Science, New Thought, and Mental Science taught a religion of joy and gladness in the present which brought people nearer to God.¹⁷

Because bodies were but an extension of one’s thoughts, Marden taught that disease was but an objectification of the mind. “As long as physical defects, weaknesses, or diseased conditions exist in the imagination . . . the body must correspond, because our bodies are but an extension of our thoughts.” While faith allowed homeopaths to move from enormous doses to almost nothing and still have the same results, mental healers simply went one step further by doing without medicine altogether. The success of the mental healer depended on his or her

¹⁶ Orison Swett Marden, *How to Get What You Want* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1917, 6, 17, 23.

¹⁷ Marden, *How to Get What You Want*, 26-30, 82-84.

faith and that of the patient. “The healing principle is in the patient himself. The mental healer does not heal his patient. He merely arouses the divinity, the healing principle in the sufferer.”¹⁸

Marden preferred the term “new philosophy” to that of “New Thought,” believing the latter represented a digression in thinking. New philosophy, on the other hand, showed “that if we want to get on in the world, we must hold the hopeful, optimistic attitude. It tells us that if we would attain prosperity, we must obey the law of prosperity, because the abundance God has provided for us can never flow toward a pessimistic doubting, or unbelieving mind; that abundance cannot flow through pipes pinched by doubts and fears.” In other words, in contrast to the meaning of the term New Thought, new philosophy taught that thoughts were seeds which produced a harvest of like things.¹⁹

The same law that the financier used to expand his wealth and the scientist used for discovery in his laboratory, the Christian used to seek miraculous results through prayer.

We know that the Universe is governed by law; that for every effect there must be a cause, and that the same cause, under the same conditions, will invariably produce the same effect. Consequently, if prayer has ever been answered, it will be answered if the proper conditions are complied with. This must necessarily be true; otherwise the Universe would be a Chaos instead of a Cosmos. The answer to prayer is therefore subject to law, and these laws are definite, exact and scientific, just as are the laws governing Gravitation and Electricity. An understanding of these laws takes the foundation of Christianity out of the realm of superstition and credulity and places it

¹⁸ Marden, *How to Get What You Want*, 153, 173.

¹⁹ Orison Swett Marden, *You Can but Will You?* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1920), 15-16.

upon the firm rock of Scientific Understanding. It is the solvent for every physical, economic, industrial, social and political ill in existence. In fact, it would appear to be the Creator's magnificent provision for the emancipation of mankind. We will be glad to send evidence showing how thousands are making use of this discovery and thereby finding health, comfort, prosperity and 'whatsoever things they desire.'²⁰

Marden's magazine *New Success* (1897-1912) was published out of New York by the Lowrey-Marden Corporation and carried the sub-heading of "Marden's Magazine." Dedicated to optimism, self-help, and encouragement, its circulation, which reached nearly a half million, taught small business owners who, powered by the law of attraction and right thinking and reinforced by the "I AM," or the divine power within, could take charge of their future. It was just that type of thinking that enabled Napoleon Hill to write his *Think and Grow Rich* (1938) with its emphasis on self-will, purpose, and visualization. While New Thought as a concept entered the mainstream of business success writers, there was a corresponding de-emphasis of the *term* which faded in usage. Similarly, writers focused less on theology and more on the secular qualities that derived from self-help.²¹

Wallace D. Wattles

²⁰ "Is Prayer ever Answered?" an advertisement by The Master Key Institute of St. Louis, Mo. In *New Success*, 5 (1921), 24.

²¹ Dawn Hutchinson, "New Thought's Prosperity Theology and Its Influence on American Ideas of Success," *Nova Religio*, 18 (2014), 28-44.

Much like Atkinson, Wallace Delois Wattles (1860-1911) became one of the most quoted New Thought writers of his generation and a leader in the genre known as self-help literature. An admirer of Emerson, Swedenborg, and the teachings of Jesus, he put their ideas into practice through creative visualization. "For years," wrote his daughter Florence, "his life was cursed by poverty and the fear of poverty." Drawn to the cause of the working classes, the family lived in the mill town of Elwood, Indiana, where year after year, Wattles schemed to bring the abundance of life to his family. Despite obstacles, he never lost confidence in the power of a "master Intelligence" that would "right every wrong and to give to every man and woman his or her share of the good things of life." After an encounter in Chicago in 1896 with the Congregational minister George Davis Herron from whom he learned the importance of *applied* Christianity, "he worked unceasingly to realize the glorious vision of human brotherhood," lecturing on Sunday nights in Indianapolis. For years, it was the family's only source of income.²²

A socialist and friend of Eugene V. Debs, Wattles ran as a candidate for several different political positions in Indiana without winning. At one time he also held a position in the Methodist Church but lost it after being accused of heresy, presumably because of his socialist ideas. Influenced by the work of Emma Curtis Hopkins and Atkinson, he wrote constantly. Most were short stories that were usually returned unpublished. In 1908, he began writing regularly for Elizabeth Towne's *Nautilus*, and for years, nearly every issue contained an article or more exploring some aspect of his philosophy. As his daughter explained, he "wrote almost constantly. It was then that he formed his mental picture. He saw himself as a successful writer,

²² Quoted in Wallace Wattles, *The Science of Getting Rich* in <https://wealthcreationmastermind.com/blog/the-science-of-getting-rich-by-wallace-wattles-overview/> (accessed May 25, 2021).

a personality of power, an advancing man, and he began to work toward the realization of this vision. He lived every page. . . . His life was truly the powerful life."²³

As Wattles became a successful writer, his socialist ideas underwent a transformation. In his *Making the Man Who Can* (1909) and *The Science of Getting Rich* (1910) he remarked that “What God wants is that you should make the most of yourself, for yourself, and for others; and you can help others more by making the most of yourself than in any other way.”²⁴ As his daughter explained, her father had not lost sight of the workers, or of his socialist cause, but had simply chosen to broaden his vision. With a more realistic vision of the world and the laws that governed its workings, he no longer thought it possible to change the social system by advancing everyone at once. If the wage system stood in the way of workers’ advancement, their individual demands were all that was needed to change it. Economic systems could only improve individual lives when each chose to make the very most of himself by working with the evolutionary forces that were moving ever forward. It can be argued that Wattles, whose livelihood up until this time had depended largely on his Christian Socialist politics, changed dramatically as his choice turned to *laissez faire* economics—a masterful sleight-of-hand which presented his philosophy in an altogether new point of view.²⁵

Whatever may be said in praise of poverty, the fact remains that it is not possible to live a really complete or successful life unless one is rich. You cannot rise to your greatest possible height in talent or soul development unless you have plenty of money. For to

²³ <https://wealthcreationmastermind.com/blog/the-science-of-getting-rich-by-wallace-wattles-overview/> (accessed May 25, 2021).

²⁴ Wallace D. Wattles, *The Science of Getting Rich* (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 2008 [1910]), 13.

²⁵ Florence A. Wattles, “Letter to the Editor,” *Nautilus Magazine* (April 1911), 60-62; Eugene V. Debs, “Letter to the Editor,” *Ibid.*

unfold your soul and to develop talent you must have many things to use, and you cannot have these things unless you have money with which to buy them.²⁶

In his *Science of Being Well* (1910) Wattles, who greatly admired Mary Baker Eddy, pointed to the fact that homeopathy and allopathy were radically opposite in theory and practice and yet both cured most diseases. This, Wattles reasoned, could be explained by saying that their patients were healed by a principle of health within themselves and not by something in their remedies. Getting well did not depend on a particular system or remedy but on what a person thinks and believes. “If a man has faith in the efficacy of a medicine, and is able to apply that faith to himself, that medicine will certainly cause him to be cured; but though his faith be great, he will not be cured unless he applies it to himself.”²⁷

Good health required belief in God, the creator of the “Living substance” which filled the universe from which all living things were created. Disease was neither created nor ordained by God; it was a product of “separate consciousness” created by human thought. As long as humans thought in a healthy manner, they could control the “Principle of Health.” But while humans were capable of originating thought, their mistakes perverted that principle, thus causing disease. Not until they learn how to think perfect health could they become well and remain such. The best way to accomplish this was for the individual to form a mental image of being well and make it a “habitual thought.” This required the individual to direct the will to a specific belief. “The sole legitimate use of the will is in determining to what you shall give your attention, and what you shall think about the things to which your attention is given.” Only then

²⁶ Wallace D. Wattles, *The Science of Getting Rich*, 118.

²⁷ Wallace D. Wattles, *The Science of Being Well* (Holyoke, MA: Elizabeth Towne, 1910), 11-15

could the individual enter into a full mental relationship with health. This had formed the basis of Christian Science and had remained so ever since.²⁸

For twenty years, Wattles wrote books that inspired countless millions, including Anthony Robbins, Robert Schuller, and Napoleon Hill to his way of thinking. A virtual powerhouse of personality, he had a faith in his own capability, and that of others, and never wavered. His books remain some of the most highly respected sources for those seeking to generate wealth. Among the many inspired by his works was Rhonda Byrne whose *The Secret* (2006) reflected much of Wattle's teachings.

* * *

According to Philip R. Jenkins, the *Cumulative Book Index* for 1928-32 listed over a hundred self-help titles. Nearly the same number covered the period from 1912-17. Going back in time, he found nine books listed in 1884, and six in 1876.²⁹ These became the precursors to Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937), Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), Stephen R. Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), Deepak Chopra's *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* (1994), and Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*. Their journey to mind-power and the "I Am" included visits to Eastern philosophies, transcendental meditation, the benefits of yoga and meditation, and the popularization of Chinese acupuncture and Ayurvedic medicine. While there remain a plethora of success books on the market today, the only thing that seems to differ among them is their publishing date. Otherwise, they look

²⁸ Wattles, *The Science of Being Well*, 24-25, 56-57.

²⁹ Philip R. Jenkins, "The 'Success' Books: Phony Guidance?" *The Clearing House*, 13 (1939), 336-39.

and read alike. Together, they promise prosperity and boundless abundance for those who dare to take a risk.³⁰

³⁰ Merce Mur Effing, "The Origins and Development of Self-Help Literature in the United States: The Concept of Success and Happiness, an Overview," *Atlantis*, 31 (2009), 125-41.

Chapter 5

Switching Hats

The secret of success is to try always to improve yourself no matter where you are or what your position. Learn all you can. Don't see how little you can do, but how much you can do.

(Theron Q. Dumont, *The Power of Concentration*, 1918)

Following the World's Parliament of Religions which met for seventeen days during the Columbian Exhibition of 1893, drawing more than 175,000 visitors to its lectures, numerous Hindu and Buddhist delegates toured the states giving lectures, writing books, establishing temples, and generally preaching the affinity of Oriental religions and philosophies to modern science. Examples included Vivekananda, disciple of the Indian mystic Ramakrishna; Shaku Soyen, Lord Abbot and representative of Zen Buddhism; Anagarika Dharmapala, Sri Lankan Buddhist of the Theravada tradition; and Protap Chunder Mozoomder, leader of the Brahmo Somaj, a Hindu reform movement and author of *The Oriental Christ* (1888). Using the Advanced Thought Publishing Company and the Yoga Publication Society which he owned, and the *Advanced Thought* magazine which he published and edited, Atkinson capitalized on this newest interest by writing articles under his own name and using the pseudonyms of Yogi Ramacharaka, Swami Bhakta Vishita, Swami Panchadasa, Theron Q. Dumont, the Three Initiates, Magus Incognito, L. W. de Laurence, and Theodore Sheldon to carry his message. Of all his pseudonyms, the books by Ramacharaka and Vishita were among the most popular and many remain in print today.

The Hindu Mystic: Ramacharaka

It was alleged that Atkinson attended the Parliament of Religions in 1893 where he met Baba Bharata, a delegate claiming to be a pupil of the Indian Hindu mystic Yogi Ramacharaka who, after teaching Bharata his philosophy, sent him to Chicago to carry his message. Once there, Bharata supposedly fascinated audiences with his lectures on Ramacharaka's teachings and was encouraged to start a new religion based on his teacher's beliefs. As the story goes, Bharata and Atkinson collaborated on a series of books which they agreed to attribute to Ramacharaka. To accomplish this task, they had at their disposal the published speeches of the delegates along with translations from leading Indologists like the German scholar Max Müller whose *Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1910) were being published by Oxford University Press. However, there is no record of a Baba Bharata in any of the official or unofficial accounts of the Parliament. Nor, for that matter, is there any evidence of a Yogi Ramacharaka. In fact, there is also no record of Atkinson being there since he did not move to Chicago until the late 1890s.¹

With or without Bharata and Ramacharaka being real persons, the books printed by the Yogi Publication Society were exceedingly popular. Writing under the pseudonym of Ramacharaka from his home in Chicago, and later in California, Atkinson penned a total of fourteen books including *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (1903), *Correspondence Class Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (1903-1904), *Hatha Yoga; Or, the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being* (1904), *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* (1906), *The Hindu-Yogi System of Practical Water Cure as Practiced in India and Other Oriental Countries* (1909), and *A Series of Lessons in Gnani Yoga* (1917). His publications were not

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Walker_Atkinson (accessed July 18, 2020).

particularly unusual as “Orientalism” had become a hot item since the Parliament and a running theme in a host of magazines—from art to music, philosophy, health, and religion. Such had also been the strength of the occult movement known as Theosophy, founded by H. P. Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott who taught that true knowledge came through spiritual ecstasy, i.e., intuition and direct communication from the monasteries of the Brotherhood in the highlands of Tibet.

The earliest of Ramacharaka’s lessons began as correspondence booklets whose purchasers came from nearly every state and territory, and from abroad. They represented different shades of religious beliefs and opinions, yet all seemed to be searching for a “common end of development, unfoldment, and growth.”² Yogi philosophy, which presumably came down through the centuries from the writings of Adepts in India, Chaldea, Persia, Egypt, and Ancient Greece, taught that humans were defined by their access to seven distinct principles.

- The *Physical Body*, the most apparent and “crudest manifestation” of the seven principles, provided the basis for the growth of the other six. Each person had the responsibility for training his or her body to the highest degree of perfection. This required good health and care of the body under the control of the mind.³
- The *Astral Body*, sometimes called the “ethereal body” or “fluidic body,” consisted of matter of a finer quality that separated from the physical body after death. Invisible to the ordinary eye, it could only be observed by an Adept or

² Yogi Ramacharaka, *Correspondence Class Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (Palmyra, NJ: The Yogi Publication Society, 1903), 18.

³ Yogi Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy: The Complete Lessons of Yogi Ramacharaka* (Hollister, MO: YogeBooks, 2014), 16.

trained occultist. Though not possessed of life or intelligence, it bore the shape or astral shell of the human form.

- The *Prana*, or *Vital Force*, was a form of universal energy evident in all forms of life and supplied the Ego with its animated manifestations. At death, when no longer under the Ego's control, the Prana reverted to its original elements in preparation for forming a new combination. Invisible to the eye, it was the force used in magnetic, mental, and absent healing as well as in telepathy and thought transference.⁴
- The *Instinctive Mind* was home to the brute appetites, passions, desires, sensations, feelings, and emotions found in the lowest orders of the animal kingdom. The minds of many humans also functioned on this plane, performing tasks and mastering them like a painter using his brush, or a woman with her sewing-machine. It was this level of mind that allowed thought-waves from others to take foolish control of a subject, precipitating the acting out of passions, feelings, and brute emotions without regard to the consequences.
- The *Intellect* contributed reason to the Instinctive Mind, merging simple consciousness with self-consciousness. Representing the beginnings of the conception of "I," it encouraged the individual to analyze, classify, separate, and deduce. At this stage, individuals began deliberately willing things and not simply accepting life's challenges.⁵ The first steps in developing an awareness of the Ego

⁴ William Walker Atkinson, *The Arcane Formulas or Mental Alchemy* (Chicago: The Arcane Book Co., 1909), 14.

⁵ Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1903), 20-32.

(i.e., the identification of the self with the Self) started by degrees until Ego Consciousness became a part of natural consciousness. Once established, it protected the individual's personal life. Accessing it required "entering the silence" and fixating attention on the physical body, the "sheath" in which the Ego dwelled, and energizing it with vital energy or "Vril."⁶

- The *Spiritual Mind* represented the hunger of the intellect for something more, i.e., finding a path toward illumination of some degree of spiritual or "cosmic consciousness." Represented in the unfoldment of God's love of humanity, it stressed the importance of justice and compassion, best represented in the inspiration of poets, painters, sculptors, writers, orators, and preachers. It was a level of comprehension found in "highly developed souls" but which Ramacharaka believed would eventually include all. Humanity's impulse toward this level of consciousness did not come from the intellect but from "some unknown place" in the inner recesses of the soul.⁷
- The principle of *Spirit*, the most precious inheritance from the Divine, was the gift of the "Divine Spark" which most minds could not understand. It was that moment when the individual achieved "full consciousness of Spirit." These moments of illumination (i.e., feeling the real presence of the Spirit) forever changed the individual.⁸ It was the song of the Soul, which when once heard, was

⁶ Atkinson, *The Arcane Formulas or Mental*, 14.

⁷ Yogi Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*, 38-46; Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 67, 72.

⁸ Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*, 47-48.

never forgotten. Whether among the semi-barbarous races or the talented musician of to-day, its strains were plainly recognized.⁹

After identifying the seven principles, Ramacharaka turned his attention to the *Human Aura* which, visible to only those with highly developed psychic powers, revealed the quality of mind or thought-waves evident in the lower five principles. The sixth (Spiritual Mind) and seventh (Spirit) principles, however, were only visible by “those beings far higher in the scale than the human race as we know it.” Regardless, each Human Aura operated at a different rate of vibration that extended outward in an oval shape from the body, forming different colored lines or sparks of energy two to three feet in height. While the colors—from black to brilliant white—constantly shifted and blended, certain colors predominated, revealing the specific thoughts or emotions of the individual. Certain habitual colors indicated an individual’s general character while blending colors were evidence of passing feelings or emotions.¹⁰

Yoga

Yoga, from the Sanskrit word “Yug,” meaning “to join,” represented the physical, mental, and psychic, or spiritual control of the individual through the science of breath. For the people of India, this was the rule of life.¹¹ Each of the higher mental principles had its own form of Yogi: (1) Raja Yoga developed the mental faculties by the application of the will; (2) Karma Yoga emphasized the importance of usefulness; and (3), Gnani Yoga studied the fundamental

⁹ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 87.

¹⁰ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 95, 114-16.

¹¹ Yogi Ramacharaka, *Science of Breath: A Complete Manual of the Oriental Breathing Philosophy of Physical, Mental, Psychic and Spiritual Development* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1905), 5-6.

principles underlying life. In addition, there was Bhakti Yoga which dealt with the awakening in the individual to a still higher realization of his or her relationship with the One, the Absolute.¹²

Yoga Philosophy taught that the path taken by an individual depended on the desires of each individual soul. It taught the “unfoldment” of the soul until it recognized its real self in union with the Spirit. This was the meaning of life and of evolution and not, by contrast, the pursuit of happiness in a blind fashion.

The best work of the world is produced by men who take an interest in their tasks, and do not go through the motions of work simply to earn their wage. The instinct that causes the artist to paint a great picture—the writer to produce a great book—the musician to compose a great work—will cause a man to make a success of any line of work. It is work for work’s sake—work for the joy of the worker. All great work is produced in this way.¹³

Hatha Yoga

Hatha Yoga purified, strengthened, and maintained the body in health, giving the Spirit a worthy temple in which to exist. As a branch of Yoga philosophy, it focused on physical well-being, meaning methods of hygiene and other natural forms intended to maintain and improve physical health and vigor. It concerned the proper choice of foods, irrigation of the body, breathing, relaxation, pranic energy, fresh air, and sleep. Separate from the others, Hatha Yoga depended on allowing the Prana, or vital force, to work without hindrance on the body. Manifested in all forms of life, it preserved the body’s health by absorbing energy from food,

¹² Yogi Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Gnani Yogi* (London: L. N. Fowler, 1917), 9.

¹³ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 669.

thereby giving “vitality” to the cells. For this reason, Hatha Yoga attached great importance to the use of proper foods and the quantity of water consumed (two quarts daily), regular irrigation of the colon, the mechanics of respiration, control over the involuntary system, and exercises to improve the vibratory quality of the Prana as the essence of all motion, force, or energy in all forms of life.¹⁴

Proper respiration, or the science of breath, was the principle behind all motion, force, or energy. While in ordinary breathing each person absorbed a given amount of Prana, Yoga breathing extracted a greater supply and even stored it away for times when it was most needed. Physical health depended upon correct breathing. When performed properly, breathing controlled the body, increased mental capacity and developed the spiritual side of an individual. It augmented the vital force by sending increased levels of oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen to the organs.¹⁵

Ramacharaka classified respiration into high, mid, low, and Yogi breathing. High breathing, known as *clavicular breathing*, was the least healthy because it required enormous energy for the smallest benefit. Straining the organs and disagreeable for the voice, it became the breeding ground for contagious disease. *Mid-breathing*, or rib (inter-costal) breathing caused the diaphragm to be pushed upward and the abdomen to be drawn in, the ribs raised,

¹⁴ Yogi Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga; Or, The Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1904), 1-17. One system of natural healing which worked well with the Hindu Yoga system was practical water cure. It was nothing new to the Western world due in large part to numerous hot springs in America and Europe which became popular healing spas for thousands. By taking a glass or vessel and pouring it backward and forward into several glasses improve the vital energy of the water. This became a restorative process called “Prana-ized.” It involved drinking water, applying it to the skin, hot and cold baths, compresses, pack treatments with wet sheets, hydrotherapy, and sexual vitality treatments. See Yogi Ramacharaka, *The Hindu-Yogi System of Practical Water Cure as Practiced in India and Other Oriental Countries* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Co., 1909), 7-10.

¹⁵ Ramacharaka, *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath: A Complete Manual* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1905), 8-10.

and the chest expanded. Low abdominal breathing, or *diaphragmic breathing*, involved the entire respiratory system and required the least expenditure of energy. It involved breathing through the nostrils and filling the lower part of the lungs first before filling the other areas. It produced a rhythm that kept the entire body strengthened and vitalized, thus immunizing it from consumption and other pulmonary diseases. Diaphragmic breathing formed the basis for psychic breathing in that it inhibited pain, could direct the circulation to any part of the body, was the basis for self-healing, and even enabled an individual to heal others near or distant. This type of breathing formed an aura around humans, protecting them from the gross thoughts of others; it also enabled them to recharge their energy. Unlike the other methods of breathing, yoga breathing occurred only when the individual's will-power was fully developed. It involved breathing rhythmically and meditating upon the self as something independent of the body. It produced a sense of the soul and of immortality, making one aware of the Universal Spirit or Universal Mind.¹⁶

Raja Yogi

Raja Yogi focused on gaining control of the mental faculties to accomplish goals by application of the will and mind. Like mental science, it recognized the power of the trained mind in psychology and psychic phenomena. The Yogi student received instructions in the mysteries of the mind “not that he may make use of it to build up material success, or to realize his personal desires,” but to understand the workings of the laws affecting individuals and to use the power to help the race. Initiates into the science of Raja Yoga began with a series of lessons, the first of which involved instruction in the full realization of the “I” and using mental

¹⁶ Ramacharaka, *Science of Breath*, 26-75, 85-90.

drills that included concentration, the cultivation of attention and perception, the unfoldment of consciousness, understanding the sub-conscious, and affirmations at the conclusion of each lesson. The second centered on consciousness of the “I AM.” While the “I” awakened the individual to the realization of the self, the latter awakened the individual to the latent and potential qualities that lay in the “I AM.” When this occurred, the individual felt the consciousness of the “Real Self,” the preliminary step to “Illumination,” making possible states of meditation where, alone with oneself, the individual could access the hidden planes of mind above the intellect, including the subconscious. This was also the moment one realized the immortality of the Ego.¹⁷

Karma Yoga

While Raja Yoga was the path followed by those intent on developing the mental faculties through control of the will, Karma Yoga, meaning “to do” or “to act,” was the Yoga of work. It emphasized the importance of doing things with head and hand, and the joy of putting the philosophy of yoga into action. It celebrated life by performing actions that worked in the world whether or not it served as a form of spiritual awakening. By working in the world and serving others, one also served God. It was a simple yoga that made doing everyday things into an offering. It was the pure act of doing the appropriate thing that you do (and doing it as well as you can) when you are not playing the part of someone who you are not. The secret of work was the enjoyment it produced without dependence on any other factors. It recognized work

¹⁷ Yogi Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1906), 9, 12-18, 291-92.

for what it was, and was not deluded by any popular misconceptions. Its benefits and happiness sprang from the work itself and not any ratiocination attached before or after the event.¹⁸

Gnani Yoga

Gnani Yoga, meaning “to know,” represented the Yoga of Wisdom used by scientists and other intellectuals fascinated with reasoning, proving, experimenting, and classifying. These were individuals who, in their quest for personal enlightenment, asked the question “Why?” The Gnani Yogis were the philosophers, scholars, and teachers known at times to go to extreme lengths in applying scientific and intellectual knowledge to the great questions of life. As a way of thinking about truth and ideals, its practitioners found their answers within themselves by examining their own thoughts.¹⁹ The Gnani Yogi saw truth in all religions and all schools of philosophy. None had all the answers but only a small fraction of the “great truth.” Similarly, the Gnani Yogi excluded no creatures from Nature’s bounty. Here, Ramacharaka referenced Emanuel Swedenborg who spoke of the individual as one of many forms through which the universe flowed like a stream.²⁰

Bhakti Yoga

In addition to the above three, Bhakti Yoga stood for the Hindu cultivation of spiritual love in its purest form using all the senses and emotions. From the Sanskrit word meaning “to adore or worship God,” its goal was selfless union with and devotion to the Divine—a blissful intoxication of surrender, peace, and grace—regardless of its form. One example came from St. Anselm of Canterbury who wrote: “I have found a joy that is full and more than full. For when

¹⁸ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 645, 651; Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*, 265-66.

¹⁹ Ramacharaka, *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*, 267-68.

²⁰ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 726.

heart and mind and soul and all are full of that joy, joy beyond measure will still remain.”²¹

Another came from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas when Jesus said: “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.” It represented the intense but humble and unconditional surrender of the self as an instrument of the Divine, namely the acceptance of the Divine on the Divine’s terms alone.²²

Considered the highest spiritual level of yoga, a pure and unconditional union with the Divine through prayer, ritual, and chanting, it involved nine steps: (1) encountering truth by listening to inspiring stories; (2) identification with the Godly qualities by singing his glories; (3) adherence to the teachings in prayers; (4) acceptance of reality through service and humility; (5) remembrance of God with faith and worship; (6) commitment to restrained and graceful action; (7) seeing divinity in everything and developing an attitude of self-sacrifice; (8) cultivating a sense of contentment and being a servant of God; and (9) accepting complete surrender by accepting all things that happen to you. At the end of this process, the individual became one with God.²³

As explained by Ramacharaka, there was only *One* Reality from which all things (i.e., material forms, forces, energies, etc.) flowed. Called *Spirit* or *Absolute*, it was omnipresent, immanent in all forms of life, including the forces and laws of the universe. It was a living universe where even the most inert particles teemed with degrees of power. Here Ramacharaka chose Lamarck over Darwin to explain himself. Evolution was more than survival of the fittest

²¹ Saint Anselm, “Proslogion,” <http://www.logoslibrary.org/anselm/proslogion/126.html> (accessed October 24, 2020).

²² Quoted in *Gospel of Thomas Saying 70* in <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas70.html> (accessed October 24, 2020).

²³ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, 743-44.

through natural selection. All that existed within the universe was “moving upward and onward, along the lines of Evolution. All is Well. We are held firmly in the Mind of the One.”

Evolution shows us Life constantly pressing forward toward higher and still higher forms of expression. The urge is constantly upward and onward. It is true that some species sink out of sight, their work in the world having been done, but they are succeeded by other species more in harmony with their environment and the needs of their times. Some races of men decay, but others build on their foundations, and reach still greater heights.²⁴

Mystic Christianity

Believing that humankind had an imperfect understanding of the life and “inner teachings” of Jesus, Ramacharaka offered *A Series of Lessons in Mystic Christianity* (1907). Drawing on different legends, he proceeded to create a new profile of Christianity’s Son of God, beginning when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod and visited by members of the Mystic Orders from the Orient. They were the Adepts from the Great Eastern Lodges who had been searching the world for the appearance of a “Great Master of Masters” predicted by the Occult Brotherhood centuries earlier. Thus, when a peculiar conjunction of the planets occurred in the sky, it was interpreted as marking the appearance of the Great Divine Soul long predicted in the mystic traditions. After giving the child gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, each a symbol of recognition by the Occult Brotherhoods, the Magi departed, leaving

²⁴ Yogi Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Gnani Yoga* (Chicago, IL: The Yogi Publication Society, 1908), 4-5, 59, 149.

“watchers” to look over his movements. Hearing of the old prophecy regarding the birth of a “Great Master,” Herod ordered his army to kill all children under two years of age. Mary and Joseph reputedly used the Magi’s gold to escape to Egypt.²⁵

Ramacharaka then referenced the occult traditions among the Brahmans, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians that recounted stories of a young boy who was taken by his parents at age thirteen to Jerusalem where he remained behind to speak with the air of a celebrated Master to teachers and doctors of the Law. The legends also explained that this same young teacher frequently stole away from his home to talk with travelers from Samaria, Damascus, Greece, Rome, Arabia, Syria, Persia, Phoenicia, and other distant lands to discuss occult and mystic lore. From age twenty-one until he was nearly thirty years of age, he traveled east to pursue a ministry among the people of India and Persia, preaching against priestcraft and formalism. “Everywhere He was regarded as a firebrand and a disturber of the established social order by the priests and high-caste people.”²⁶

Having traveled through much of the known world, Jesus returned to Israel as a Master, Teacher, and Prophet, rather than as a Hebrew Messiah. On his way home, he spent time in the various lodges of the Essenic Brotherhood where he learned of the work of John the Baptist who, reared in the home of his father who was a priest, had been educated in the Inner Teachings of the Kabbalah, the basis of Hebrew occultism and mysticism. After initiated into the mysteries of the Inner Circle of the Hebrew Mystics known as the Essenes, John left home and lived for a time in the wilderness subsisting on the most elementary food. When he returned

²⁵ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Mystic Christianity* (Chicago: The Yogi Publication Society, 1907), 13-14, 183.

²⁶ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Mystic Christianity*, 69-73,

into society, he preached repentance, righteousness, the Essenic rite of baptism, and the coming of the Master. When Jesus visited John and asked to be baptized, giving John various signs of the Occult Fraternity to which they were both members, John recognized in Jesus a person who had attained the level of Occult Master. Although John felt it was wrong to baptize Jesus, he performed the rite at Jesus' insistence. Until his death at the hands of Herod, John and his followers transferred many of their ceremonial rites into the early Christian Church, including baptism which became a distinctive part of its sacraments.²⁷

Swami Bhaka Vishita

Another of Atkinson's more popular pseudonyms was Swami Bhaka Vishita, the so-called "Hindu Master" who produced more than a two dozen books, plus numerous pamphlets, all touching on a class of manifestations known as telepathy, thought transference, clairvoyance, psychometry, and thought-force. In his *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power* (1919), he set forth the premise that in all mental states, a specific rate of vibration radiated from the mind, some of which were complex and more pronounced than others. Having mastered the scientific principles upon which they were based, he provided lessons on how to raise one's psychic vibrations to the level of psychometrizing old letters through 'touch;' using crystals to do the same; or applying clairvoyant power to disclose the human Aura.²⁸

Beyond the five senses were new powers ("transcendental senses") that resulted from contact with vibratory motion. Lying dormant in large masses of humankind, these faculties had

²⁷ Ramacharaka, *A Series of Lessons in Mystic Christianity*, 5-10.

²⁸ Swami Bhakta Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1919), 32.

the power to understand the higher vibrations that unfolded into consciousness. Though difficult to conceive of a wave of “thought” traveling along a channel before reaching the mind of another person, Vishita treated it as analogous to wireless telegraphy, magnetism, the X-ray, and radioactivity. As in the case of the wireless telegraphy, Morse code was transmitted using short (“dot”) and long (“dash”) pulses of radio waves that could be heard in the earphones of a receiving operator who would then translate the code back into text. Mental vibrations were no different, Vishita explained. On encountering an individual’s nervous system, the thought waves were transformed into mental vibrations which produced feelings and mental images in the brain.²⁹ The ether which pervaded the universe, served as the medium through which the waves of vibratory energy moved. From the lowest to highest, everything was in motion, i.e., in vibration.

Mediumship

Modern Spiritualism, which held that the spirits of former humans could communicate with the living, originated in Hydesville, New York, in 1848, when the Fox family’s youngest daughters, Maggie and Kate, communicated with the spirit of a murdered peddler through an improvised form of rapping sounds. Touted as the religion of the future, it taught that people were animals by accident and that their true birthright was as spirit.³⁰ Although theories in human immortality differed as to just how and where humans lived after physical death, there prevailed “an abiding sense of existence and deathlessness” from people of all different cultures. Each expected to live after physical death in the *now*, sensing not death but life—a place where the human body acquired a new more refined and more spiritual form. Spiritualism

²⁹ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 39-51.

³⁰ Read John S. Haller, Jr., *Modern Spiritualism: Its Quest to Become a Science* (Monee, IL: Amazon Books, 2020).

redeemed the stories told by the prophets and seers who communicated with angels and drove home the 'fact' that intercourse between the two worlds was real and continuous. The manifestation of these beliefs meant that the dread of death disappeared with the presence of ministering spirits.³¹

Within this belief, Atkinson and other Spiritualists affirmed that all humans, irrespective of beliefs, were transported after death to a spirit-world whose other-worldly existence included responsibility for the spiritual and civil reformation of the earth's inhabitants.³² Unable to receive validation from the normative sciences, spiritualists turned to the pseudo-sciences including phrenology, psychometry, telepathy, pneumatology, and sarcognomy to authenticate this spirit-world.

According to Vishita, mediumship had suffered from an undue number of frauds and charlatans anxious to empty the pocketbooks of gullible individuals seeking to contact a loved one. For this reason, mediumship demanded an honest examination of its claim to communicate with the inhabitants of the spirit-world through messages "telegraphed" rather than face-to-face greetings from the Other World. Mediums served as the gateway to the spirit-world which they depicted without the images of a wrathful God, but instead a place of spiritual inspiration. Vishita insisted that Spiritualism was not the exercise of neurotic or hysterical individual or groups, but a belief held by members of the educated middle class and elite members of society seeking comfort with the spirits of their departed family members and friends. Now individuals could rely on spiritual intercourse between themselves and a loved one

³¹ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 136.

³² William Walker Atkinson, *The Law of the New Thought: A Study of Fundamental Principles and Their Application* (Chicago: the Psychic Research Company, 1902), 15-16.

that did not involve consorting with the devil or any of his evil spirits. Instead, they found a spiritual fellowship beyond the valley of death that made the prospect of their own deaths less worrisome. With the invisible world nearby, death was not the end of existence but a channel leading to a spiritual universe of living persons.³³

Mediumship required the powers of concentration, patience, and perseverance. It also entailed guidance, direction, and the control of a spirit who was often intent on playing tricks and giving misinformation. Spirits were known to throw things, levitate tables and chairs, play musical instruments, drop flowers from the ceiling, and create different sounds. Communing with spirits was not for the weak-hearted as precautions had to be taken since a medium could lose his or her individuality in the process of connecting with the spirit-world. Thus, those aware of the risks knew the importance of controlling the actions of the spirit. Quoting from Albert Morton, author of *Psychic Studies, Spiritual Science, and The Higher Aspects of Spiritualism*,

Elevated spirits do not require mediums to surrender their reason; on the contrary, they advise that every new thought should be tested in the crucible of reason, and that it be rejected if not in accordance therewith; but the control of domineering spirits, claiming the name of celebrities, who present unreasonable theories, and in a dictatorial 'this saith the spirit' manner, demanding unquestioning compliance with their commands, must be rejected by all mediums as debasing and inconsistent with self-respect. Any associations or concessions which tend to lower the spiritual standard must be carefully

³³ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 135-40.

avoided, for there is no growth in any relations which can only be maintained by the sacrifice of self-respect and self-justice.³⁴

Most of those who believed in mediumship also supported the existence of different spiritual planes, beginning with the earth-plane and moving upward into the higher vibrations. Every spirit dwelled on one of these planes, each reflecting a particular mental vibration and personality. Mediumship required not only concentration but the ability to communicate at the appropriate vibratory level thus allowing him or her to speak to the spirit. Nevertheless, Vishita insisted that spirits did not require mediums to surrender their reason. Any such tendency, he felt, should be carefully avoided.³⁵

Vishita provided lessons on how to become a medium, how to form a “spirit circle,” how to use a Ouija Board, and how to learn psychometrics and clairvoyance. Although psychic phenomena were thought to be understood as supernatural or outside the realm of Nature’s laws, Vishita insisted that these were skills that could be learned by ordinary people. Rather than call them supernatural gifts, Vishita preferred the term “supernormal.” Only ignorance prevented the individual from possessing these capabilities. Modern science furnished abundant testimony that the universe was in constant motion and manifested in different degrees of vibrations. These differences, although imperceptible to the senses, no longer remained unknown; they could now be channeled and used.³⁶

Seership

³⁴ Quoted in Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 145-149.

³⁵ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 143-49.

³⁶ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 10-18.

Vishita defined seership as that power other than the five senses capable of interpreting the past and future for purposes of controlling one's destiny. Distinct from Spiritualism, it did not involve the use of a medium. Instead, seers obtained their knowledge directly. "Once seership is unfolded," he explained, "you learn the secrets of the darkness around you; materialism disappears, and in its place comes the light of wisdom and knowledge." This inner vision enlarged human consciousness by leaping over material barriers to reveal the mysteries of the universe. It included communicating with the Guardian Angels who inhabited the higher planes, and even foretelling the future. Its greatest advantage, however, lay in diagnosing disease, restoring domestic harmony, and revealing the "life-scroll" of others. Humankind was fast reaching the climax of its existence and needed now to emerge from its physical unreality to realize its non-physical reality and eternal companionship with the Creator.³⁷ The power to tell the future was close at hand. By making use of superior consciousness, a seer could reveal the past and future of any person. So too, those in the spirit-land could directly reveal themselves to their living friends without requiring a medium.³⁸

Claiming to be a member of the Pythagorean and Rosicrucian fraternities who had received their wisdom from the Adepts of India, China, and Egypt, Vishita addressed seership as a practical science stripped of the mysteries created by pseudo-seers, charlatans, and imposters. After many years of study, he insisted that it was a natural power inherent in humankind. It was the birthright of every soul and only required the individual to become "*en rapport* with this vast ocean of inner light." He claimed to have been a seer all his life and had no doubt it would

³⁷ Swami Bhakta Vishita, *The Development of Seership: The Science of Knowing the Future: Hindoo and Oriental Methods: Coming Events Cast their Shadows Before* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1915), 5, 51-65.

³⁸ Vishita, *The Development of Seership*, 18.

lead to the greatest illumination possible for mankind to experience. To achieve this, however, it was essential that the individual does not see through his/her eyes, or any of the other senses, but with only the mind. Intuition was certainly part of it; confidence was another. "In most of the larger cities there are a number of those who call themselves seers, but, as a rule, and at best, are really only sensitives, and generally they are rank fakirs, and the less you have to do with them the better."³⁹

Seership came in different forms: natural, intellectual, medical, ethereal, social, practical, and purely mental. All, irrespective of type, practiced continence in sex ("for an error in that direction is fatal to clear vision"); could gaze steadily at a speck in the wall for several minutes; and able to breathe deeply and rapidly for ninety seconds to become dizzy. If done properly, the exercise created a "dream state" enabling one to see without the aid of the eyes.⁴⁰

True seers were citizens of the spiritual world as well as earth. They did not come to that status by using their reasoning powers as that would never secure the intended results. Reasoning was only relevant afterward. Seers learned to photograph the subconscious and bring it to consciousness. The eyes were the Seer's instrument of sight; the sight served the mind; and the mind served the spirit. And unlike mediumship, seers never lost control. In seership, there was a face-to-face spiritual communication, proving that the unseen world was nearby and where loved ones dwelled who had passed on. "They impress, influence, and guide us, so that we may realize now and here that life is immortal, that the end of existence is not death, but that life is eternal."⁴¹ Vishita considered these matters proven by the so-called

³⁹ Vishita, *The Development of Seership*, 11-48.

⁴⁰ Vishita, *The Development of Seership*, 44-49.

⁴¹ Vishita, *The Development of Seership*, 113-131, 365.

“Akashic Records” which, according to Blavatsky’s Theosophy and Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy, represented a compendium of all universal events, thoughts, words, emotions, and intents to ever have occurred in the past, present, and future.⁴²

Seership was also proven by psychometry, a pseudo-science discovered by the doctor and spiritualist Joseph Rodes Buchanan, which established the clairvoyant’s ability to connect with an object, person, or scene by means of a physical object such as a relic or piece of clothing, and having the ability to ‘read’ the emanations given off by it. For example, after gathering bullets from a Civil War battlefield, the psychometrist could reputedly describe the battle in detail, including flashes of scenes associated with it.⁴³

The other instrument of seership was crystal gazing which focused on concentrating psychic vibrations on a specific point. To exercise this talent, the individual was directed to maintain a quiet mental habit and concentrate on the subject at hand. Like psychometry, Vishita claimed it was scientifically established owing to the possession of an “interior vision.” Long used by the Rosicrucians, it allowed the seer to be wide awake and without any strain to the nerves or brain. It meant “going into the silence” and contacting the world of the spirit. Nevertheless, he argued, “men of science, everywhere, are admitting . . . that the future is just as fixed and determinate, just as settled and inevitable, just as possible to determine, as is the past.” The challenge was knowing how to penetrate the veil and read its secrets.⁴⁴

⁴² Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 105.

⁴³ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 85-86.

⁴⁴ Vishita, *Genuine Mediumship or the Invisible Power*, 95-101.

Chapter 6

More Hats

A desire in the heart for anything is God's sure promise sent beforehand to indicate that it is yours already in the limitless realm of supply.

(H. Emilie Cady, *Lessons in Truth*, 1896)

Over the course of his career, Atkinson authored multiple other books using several additional pseudonyms. Three he wrote under the pseudonym of Swami Panchadasi, and another eight using the name of Theron Q. Dumont, a presumed instructor in the art and science of personal magnetism in Paris who provided training exercises to improve the will, memory, and personal magnetism for those individuals anxious to strike out on their own in the medical world.

Atkinson also reputedly authored *The Kybalion* (1908) under the pseudonym of the "Three Initiates;" one by Lauron W. de Laurence titled *Crystal Gazing and Spiritual Clairvoyance* (1913); co-authored *Vim Culture* (1913) with Theodore Sheldon on the subject of health and healing; used the name Magus Incognito to publish *The Secret Doctrines of the Rosicrucians* (1918); and co-authored with Edward Beals a series of twelve books on *Personal Power* (1922). There were probably other pseudonyms that he used which have not been identified.¹

Swami Panchadasi

¹ The Yogi Publication Society was a mail-order publishing house located at 3855 Vincennes Avenue in Chicago, sharing space with Sydney Flowers' Psychic Research Company.

Atkinson used the pseudonym of Swami Panchadasi to restate and expand much of what he had already written about under his own name or that of Ramacharaka and Vishita. He recounted the egg-shaped nebula that radiated from every individual; how the Prana, or vital force, affected the Aura; how the mental or emotional states had their own astral shade or color; how thought-forms were created and projected; using human magnetism to heal; and how to protect a person's Aura from physical and psychic attacks. Key to the Panchadasi book series was understanding the Prana which, not being a material substance but a higher auric entity distinguished by its finer vibrations, its radiant colors indicated the general health of the individual. Artists in past times and in different cultures had pictured the Prana as a "halo effect" hovering above the heads of saints and other "holy" or important individuals. These flamelike emanations reflected the spiritual, mental, and emotional character of their personality.²

As with Ramacharaka and Vishita, Panchadasi stressed the need to go beyond the five sense organs to understand and utilize the capacities operating at the higher psychical planes. Described as the "astral senses," they were beyond the power of ordinary people to experience. Panchadasi, however, provided lessons that taught the use of the astral senses, mind-reading, psychometry, crystal gazing, the laws of psychic attraction, magnetic healing, telepathy, and clairvoyance. Instead of relying on Hindu authorities to explain psychic phenomena, he turned to the work of prominent western scientists who had expressed interest in occult sciences and philosophy and who were intent on validating them, specifically telepathy, using the scientific investigators of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in England. Concerned with the

² Swami Panchadasi, *The Human Aura: Astral Colors and Thought Forms* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1912).

possibility of fraud or collusion, Panchadasi referred to the SPR's investigations of the family of the Rev. A. M. Creery of Derbyshire, England, whose children had a reputation for 'guessing' a specific number in a pack of cards, objects hidden in the person's hands, and recounting messages from persons dying or believing themselves to be approaching death.³

As for Psychometry, namely the ability of an individual to tell the physical condition of a person by holding some trinket worn on the person from whom the information was sought, Panchadasi turned to the experiments of the spiritualist Joseph Rodes Buchanan and geologist Dr. William Denton who published his results in *The Soul of Things* (1863).

I once handed a good psychometrist bit of ornament taken from an Egyptian mummy over three thousand years old. Though the psychometrist did not know what the object was, or from whence it had come, she was able to picture not only the scenes in which the Egyptian had lived, but also the scenes connected with the manufacture of the ornament, some three hundred years before that time—for it turned out that the ornament itself was an antique when the Egyptian acquired it.⁴

Turning to psychic and magnetic healing, Panchadasi explained that while a number of healing cults had organized in recent decades claiming all manner of theories, most simply applied principles known for thousands of years. Regardless of their expressed differences, those that were the most successful based their methods on three basic principles: (1) the desire to make a cure; (2) a clear mental picture of the desired condition in the patient; and (3)

³ Panchadasi, *Clairvoyance and Occult Powers*, 61-63.

⁴ Panchadasi, *Clairvoyance and Occult Powers*, 99.

concentration of the healer's mind on the two preceding mental states. This was the secret behind psychic healing, whether in the form of the "royal touch," "laying on of hands," "magnetic healing," "spiritual healing," or dozens of other explanations. All were simply material aids designed to arouse the patient's confidence in the healer. This, of course, was the position Atkinson had taken in the classes he taught in 1902 when he opened his School of Mental Science, namely, that all the theories underlying the cures could be reduced to a single working principle. All psychic healing was really accomplished on the astral body before affecting the physical body.⁵

Three Initiates

The so-called Three Initiates, yet another pseudonym used by Atkinson, introduced readers to the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, a man known as "The Great" or "The Master of Masters," the father of occult wisdom and founder of astrology. A presumed contemporary of Abraham, Hermes reputedly recounted to him the most ancient mystic teachings of Egypt. After Hermes's death, the Egyptians deified him by making him Toth, one of their many gods, and added to his title "Trismegistus," meaning "thrice-great."⁶

When several of Hermes's followers decided to become priests and mixed theology with his philosophy, his teaching formalized into creeds. Exemplary of this had been the Christian Church which had applied a "blanket of theology" over its mystic teachings and persecuted any adherents to the ancient beliefs. This led Hermes's disciples to conceal their teachings as a way

⁵ Panchadasi, *Clairvoyance and Occult Powers*, 305-306.

⁶ Three Initiates, *The Kybalion: A Study of the Hermetic Philosophy of Ancient Egypt and Greece* (Chicago, IL: The Yogi Publication Society Masonic Temple, 1908), 17-18.

of preserving the integrity of their beliefs. Accordingly, their teachings were handed down by lip and ear, or otherwise written in veiled terms using alchemy and astrology to hide their true meaning. The Hermetists were the original mystic psychologists from whom grew modern astronomy, chemistry, and psychology.⁷

As a collection of maxims, axioms, and precepts, *The Kabalion* constituted the formative beliefs of true hermeticism, beginning with a listing of the seven Hermetic principles on which the entire philosophy rested. The first principle, that of *mentalism*, embodied the idea that “all is mind.” In other words, all which was known under matter, including the universe, life, and energy, or “spirit,” had their existence as a mental creation in the Mind of “The All.” The second principle, that of *correspondence*, referred to the material, mental, and spiritual planes of the universe that enabled the individual to reason from the known to the unknown. The third, *vibration*, embodied the idea that everything was in motion. Matter, energy, mind, and spirit existed at different rates of vibration; the higher the vibration the higher the scale—from gross forms of matter to planes of spiritual energy and force. The fourth principle of *polarity* embodied the idea that everything consisted of a like and unlike; everything had its opposite. The fifth principle of *rhythm* embodied motion, a pendulum-like movement between polarities—action and reaction—best represented in the rise and fall of nations, and the passage from life to death. Sometimes referred to as the Law of Compensation, the one balanced or counterbalanced the other. The sixth principle of *cause and effect* ruled out chance. Nothing escaped the law; there was an effect from every cause. Finally, the seventh principle, that of *gender*, implied that everything manifested itself as either a male or female element in

⁷ Three Initiates, *The Kybalion*, 20, 41-53.

the creative process. Gender existed on all planes, from the inorganic to the fields of energy or force. This did not imply lustful theories or practices but simply the concept of regeneration.⁸

Behind the outward appearances of these principles existed the Law of Substantial Reality. Though everything was becoming and changing, there was an underlying power, the unknowable, to which “The All” applied. Nothing existed outside it. Infinite in time and space, it was this Spirit that had created the universe whose physical, mental, and spiritual planes shaded into one. The creation of “The All” demonstrated the degrees or dimension of life in its various manifestations. The planes, in turn, subdivided into sub-planes, essentially degrees of matter, ethereal substance, and energy. It began with the solids, liquids, and gasses, and then into waves of energy such as light, heat, electricity, and attraction, before moving into the spiritual planes of masters, adepts, angels, archangels, and demi-gods who contributed to the process of evolution and cosmic process. Although poorly understood, the vibrations ultimately arrived at the Absolute Spirit.⁹

The Kybalion ended on a principle that came directly out of Swedenborg, namely the Law of Use, saying that he who violated it “suffers by reason of his conflict with natural forces.” Knowledge was intended for use. “The Law of Use is Universal, and he who violates it suffers by reason of his conflict with natural forces.”¹⁰

Theron Q. Dumont

⁸ Three Initiates, *The Kybalion*, 25-41.

⁹ Three Initiates, *The Kybalion*, 118-141.

¹⁰ Three Initiates, *The Kybalion*, 213.

Theron Q. Dumont, another of Atkinson's pseudonyms, was described as an instructor in the art and science of personal magnetism in Paris. His book, *Mental Therapeutics* (1916), served as a textbook for those looking to practice mental therapeutics. It provided not only a theory but detailed methods of approach, including the types of suggestions to give the patient, and the lessons learned when teaching self-healing through auto-suggestion. Interestingly, Dumont made frequent reference to the works of Atkinson as one of self-healing's more innovative teachers, a form of self-flattery probably learned from Sydney Flower. Directed to those intent on avoiding the making of a religion out of mental therapeutics, Dumont insisted that the goodness of being and the importance of living a good life did not require mixing its scientific methods with metaphysical, philosophical, or theological doctrines. Once having learned the essential laws and principles of biology, physiology, psychology, and mental therapeutics, it became clear that truth did not lie in the exclusive possession of any one school but could be found in varying degrees in all philosophies.¹¹

In this regard, mental healing was the most basic form of healing because it directed energy to human cells. Those who understood this, could practice all manner of mental healing without dependence on priests who brought their baggage of sacred relics, shrines, and holy places into the healing process. Similarly, one could reject the "Royal Touch" of the Middle Ages, the claims of Mesmer's "animal magnetism," and the so-called "divine healings" of individuals like Francis Schlatte and John Alexander Dowie.¹²

¹¹ Theron Q. Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1916), 7-10, 122-123..

¹² Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 38, 68-71.

Dumont identified four general classes of mental healing: (1) mental suggestion; (2) personal thought induction; (3) distant thought induction; and (4) a blending of two or more of the above methods. For example, direct thought induction invariably used mental suggestion with communication with a patient. Knowing these categories when treating the personal idiosyncrasies or peculiarities the patient allowed the practitioner to apply the principles of mental healing scientifically rather than showing some loyalty to a specific school or teacher. The successful practitioner understood the underlying methods and principles of mental healing.¹³

Mental suggestion did not imply or require hypnotic suggestion. It was only necessary to introduce into the subconscious mind of the patient a “firm, strong, positive idea of the physical condition sought to be induced.” This could be achieved by logical arguments, or by an “authoritative form of presentation.” Mental suggestion in mental healing conveyed to the mind of the patient an idea or picture of the physical condition that was sought. Once introduced into the subconscious, it passed to the corporeal mind and to the organ and cells where the physical condition was located.¹⁴

The words used in a *mental suggestion* had no “magical power” in themselves. Rather, they represented ideas and actions that were called into being by the mind, producing a mental picture of the desired physical condition intended. The suggestion conveyed an idea which became a symbol of what the patient desired. This was not something induced by reason but through the association of ideas acquired by words, manners, and tones. The experienced practitioner knew that suggestion “enters the back door of the mind, while reason and logic

¹³ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 80-87.

¹⁴ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 89-90.

enter the front door.” The former appealed to one’s desires and feelings while the latter relied on logical proof which often caused the suggestion to lose its effect. Logic did not sustain the suggestion; only the boldness and air of authority expressed by the practitioner. The quality or tone of the voice, the earnestness of the practitioner, the clarity of words, and the use of repetition were essential elements in the effectiveness of the mental suggestion.¹⁵

Patients who followed the teaching of specific schools or cults, had a success rate commensurate with the “truths” in their teachings. The scientific student, however, knew that the myriad of treatments was simply part of a general principle of healing common to all. However, for some patients, the truth was less effective than truths “dressed upon in fanciful garments, or disguised with fanciful trimmings and masks.” Certain types of religious patients required a special kind of mental atmosphere before they became susceptible to the healing suggestion. The same applied to the metaphysical, psychological, or what Dumont called the “New Thing” type of patient who expected some wonderful new power of mind like psychic, vital, and magnetic.¹⁶

Personal thought induction followed the same process except that the physical condition was not affected by words, spoken, written, or printed, but by the personal presence of the practitioner with the patient. Given that thought, much like magnetism, radiated from a thinker, the thought-vibrations of the practitioner encountered the mental Aura of the patient inducing the mental picture intended by the practitioner. The process was the same as mental suggestion; the only difference was the manner in which the concept reached the subconscious mind of the patient. Instead of using words written, spoken, or printed, they were radiated from

¹⁵ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 90-95.

¹⁶ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 105-110.

the practitioner's mind and carried as an idea or mental picture to the patient's sub-conscious. To the degree that these mental pictures formed a clear, strong, and positive response to the patient, they resulted in a curative response.¹⁷

Thought induction was "silent" and required the practitioner to avoid the awkwardness common to those unfamiliar with the process. Dumont encouraged practitioners to stand before a mirror and state the condition they intended to produce. By practicing in this manner, they could learn to show earnestness instead of a flippant or frivolous demeanor. The formation of the words in the mind were not enough. Besides thinking the actual words, they also had to make the right presentation. The sense of earnestness affected the force and power manifested.

The practitioner must take the mental position, and assume the mental attitude, that the physical body of the patient, in its entirety and in its parts, down even to the cells composing it is PLASTIC SUBSTANCE which may be molded by the thought influence and power of himself (the practitioner), just as the plastic clay is molded by the hands of the potter or the sculptor.¹⁸

Dumont also taught how to heal at a distance. Distant thought was like personal thought induction except that the mental powers which carried the thought vibrations extended long distances. To accomplish this, the practitioner created the mental idea or picture of the patient as if present in the room, and then used the mind to project his or her thought into space where the vibrations reached the subconscious mind of the patient and then passed into the corporeal

¹⁷ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 84-85.

¹⁸ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 135-142.

mind and cell-mind and organ-mind. Success depended on the earnestness on the part of the practitioner and expectancy on the part of the patient. “The thought of the practitioner, and his every word and suggestion, must be along the lines of the condition he wishes to produce in the patient. He must always see and think of the desired condition as already existing.”¹⁹

Dumont’s *Master Mind* (1918) did not involve metaphysical theories or hypotheses; nor did it concern the spirit or soul. Instead, it focused on how the mind could be controlled or managed. The master mind implied the conscious, deliberate, and voluntary building, and cultivating of mind to follow the conscious direction of the will. Although the ordinary mind was a creature of outside forces, the master mind acted out a course determined by a strong-willed, intelligent, and masterful self. Unfortunately, the great mass of humanity lived in conditions of mental slavery or partial freedom. They were no longer masters of their inner thoughts and feelings, but prey to those who directed and employed their minds for other purposes.²⁰ By contrast, the master mind was able to control the powers of concentration thus allowing him or her to choose exactly the types of thoughts and ideas were required for control of one’s self, emotions, and ideas. This meant mastery of the subconscious and the ability to regulate, direct, restrain, manage, encourage, and control that which was within the self. Essentially, it meant being the master over the mind. The will was the acclaimed master where exercise was the key to those who were the real master minds. In those moments when the master-mind exerted his or her will power, it came with “an overwhelming consciousness of the

¹⁹ Dumont, *Mental Therapeutics; Or, Just How to Heal Oneself and Others*, 85-86, 94-95, 164-65, 170.

²⁰ Theron O. Dumont, *The Master Mind; Or The Key to Mental Power, Development and Efficiency* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1918), 8-15.

existence of the self, or 'I,' at the center of their being." The "I" or "ego" became the thinker, knower, feeler, and actor. This was the sleeping giant in everyone.²¹

In his *Cult of Personality: Art and Science of Personal Magnetism* (1913), Dumont provided practical lessons on the art and science of personal magnetism. He defined personal magnetism as a "power, force, or influence, exerted by certain individuals, in varying degrees, by the means of which other persons are attracted to, controlled by, dominated, or influenced by the individual possessing the power." Personal magnetism both repelled and attracted. In other words, there was both a positive and a negative side to it. Even the weakest of individuals operated some degree of magnetism, even if it only drew negative forces. Nevertheless, everyone had the ability to change completely the character of their magnetism by following the instructions Dumont provided in the book. All that it required was determination, practice, and an "indomitable will."²²

Magus Incognito

In 1918, the Yogi Publication Society published *The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians* by Magus Incognito, yet another pseudonym attributed to Atkinson. The book, which bore a strong resemblance to *The Kybalion*, explained that true Rosicrucians had no formal organization; instead, they were individuals who accepted certain fundamental principles of the occult and were prominent in occult organizations and societies around the world. As legend explained, the order originated when a German nobleman, Christian Rosenkreutz, returned from India,

²¹ Dumont, *The Master Mind; Or, The Key to Mental Power, Development and Efficiency*, 19-29.

²² Theron Q. Dumont, *Culture of Personality: Art and Science of Personal Magnetism* (Chicago, IL: The Adams Publishing Co., 1913), 3-8.

Persia, and Arabia with a “Secret Doctrine” obtained from the Adepts. The doctrine consisted of esoteric teachings and occult lore drawn from the “Inner Teachings” of the highest Oriental Brotherhood. Much of these teachings involved mental and spiritual alchemy which were jealously guarded and transmitted from master to student over many centuries. Traces of it were believed to be found in the teachings of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, and in Hebrew esoteric teachings. All, including the Egyptian esoteric teachings, traced back to the legends of the lost Atlantis.²³

According to popular thinking, the Rosicrucians were devoted to alchemy and the so-called transformation of the elements into precious metals. Actually, they used the language of alchemy to conceal their esoteric teachings from both the authorities and the public eye. Concealed within the nonsense of alchemy were hidden passages of the “grandest imaginable realms of enlightenment.” The references to sulfur, mercury, and other chemical elements directed the reader to specific teachings of the secret doctrines.²⁴

Magus Incognito’s accounting of the Rosicrucians was totally consistent with Atkinson earlier *Reincarnation and the Law of Karma* (1908). Various called metempsychosis, rebirth, and transmigration of the soul, its history went back thousands of years and had become a vital part of the teachings of the Egyptians, Druids, Chaldeans, Hindus and other Eastern peoples. Karma, the law of cause and effect, applied to the life of the soul. It meant that each soul reaped the results of its own sowing. Each soul in its spiritual childhood learned by experience. One’s future in the next incarnation depended on his or her state of goodness in the present, a

²³ Magus Incognito, *The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians: Illustrated with the Secret Rosicrucian Symbols* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1918), 8-19.

²⁴ Magus Incognito, *The Secret Doctrine of the Rosicrucians*. 13-14.

concept that held the public on an ethical road conducive to the public weal. Found in almost every philosophy and religion, its fullest expression occurred in India where became an accepted doctrine of the Hindu people. Hindu books were filled with its references, including the Laws of Manu, the Upanishads, and Vedas. The same applied to the schools of Northern and Southern Buddhism that had attracted so many Americans during the World's Fair in Chicago. It even entered the teachings of Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott who claimed the doctrine had been handed down from the Adepts living in the far reaches of Tibet.²⁵

* * *

Rather capitalize on his celebrity status as a popular New Thought writer, Atkinson created multiple pseudonyms to conceal his identity. The books attributed to him force one to question whether he was contributing anything really new and different in these additional books, whether he was trying to explain the contributions of Oriental philosophy using a different set of epistemological tools, or whether he was simply restating the information under different guises for the purpose of selling more books. Like homeopathy whose potentized medicines concealed the drug in its highly attenuated solutions to the point where a single molecule was difficult to find, so Atkinson's identity remained hidden in a cast of characters he created to introduce his views. Despite their common DNA, his identity remained only a supposition that to the present day seems to defy explanation. Perhaps he found himself at the center of too much attention and chose to conceal his identity in the face of what were arguably issues of agoraphobia.

²⁵ William Walker Atkinson, *Reincarnation and the Law of Karma: A Study of Old-New World-Doctrine of Rebirth and Spiritual Cause and Effect* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1908), 68, 95-97, 223-230.

For a man who sought privacy above all else by working at home, or out of state, pseudonyms gave him the added opportunity to conceal from the public his true identity. Otherwise, the reasoning becomes murky. Did he do it to sell more books? Did he do it to give additional perspective to that which he had already written about? Did he do it to provide both a spiritual and a scientific explanation to his audience? Or was it a little of each? Regardless of the explanation(s), Atkinson seemed willing and able to satisfy his many different types of readers. A man of Janus-like faces and interests, he proved equal to the task of educating generations of curious readers to an understanding of some of western society's most confounding issues regarding the body, mind, spirit, and the healing paradigm.

Chapter 7

Making Sense

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the commodification of making wage earners optimistic concerning their prospects of becoming members of the middle class became the career choice of several generations of writers whose articles and books produced a genre of literature that celebrated a standard of cheerfulness and competitiveness in the marketplace. With a growing library of self-help and personal improvement books spanning the disciplines of education, health, psychology, stress management, psychotherapy, sports, and business, to name just a few, the objective, whether expressed directly or implied, sought the fulfillment of promises associated with the myths surrounding the American dream as the land of opportunity. To achieve this objective, William Walker Atkinson distinguished himself from his peers by drawing on a hermeneutic tradition drawn from ancient traditions, mysteries, and obscure writings. This even included the mysterious Adepts whose ideas had come down through the centuries as secret formulae to be revealed at various stages in humanity's evolutionary ascent out of barbarism. Provided one started with the virtues of hard work, frugality, education, and self-examination, the exponents of America's self-help literature offered unlimited progress; and provided each did his best, nothing was impossible. Along with these caveats came a renewed sense of identity, economic status, an ethic of self-reliance, a more productive social environment, and the enjoyment of greater independence—personally and collectively. Over time, this disposition became embedded in the American character. From

Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Smiles, to Horatio Alger, Orison Swett Marden, and William Walker Atkinson, the American character was primed for earning happiness and success. How else can one explain Ralph Waldo Trine's *Cheerfulness as a Life Power* (1899)? By the turn of the century, what began as a home ethic, transformed into a business and corporate ethic, turning America's middle class, including those aspiring entry, with finding a purpose and meaning in the writings of Atkinson and his fellow New Thinkers. Books like Wilber Nesbit's *A little Book of Smiles and Joy and Sunshine* (1911), George Van Ness Dearborn's *The Influence of Joy* (1920), Robert Haven Schauffler's *Enjoy Living* (1939), Lionel Tiger's *Optimism* (1979), and Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric's *I'm So Happy* (1990) were carried on the heels of this mystique. The early optimism expressed by Europeans like Montaigne, Descartes, Leibniz, and Pope which they attributed to rational thought, now gave way to generations of writers bent on celebrating intuitive knowledge and its gifts.¹

¹ Merce Mur Effing, "The Origins and Development of Self-Help Literature in the United States: The Concept of Success and Happiness, an Overview," *Atlantis*, 31 (2009), 125-41.

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