

SPIRITED VISIONS

A STUDY OF SPIRITUALISM IN NEW ZEALAND SETTLER
SOCIETY, 1870-90

by

Shaun D. Broadley

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the growth, character and significance of spiritualism in New Zealand settler society in the 1870s and 1880s. Spiritualism was a religious cult which popularised mediumship and the seance in Victorian society and gained publicity through manifestations alleged to emanate from the spirits of the dead. Though largely overlooked by historians in New Zealand, the topic merits serious attention. Spiritualism was not a social oddity or merely an epiphenomenon of wider social forces. It was a significant religious movement in its own right. Spiritualism shaped many areas of colonial culture and was part of a much larger body of eclectic spirituality among settlers. Settler society was an egalitarian environment favourable to the growth of novel religious movements and heterodox philosophies. This study reveals that heterodox religious belief and religious enquiry were common in settler society, and that few cultural sites were devoid of spiritual content and religious significance. New Zealand was far from wholly Christian, but it was not irreligious. Spiritualism provides a clear illustration of this. Though hardcore adherents were few, its prevalence cannot be measured in converts. It was a heterogeneous movement that attracted the interest of thousands and influenced a much wider circle of settlers. Spiritualist topics infiltrated such varied domains as politics, science, Christianity, medicine, literature, the women's movement, stage entertainment and popular culture in general. Spiritualism provoked numerous public debates and had a measurable impact on the character and development of settler society. It provided a seed-bed for the growth of novel socio-religious movements and fuelled liberal reform in the wider community. Spiritualists and their sympathisers were commonly involved in the political radicalism that preceded liberal social reform in the 1890s, and some achieved political power and public acclaim. More generally, spiritualism resonated with the dominant liberal aspirations of Pakeha settlers: it reflected and reinforced the vision of New Zealand as an embryonic utopia where progressive social experimentation would eliminate Old World ills and unleash the latent potential of humanity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACLLA	Aurelia Cooperative Land and Labour Association
AJHR	<i>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</i>
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
DFA	Dunedin Freethought Association
DNZB	<i>Dictionary of New Zealand Biography</i>
NZPD	<i>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</i>
ODT	<i>Otago Daily Times</i>
SIS	Society for Investigating Spiritualism
TPNZI	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute</i>
VAPS	Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists
WAS	Wellington Association of Spiritualists

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of 'modern spiritualism' in New Zealand settler society in the 1870s and 1880s. Spiritualism was a religious movement that began in America in 1848 and arrived in England in the early-1850s. It subsequently diffused throughout the British Empire, emerging in New Zealand in the late-1860s. Though initially taking the form of 'table-turning' and 'spirit-rapping' crazes, spiritualism later became a coherent religious movement centred on three core beliefs:

- 1) each human spirit is immortal and after death all spirits progress throughout eternity
- 2) both good and evil spirits can return to Earth and communicate with humans, and are capable of instigating a range of spiritualist phenomena
- 3) spiritual progress depends on taking personal responsibility for one's actions.¹

Spiritualism claimed to offer people new concepts and techniques to cope with change and re-anchor themselves during a time of social upheaval. It was also a symptom of the widespread religious questioning in Victorian society. Amid a perceived rise in materialism and scepticism, spiritualism promised believers demonstrable scientific proof of personal immortality and a spiritual universe. This proof consisted largely of messages and manifestations which, claimed spiritualists, emanated from spirits of deceased human beings in the seance room through the agency of human mediums. Spiritualism offered adherents an 'advanced' form of religious belief and the opportunity to commune with their departed friends and relatives. The spirits tendered evidence and assurances, which some could no longer find in orthodox Christianity, that a happier state of existence awaited beyond the grave.

In terms of publicity, controversy and diffuse belief, spiritualism was by far the most conspicuous Pakeha (white settler) religious cult in New Zealand settler society.² The only other cult of comparable size and visibility in the period was Theosophy, but this emerged in the late-1880s, at least twenty years later than spiritualism, and never achieved anywhere near the same level of popularity and publicity. Despite the prominence of

¹This definition is slightly altered and paraphrased for the sake of clarity from that enunciated in 1887 by William McLean, the president of the Wellington Association of Spiritualists. William McLean, *Spiritualism Vindicated and Clerical Slanders Refuted*, Wellington 1887, p.16.

²Drawing from Michael Hill, a cult is defined as "a religious movement that, unlike sects which maintain strict boundaries and tend to retreat from society, have "fluid boundaries, do not seek to monopolise their members' commitment, and instead of rejecting or avoiding the surrounding society they offer their clients esoteric *techniques* for the more successful attainment of goals that are widely valued socially". Michael Hill, "Religion", in Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Ian Shirley (eds), *New Zealand: Sociological Perspectives*, Palmerston North 1982, pp.185-6.

spiritualism, Robert S. Ellwood's *Islands of the Dawn* is the only scholarly work which discusses the topic in any depth, and it offers a rather cursory examination. Historians such as Peter Lineham and John Stenhouse mention the subject but offer few details.³ Some sociologists of religion analyse the relationship between New Zealand's colonial environment and a comparatively high level of cult adherence in the late twentieth century. They argue that settler society was relatively receptive to novel cult and sect movements, which helps explain New Zealand's current level of cult activity.⁴ Unfortunately, such work still skirts a thorough analysis of spiritualism in New Zealand. By contrast, Australian spiritualism has been explored by historians such as Al Gabay, F.B. Smith and Lurline Stuart.⁵ This thesis provides more detailed information about the New Zealand spiritualist community in the 1870s and '80s than that provided by Ellwood, thereby casting light on a group largely overlooked by historians. It delineates their interests, activities and endeavours, and reveals the many sites in colonial culture infused with spiritualism. In general, this study supports Ellwood's observation that beliefs such as spiritualism "had high visibility and relative success" in New Zealand and that the colony was "an apt receptacle for new and unconventional spiritual movements".⁶

Spiritualism was not an anomalous oddity of settler society, nor a wholly 'alternative' subculture, as Ellwood implies in his study of "alternative spirituality". Neither was it a product merely of wider social forces, as scholars commonly assume. Spiritualism was a significant religious movement in its own right that helped shape the character and direction of settler society in small but significant ways. Spiritualism also echoed and reinforced the prevailing beliefs and aspirations of settlers. In particular, it embraced the liberalism and experimentalism characteristic of society, a topic on which this study focuses. Like many other settlers, spiritualists were influenced by the notion that New Zealand offered a fresh opportunity to begin anew, to revitalise civilisation and create an advanced society devoid of Old World evils. Spiritualism was part of a wider liberal and experimental tradition that found expression in Edward Gibbon Wakefield's systematic colonisation, Julius Vogel's public works and immigration policies of the 1870s and the

³Robert S. Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: the Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand*, Honolulu 1993; P.J. Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.19, no.1, 1985, pp.61-81; Peter J. Lineham, "Christian Reaction to Freethought and Rationalism in New Zealand", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.15, no.2, 1988, pp.236-50; John Stenhouse, "Science Versus Religion in Nineteenth Century New Zealand: Robert Stout and Social Darwinism", *Pacifica*, no.2, 1989, pp.61-86; John Stenhouse, "The Rev. Dr James Copland and the Mind of New Zealand 'Fundamentalism'", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.17, no.4, Dec. 1993, pp.475-97.

⁴Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularisation, Revival and Cult Formation*, Berkeley 1985, pp.482-93; Roy Wallis, "Figuring Out Cult Receptivity", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.25, no.4, pp.494-503; Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, ch.7.

⁵Al Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s: Experience and Meanings", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.13, 1984, pp.192-212; Al Gabay, *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*, Cambridge 1992; Francis Barrymore Smith, "Religion and Freethought in Melbourne, 1870 to 1890", M.A. thesis, University of Melbourne 1960; F.B. Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.3, no.3, 1965, pp.246-60; Lurline Stuart, *James Smith: the Making of Colonial Culture*, Sydney 1989.

⁶Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.1-2.

Liberal reforms of the 1890s. It provides evidence of the "ongoing appeal" of Wakefield's vision of New Zealand as an experiment in civilisation.⁷ Spiritualism played a small but noteworthy role in the perpetuation of this vision. Though not particularly influential as a distinct reform movement, spiritualism fuelled liberalism and experimentalism among individuals involved in other radical and heterodox movements. Spiritualists introduced novel and subversive views into the arena of political and philosophical debate. Though often ridiculed, they helped drag public opinion further toward experimentalism and progressive optimism, thereby giving impetus to the liberal character of nineteenth-century New Zealand.

It is important to define exactly what is meant by 'liberalism' and 'experimentalism' in order to understand exactly what spiritualists encapsulated and perpetuated. In this thesis, the term 'liberalism' refers to a nexus of liberal sentiments that were popular in settler society, namely tolerance, egalitarianism, democracy, freedom of thought, mutualism and co-operation, coupled with a strong sense of individual rights and liberties.⁸ These ideas were interwoven with a variety of liberal political movements in the 1880s and underpinned the wide-ranging social reforms of the Liberal government in the 1890s. They also permeated colonial religion and medicine, shaping relationships between seemingly divergent and competing groups of settlers. 'Experimentalism' simply designates a willingness to experiment with novel ideas, strategies and philosophies for individual and social improvement. It is argued here that spiritualism reflected and reinforced the liberalism and experimentalism which pervaded Pakeha settler society. Spiritualism was thus part of nation-building beliefs and processes in nineteenth-century New Zealand.

Spiritualism also offers a valuable window into the character of settler society. In spiritualism the historian can sample many of the most important social and religious issues of the day: debates over science and religion, spirit and matter, and reformist discourse on the causes and cures of human suffering. Spiritualist discussions on such topics often led to debates over cultural and intellectual authority. These debates reveal that public authority in science, religion and politics in New Zealand during the 1870s and '80s was unsettled. The merits and demerits of spiritualism and its philosophy (and many other subjects) were discussed, debated and tested by a wide range of settlers, who were unafraid to reach their own conclusions about them. Yet the dominant feature of these debates and discussions was compromise and co-operation. Settlers of all shades were anxious to prevent social and religious divisions from obstructing the progress and unity of society. A fluid and egalitarian order gave scope for spiritualism to take root and command attention.

Perhaps the most significant insight spiritualism offers the historian is a window into heterodox spirituality in colonial culture. F.M. Turner observes that a significant

⁷Erik Olssen, "Mr Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice", *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.31, no.2, Oct. 1997, p.216.

⁸This definition of liberalism is drawn largely from Erik Olssen, *Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s-1920s*, Auckland 1995, pp.158-65.

number of Victorian intellectuals in England were caught between a "narrow and often intellectually shallow" scientific naturalism and the "bondage" of orthodox Christian doctrines. They "came to dwell between the science that beckoned them and the religion they had forsaken", engaging in spiritualism, psychical research, idealism and metaphysical speculation. Though Turner initially assumed such persons were confused and atypical, he later recognised that this spiritual halfway house between orthodox Christianity and godless scientific naturalism was populated by a far greater number of thinkers in England and abroad.⁹ The interest in spiritualism and related ideas exhibited by many New Zealand intellectuals affirms this assessment. This study reveals that various forms of religious seeking and spirituality permeated society and flourished outside Christianity, among intellectuals and laymen alike. Though never wholly Christian, settler society remained largely religious in predisposition, and this religiosity influenced the direction and character of society in significant ways.

A few methodological issues must be clarified at this point. New Zealand historians have not, by and large, paid much attention to religion. This study argues that spiritual issues are often vitally important to understand fully the motives and activities of individuals and the nature of settler society. This point gives rise to an important issue of historical methodology. Immersed in specialised areas of research interest, historians all too easily forget (or fail to acknowledge) that lives were rarely experienced in compartmentalised socio-economic, gendered, ethnic or religious spheres. As Turner puts it, "the achievement of a more nearly complete and adequate understanding of the past must always involve a catholic approach to human experience and to the various tools that may open that experience to the historian."¹⁰ This study attempts to emulate such a catholic approach. Outside a few simple tenets, spiritualism incorporated a wide range of philosophical views and practices, and was a free-ranging movement that informed a variety of sites in colonial culture. This study, therefore, seeks to avoid focussing on one cultural sphere, historiographical debate or category of analysis, and instead echoes the eclectic nature of the spiritualist movement itself by examining the many dimensions of colonial culture in which spiritualism played a role.

The term 'spiritualist' as used in this thesis refers to those who identified with the spiritualist movement and embraced the most universally accepted beliefs promulgated by leading propagandists (as noted earlier). The term 'spiritualist phenomena' also requires explanation. As in the nineteenth century, in this thesis it refers to the wide range of phenomena that accompanied the spiritualist movement and took place largely, though far from exclusively in the seance room through human mediums. It was also common for spiritualists to claim that similar manifestations in other epochs and cultures were

⁹Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: the Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England*, London 1974, pp.1,35; Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life*, Cambridge 1993, p.10.

¹⁰Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, p.36.

'spiritualist phenomena'. The phenomena included clairvoyance, trance mediumship, healing, strange knocks and raps, the movement of objects by psychic or spiritual forces and the appearance of luminous forms. An appendix is provided which summarises, in the words of Alfred Russel Wallace, the main categories of phenomena. Wallace, a prominent naturalist and social reformer, was the most eminent British scientist to give his full support to spiritualism. Although the actual nature and causes of spiritualist phenomena was an important issue, this thesis focuses on historical themes and trends rather than dwelling on the origin of paranormal manifestations.

Several other terms require analysis and definition. The term 'freethought' was an umbrella term which embraced a wide variety of philosophical and religious positions in the 1870s and '80s. It was often used by evangelical Christians to disparage any radical anti-orthodox group. A 'freethinker' usually adhered to three principles: first, a belief in freedom of thought; second, the supremacy of science and reason; and, third, the notion that orthodox Christianity was an outdated system which militated against the first two principles. In one sense, spiritualism was a category of freethought since many spiritualists could (and did) claim to be freethinkers. Despite fuzzy boundaries and large areas of overlap, they were often distinguishable groups and are treated as such in this thesis.

The term 'feminism' is commonly used by scholars to refer to women's issues and women's concerns in the nineteenth century, even though this phrase was not in currency for most of the century and did not arrive in Britain until 1895.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is a useful term to apply to women's issues in Victorian society, as long as care is taken not to inject it with late twentieth-century conceptions. The terms 'feminism' and 'feminist' as used in this study are defined broadly to refer to any sentiment, activity or person that fused a deep concern with women's issues with a desire for social change in favour of women.

This study focusses on Pakeha settler society. This is because spiritualism was almost exclusively a Pakeha cult which drew from specific European traditions and was informed by European social and religious concerns. Furthermore, unlike European spiritualism, spiritualistic cults among Maori have already been examined by a number of scholars, most conspicuously by Bronwyn Elsmore.¹² However, the following discussion does note several important parallels between European and indigenous movements, and discusses a small but significant amount of interaction between Pakeha spiritualists and Maori.

The 1870s and '80s form the central focus of study and are not wholly arbitrary parameters. Research begins at the time of the first widespread outbreaks of spiritualist activity in New Zealand in the late-1860s and early-1870s, and concludes when spiritualism declined in publicity and novelty in the late-1880s. Though this decline did not correspond to a decrease in hardcore belief, the 1890s are widely recognised by historians of

¹¹Lucy Bland, "The Married Woman, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s", in Jane Rendall, (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Oxford 1987, p.142.

¹²Bronwyn Elsmore, *Mana From Heaven: a Century of Maori Prophets in New Zealand*, Tauranga 1989.

spiritualism as a period of reassessment and realignment. As Ellwood writes: "The 1890s were a time of sifting in Spiritualism around the world, including New Zealand, when circles increasingly either became frankly denominational and for real believers or cast their lot with scientific work of the sort associated with the new [British] Society for Psychological Research."¹³ Spiritualism did not experience another comparable resurgence in popularity and publicity until World War One, when stress and bereavement fertilised spiritualist soil and propagandists such as Horace Leaf and Arthur Conan Doyle expounded the faith in the 1920s during nationwide tours. Though my research occasionally extends beyond the 1880s, movements and events relevant to spiritualism which mushroomed beyond this decade remain largely outside the domain of this study.

The province of Otago is analysed in more depth than other parts of the country. There are several reasons for this. Dunedin emerged from the gold-rushes of the 1860s as the largest and most vibrant city in the country. It was a centre of vigorous intellectual and religious activity and, from 1869, the centre of spiritualism in New Zealand. The Dunedin spiritualist community was in many respects the hub of New Zealand spiritualism, fuelling activity and interest in other areas and fostering links between spiritualists throughout Australasia. The most animated discussions and prolonged debates on spiritualism took place there, involving eminent spiritualists from Europe, America and Australia.

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter one, the largest chapter, provides background to the advent of spiritualism in New Zealand and discusses its growth and character in the 1870s and '80s. It outlines prevailing attitudes toward spiritualism in the period. Chapter two examines the general nature of settler society and the composition of the spiritualist community to illustrate that New Zealand's colonial environment contained spaces and opportunities for spiritualist beliefs to prosper. The popular view among scholars that movements such as spiritualism are the result of social disruption and anomie is criticised as being simplistic.

The third chapter dwells on conflict and co-operation between various religious denominations. An egalitarian climate of liberalism, tolerance and co-operation prevailed in New Zealand and was manifest in relatively amicable relations between spiritualists and other religious groups. This chapter pays particular attention to a striking degree of overlap between freethinkers, spiritualists and evangelicals. Though spiritualism proved troublesome for both freethought and Christianity and provoked heated religious debates, a liberal spirit often prevailed among the disputants. Relations with freethinkers are illustrated through a case study of the most successful - or least unsuccessful - freethought organisation in New Zealand in the 1880s, the Dunedin Freethought Association.

Chapter four analyses spiritualist healing. Spiritualist modes of healing were popular among settlers and have been overlooked by historians when assessing the colonial

¹³Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.45.

medical market.¹⁴ They were one of many heterodox approaches to health and healing which thrived in an unregulated and permissive colonial environment. Spiritualist healers provoked controversy and occasionally became embroiled in acrimonious confrontations with rival doctors. However, the unstructured and liberal nature of settler society encouraged experimentation with their novel palliatives. Spiritualist healers overcame prejudice and often received assistance and co-operation from registered medical doctors and clergymen.

The two succeeding chapters dwell on the presence of spiritualism in social reform movements and its role in fanning liberal sentiment. Chapter five reveals that spiritualist philosophy formed a utopian religious strand within a wider body of liberal thought. It discusses spiritualists who were active in social and political reform movements during the long depression of 1879-96, including spiritualist involvement in the Lyceum movement, an alternative Sunday school system. The sixth chapter examines spiritualist views on women and their place in society. Given the centrality of women in spiritualist practice and philosophy, the topic merits close attention. Spiritualists actively promoted women's rights reform in New Zealand, and many of them were pioneering female orators. Imbued with the conviction that women were men's equal, and in spiritual affairs their superior, this small group of female reformers lobbied for the uplift of women in society alongside evangelicals and political liberals. These groups all held in common the view that women were a regenerative and purifying force capable of transforming society for good.

The final chapter analyses scientific investigations into spiritualism. Spiritualists argued that science authenticated spiritualism and held that every individual could, and should, experiment for themselves and come to their own conclusions. Such assertions induced thousands of settlers to investigate the topic personally. Investigations took place in private seances, spiritualist societies and on the public platform where itinerant popular science lecturers, mediums and magicians presented arguments, experiments, displays and exhibitions. Such activities were part of a wider 'science of mind' in society that shaped many settlers' understandings of the spiritual and psychic order. Spiritualist researches reflected a liberal-democratic 'do-it-yourself experimentalism' common in colonial society. Confident and independent, settlers heeded the call of the spirits to seek out their own truths, shape their own world-view and decide for themselves what strategies were appropriate to life in the New World.

¹⁴I am referring primarily to the work of Belgrave: Michael Peter Belgrave, "Medicine and the Rise of Health Professions in New Zealand, 1860-1939", in Linda Bryder (ed.), *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand*, Wellington 1991, pp.7-24; Michael Peter Belgrave, "'Medical Men' and 'Lady Doctors': the Making of a New Zealand Profession 1867-1941", Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University 1985.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM NEW YORK TO NEW ZEALAND

This chapter outlines the birth of spiritualism in New York State, its path to New Zealand and its growth throughout the 1870s and '80s. Particular attention is paid to the Australasian context and the importance of the goldrushes in fuelling interest in spiritualism in the region. This is followed by an analysis of the strength and distribution of spiritualists throughout New Zealand. The latter half of the chapter examines general attitudes toward spiritualism in wider society, how these attitudes affected spiritualism and how they evolved. It concludes with a brief summary of the general character of spiritualism by the 1890s. However, the main precursors and intellectual antecedents to spiritualism are discussed first in order to place spiritualist belief in a wider philosophical context.

INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS ROOTS

The spiritualist movement was a patchwork of ideas, sentiments and practices derived primarily from other philosophical streams and social movements. An important aspect of spiritualism was its utopian tendencies. Adherents believed in the innate goodness of human nature and had faith in the ability of humanity to create a perfect society. Such optimistic sentiment underpinned much of their philosophy and activity. More specifically, spiritualism was a product of the scientific utopianism that pervaded the nineteenth century. Spiritualism was propagated by believers as a thoroughly scientific religious belief that was destined to form an advanced and rational faith of the future.

Spiritualists commonly drew, directly and indirectly, from thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte, a fact which illustrates the centrality of science, evolution, natural law and progress in spiritualist thought. Spencer's world-view was characterised by inexorable evolutionary progress. He believed that the laws which governed the natural world were inherently benevolent and he had faith in the ability of science and reason to discern and master these laws. The positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte was similarly optimistic and utopian in tendency. Like spiritualists, Comte believed that the world was evolving, through science, toward a advanced future and that Christianity was both unscientific and anachronistic. These influences were clear in a pamphlet written by an "impressional medium" in 1872. Citing a list of philosophical divines from Socrates and

Plato to Newton, Bacon, Comte and Darwin, the medium described how "Mind succeeds mind in the kingdom of thought, ever onward rolls the wave of human progress, evolving first, and still evolving, higher planes of thought and action; we cannot fathom the depth of the beginning, nor yet see the mountain height that crowns the end." The medium explained further that "Our God is the supreme and infinite life of universal nature, our knowledge of him is derived from fixed and universal laws, demonstrated as humanity advances; our religion, our morals and our social relations must be alike based on science; and our faith must be the result of our real knowledge."¹

Closely related to utopianism was the tradition of millennialism, a belief in the imminent arrival of a new era of prosperity and happiness. Spiritualism inherited much of its millennial flavour from Millerism and evangelical perfectionism in 1830s and '40s America. Many spiritualists believed that the sudden emergence and rise of spiritualism from 1848 represented the dawning of a new age of truth and understanding and heralded the arrival of glorious utopian existence. Millennialism found graphic expression among spiritualists in Australasia in the person of James Smith. Smith was a spiritualist and prominent intellectual from Melbourne who visited Dunedin in April 1872. Under spirit guidance, later that year he announced the imminent destruction of the material world in a wave of magnetic fire in preparation for the advent of a higher spiritual life for the righteous.² Millennial sentiment was also prevalent among spiritualist communitarians such as the members of the Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association. Originating in Thames in 1872, the founders of the ACLLA believed they had found the key to the millennium. Their prospectus made this explicit:

We see with pity the actions of the ignorant and misguided Communists of France, the almost futile attempts of the International Society of Europe; the throes and struggles of the long pent up in ignorance and down-trodden agricultural laborers in England; and the world-wide groans of oppressed and poverty-stricken humanity in all nations - and we say surely the hour has come for man's redemption. ... BEHOLD we have found the secret of the long hoped for Millennium.

Like many Christians, the Aurelians had faith in human progress and were imbued with the idea of building a 'Kingdom of Heaven' on earth. They aimed to build a rational and scientific society in the image of Heaven: it would be "a social temple in which He shall ever dwell as our Supreme Ruler upon a rational throne."³ The majority of spiritualists embraced a more moderate form of millennialism. Most tended to subscribe to the wider

¹[R. F. Cunningham], *Crumbs [sic] of Thought from Harmonial Tablets, Served Up in the Author's Own Sauce and Dedicated to All Candidates For Aurelia*, Grahamstown [1872], pp.2-3,11.

²Stuart, *James Smith*, pp.140-9.

³Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association, *Prospectus of the Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association*, Grahamstown [1872], pp.5-6.

tradition of post-millennial Protestantism. They held that humanity and society was not floundering in a permanently fallen state, but were evolving toward a heavenly existence. The innate goodness and plasticity of human nature underpinned the development of society toward a more advanced level of civilisation.

The spiritualist movement was also an outgrowth of the general romanticism and sentimentality of Victorian society. Spiritualists were often imaginative and visionary in their aspirations and despite their rationalist bent, enjoyed contemplating the intangible and aesthetic qualities of life. Spiritualist philosophy was dominated by romantic visions of beautiful, harmonious worlds and blissful utopias. As one medium wrote concerning the afterlife: "Who on earth can imagine the bliss in that Elysian home, where the very atmosphere breathes of harmony and peace, in one continuous vibration of sweetest melody; and a thousand years are but as the whisperings of a seraph's voice that floats gently on the ear."⁴ Another medium relayed details of a futuristic world on Mars, a foregleam of Earth's next stage of spiritual development: Martians "are our superiors in height and strength. The different elements there all go to build up a more spiritual life. Everything there is accomplished by odic or will force, and manual labour is almost out of the question. The Martians are all more or less clairvoyant. They indulge freely and easily in spirit communion. Flying machines are common. Much study is given to all scientific subjects."⁵ Such visions represented a sentimental response to the suffering and hardship experienced by the bulk of humanity, a reaction away from the perceived brutality of hell and eternal punishment and a humanistic faith in science and progress. As later chapters will demonstrate, romantic sentimentality commonly found expression among spiritualists through mediumship, writing and a love of nature, as well as through involvement in socio-political movements.

Involvement in political and social causes touches on another important tradition, British reformism. Spiritualism was synonymous with social and political radicalism in the nineteenth century and was a magnet for a vast array of social reformers. Spiritualists believed they were part of a revolutionary movement that was destined to inaugurate momentous changes in the world's social, political and moral landscape. Drawing from British reformers such as Robert Owen and the Chartists, spiritualists supported a range of progressive causes such as universal suffrage, women's rights, secular education and religious freedom. Movements such as temperance, phrenology and health reform also received healthy support from believers who, like many evangelicals, were imbued with notions of social and bodily purity. Many held that the progress of liberal reform on earth was underwritten by evolutionary laws that governed life in other spheres of existence. Faith in progress and reform was heavily influenced by Robert Owen's belief in the

⁴[W.D. Meers], *The Ultimate of Man; or the Destiny of the Human Soul*, Christchurch 1889, p.32.

⁵Thomas Theodore King, *Occult Research, Reincarnation, Life on Other Planets, and Antiquity Unveiled by Spirit Intelligences*, Invercargill 1909, p.37.

potency of environmental circumstances. Humans, Owen believed, were not innately pre-determined in character, but could be shaped and moulded into harmonious moral agents if educated and raised in the right way.

More generally, spiritualism was influenced by those values and ethics which historians have identified as being quintessentially middle class. Most adherents strove for respectability and many were upwardly mobile. They stressed equality, self-sovereignty, self-reliance and autonomy, and deemed 'virtue', 'enlightenment' and 'doing' as the only legitimate basis for individual advancement in this world and the next. As one medium declared, "The progress of the human soul depends, both while here and hereafter, entirely on the beneficence of our actions, and our aspirations for truth and knowledge."⁶ Despite its other-worldly image, spiritualism was often used as a vehicle for worldly pursuits and worldly success, and such success was often equated with virtue, advance and spiritual progress.

The Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), and the Austrian doctor, Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), are widely acknowledged by historians as the two most formative influences on spiritualism. A mining engineer and scientist in his early years, Swedenborg later began "a scientific search for the soul" during which time he experienced remarkable visions of life in the spirit world.⁷ Many of these visions were recorded and published in his most famous work, *Heaven and Hell* (1758). A number of Swedenborg's ideas formed central tenets of spiritualist philosophy, particularly the notion that angels and spirits were once human beings, and that life in the spirit world was similar to that on earth. He taught that the spiritual universe consisted of a number of concentric spheres, each with its own density and inhabitants, and that those who find themselves in hell after death can work their way towards something higher.

In 1779 Mesmer published a *Dissertation on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism* which claimed to discover a continuous fluid that permeated the universe. Through harnessing its power he hoped to revolutionise and perfect the art of healing. Mesmer began by using magnets to cure but quickly discovered that the human body itself was able to store and channel animal magnetism. Of particular significance to spiritualist practice was Mesmer's curative *baquet*, a bath of magnetised water with protruding metal rods, around which patients sat holding hands, receiving magnetic infusions. Dim light, harmonious music and the 'laying on of hands' ('mesmeric passes') were an important feature of these seance-like healing sessions, in which patients were often induced into euphoric outbursts and trance states.⁸ Many of Mesmer's contemporaries and followers

⁶[Meers], *The Ultimate of Man*, p.23.

⁷Robert H. Kirven, *Angels in Action: What Swedenborg Saw and Heard*, West Chester 1994, pp.41-58.

⁸George Bloch, *Mesmerism: a Translation of the Original Scientific and Medical Writings of F.A. Mesmer*, Los Altos 1980, pp.67-70,135; Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing*, Yale University 1993, pp.4-14; Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, Cambridge 1992, pp.1-6.

developed concepts and techniques which became employed by spiritualists in later decades. An important figure was Armand Marie Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur. Puységur was a French magnetist who popularised the use of trance, clairvoyance and will-power in healing, and stressed the importance of empathy and 'rapport' between individuals during magnetic and mesmeric consultations.⁹ Such rapport became an important pre-requisite for spirit communion in the seance chamber. Mesmerism was also an avenue through which a wide range of occult, mystical and radical political traditions found expression and subsequently fed into spiritualism. In the decade prior to the French Revolution, mesmerism was an important vehicle for the popularisation of millennial world-views and occult philosophies, including spirit communion. The philosophy of the early French mesmerists was very similar to that of later spiritualists. The fusion of mesmerism with radical politics in pre-Revolutionary France was an important precursor to the involvement of mystics, occultists and spiritualists in radical reform movements in the nineteenth century.¹⁰

Though spiritualism drew from these philosophies and practices, on a personal level it thrived on basic human responses to stress and bereavement. At a time of religious upheaval, industrial revolution and general social instability, spiritualism offered a world-view attuned to the progressive sentiment of the day, one which claimed to make better sense of social change and suffering than traditional paradigms. Above all, spiritualism offered solace to the bereaved. James Hill, a Presbyterian minister at Thames (later of Auckland), captured this point well in a pamphlet published in 1873: "The success of the movement is easily understood. Who has not felt now and then a desire to speak with loved ones who are gone - to know their condition, and at last to be with them? To gratify that curiosity of the mind, to satisfy these longings of the heart, spiritualism comes with its revelations."¹¹

⁹Crabtree claims that Puységur developed a "primitive magnetic psychotherapy". Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, p.73 (see also pp.38-51,73-88); Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, pp.40-52.

¹⁰Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the end of the Enlightenment in France*, Cambridge Massachusetts 1968, *passim*; Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, pp.67-72,119-20.

¹¹James Hill, *Spiritualism*, Auckland 1873, p.19.

FROM ROCHESTER TO DUNEDIN

The birth of spiritualism is discussed in a large number of scholarly works and needs only brief analysis here. Though there is a risk of over-simplification when cursorily tracing the development of a social movement, only general trends and central events are outlined.¹²

The advent of spiritualism in America must be viewed in a broader context of religious and social upheaval extending back to the Jacksonian years. The optimistic individualism and expansionist tenor of that period, combined with Christian revivalism (particularly that of Charles G. Finney), transformed many parts of America into a cauldron of religious and social ferment. Utopianism and millennialism flourished in many forms. These influences were accentuated in the so-called 'burnt-over district' of western New York State, where Mormonism and Millerism arose alongside numerous other unconventional religious movements. This boisterous milieu was particularly evident in the town of Rochester, the birth-place of spiritualism. Rochester was a relatively new and quickly growing agricultural centre in the 1820s and '30s. It was influenced heavily by migration and industrial change, and experienced one of the most profound Christian revivals in America during the visit of Finney in 1830-1.¹³

The emergence of spiritualism was also related to the rise of Swedenborgianism and mesmerism in America. Swedenborgianism flourished from the 1830s, while mesmerism took hold as a popular movement in the early-1840s. Swedenborgianism introduced a spiritual dimension into mesmeric theories circulating at that time. The notion that magnetism might be a spiritual force or a vehicle through which the spiritual and material worlds could communicate gained credence. An influential text in this regard was George Bush's *Mesmer and Swedenborg; or, the Relation of the Developments of Mesmerism to the Doctrines and Disclosures of Swedenborg*, published in 1847.¹⁴

The text which influenced early spiritualism most heavily was a work by the Harmonialist philosopher, Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910). Davis was from a poor background in Poughkeepsie, New York, and after spending time as a trance healer and stage hypnotist he began dictating *The Principles of Nature* (1847). This work was delivered while entranced at age twenty and transcribed by a Universalist minister, William Fishbough. It "enjoyed tremendous popularity". As Crabtree writes: the "public was hungry for his message, which included a belief in reason and human progress, the notion that spirit is the cause of all things, and the conviction that after death everyone enters a

¹²Barrow expresses some concern over simplification in historical accounts. He suggests "we should talk less in terms of lines of descent than of points of blur and of tension between, say, Owenism, herbalism, Swedenborgianism, mesmerism, Methodism, Chartism and other isms." Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910*, London 1986, p.10.

¹³Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-37*, Toronto 1978, *passim*.

¹⁴Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, pp.221,229-30.

spiritual world that can be contacted even now while in a state of magnetic ecstasy."¹⁵ In Ellwood's view, Davis' work set "the sometimes naive but humane, forward-looking tone of the new faith" of spiritualism.¹⁶

The event which gave birth to spiritualism was a series of highly publicised manifestations at the house of a "poor but respectable" Methodist farmer, J.D. Fox, during 1848 in the town of Hydesville, New York State. Fox's wife, Margaret, and their two daughters later moved to nearby Rochester where, as Gauld explains, the "Fox girls were soon besieged by, on the one hand, numerous spirits desirous of communicating with those still on earth and, on the other, uncomfortably large numbers of persons anxious to receive messages or to witness wonders."¹⁷ The manifestations consisted of a series of knockings which were claimed by some investigators to be coded messages from deceased human spirits. The two Fox sisters, Catherine and Margaretta, later regarded by spiritualists as the founders of spiritualism, subsequently became professional mediums and were followed by numerous others.¹⁸ A spiritualist craze flooded New York State and swept America. Spiritualist phenomena diversified and fused with Harmonialist thought and numerous radical social causes. In 1853 it was claimed by an English observer that there were 30,000 mediums in the United States.¹⁹

Spiritualism became a popular fascination in Britain in 1853 when an outbreak of table-rapping on the Continent spread to England. However, prior to the 1870s British spiritualism was "a rather pale reflection of its American counterpart", due possibly to greater opposition from Christian orthodoxy and the British press.²⁰ Though it attracted the warm interest of figures such as Augustus de Morgan (the mathematician), Robert Chambers (the author of the proto-Darwinian *Vestiges of Creation*), and Robert Owen, who embraced spiritualism wholeheartedly, spiritualist belief did not markedly accelerate until 1859 and its growth was never as rapid as in America. In this year D.D. Home returned to England after an earlier visit in 1855. An American who became one of the most respected mediums of the century, Home was one of many who propelled spiritualism into the headlines with a remarkable array of mediumistic feats. Home gained an elite status through his willingness to work in light rather than darkness, and through

¹⁵Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, p.232; Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind, by and through Andrew Jackson Davis, the "Poughkeepsie" Seer and "Clairvoyant"*, New York 1847; R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, New York 1977, pp.10-11.

¹⁶Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.19-20.

¹⁷Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.3,8.

¹⁸An account of these events is provided by Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.3-31.

¹⁹This claim was made by an English investigator, Henry Spicer. Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, p.15.

²⁰Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.66,76-7.

performing feats such as levitation, the apparent elongation of his body, handling hot coals and the instigation of 'full-form materialisations'.²¹

In the 1860s and '70s spiritualism spread steadily, if not rapidly, among all classes in Britain. It was divided into two broad camps. Historians discern a division between spiritualists in the English provinces (particularly in the northern industrial towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire and in Northumberland, Durham, Derby, Nottingham and Glasgow) and spiritualists in London. The former were characterised by a strong anti-Christian sentiment and were mainly from the lower-middle class and upper working class. Barrow surmises that a history of interest in Swedenborgianism, mysticism and Owenism among these groups fostered its growth in many northern areas. This camp's most renowned propagandist was James Burns, the founder of the periodicals *Human Nature* and *Medium and Daybreak*. London spiritualists tended to be more pro-Christian and "dominated by middle-class professionals, intellectuals, and people of some means and social standing".²² Many of these more respectable believers were known as 'Christian Spiritualists' because they saw little incompatibility between orthodox doctrine and spiritualism. It was often declared that spiritualism was a *means* rather than an *end* for them.²³

Prior to 1870, spiritualism became a topic of interest in New Zealand through a number of avenues. The colonial press eagerly reported and reprinted news from Europe on the sensational events surrounding spiritualism. Publicity also grew through itinerant magicians and entertainers who traversed the colonies and claimed to expose and emulate the feats of mediums.²⁴ A steady stream of immigrants ensured that some settlers were arriving from Europe with first-hand knowledge of the topic. Some were firm believers. One such settler was John Marshman, Provincial Treasurer, immigration agent and Canterbury's first Commissioner for Crown Lands. While immigration officer and Agent-General in London, Marshman held seances at his house with notables such as Samuel Butler, Alfred R. Wallace and W.B. Carpenter.²⁵ The most important wave of immigrants to New Zealand (in terms of their significance for spiritualism) was the goldmining influx of the 1860s. Many spiritualists came to New Zealand from America and Australia

²¹Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914*, Cambridge 1985, pp.10-21; Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.66-87.

²²Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.67

²³Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, pp.10-11,98-101,133-9; Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp.67-103; Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.74-7.

²⁴For example, Professors Bushell and Belew toured the country in 1864, demonstrating electro-biology, conducting the "Davenport seance" and claiming to effect "a complete exposé of spirit rapping and table turning." In the same year Professor Jacobs, "the World-renowned Wizard, Ventriloquist, Improvisatore, and Anti-Spiritualist", toured advertising his "NECROMANTIC EXPERIMENTS, CABALISTIC WONDERS AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE ILLUSIONS." *Press*, 8 July 1864, p.1, 10 July 1864, p.2, 21 Nov. 1864, p.1, 9 Dec. 1865, p.1. Magicians are discussed further in chapter seven.

²⁵H.F. Von Haast, *The Life and Times of Sir Julius Von Haast*, Wellington 1948, pp.322,541-2; Peter Raby, *Samuel Butler: a Biography*, London 1991, p.107.

following the discovery of gold, and the goldrush generation was influential in creating a social climate conducive to spiritualism (a topic is discussed later in the chapter). However, British immigration to New Zealand peaked in the 1870s, and the rise of spiritualism in this decade was partly a consequence of this influx.

The first widespread outbreak of spiritualist activity in New Zealand occurred in Otago during 1868-9 and was centred on Dunedin. The subject became a topic of public debate following a letter to the *Otago Daily Times* in August 1868 from "Fideles", who urged covert spiritualists to "arise, and put foolish fear behind them, knowing that hardly any new science, however true or holy or good it may have been, has at first been favourably received."²⁶ This was also the year when William Denne Meers arrived in New Zealand. Meers was a London clothing manufacturer who believed he was under the spirit guidance of a Franciscan monk from the twelfth century. He agitated for the cause of spiritualism over the next four years in both Dunedin and Christchurch. By late 1869, public lectures and counter-lectures were delivered on the topic in Otago, including orations by the Presbyterian minister of West Taieri, Rev. W. Gillies, and spiritualist Robert Wilson, the publisher of the *Otago Daily Times*. Meers delivered a lecture in June 1870.²⁷ A columnist for the *Cromwell Argus* noted the prevalence of spiritualism in Otago at the time: "Spiritualism still maintains its supremacy over the minds of many in this Province" and "Strange stories pass from tongue to tongue concerning remarkable manifestations and mysterious revelations." Areas as far afield as Timaru also experienced spiritualist activity.²⁸ In January 1873, the editor of the *Otago Daily Times* was provoked to say that "Amongst the social movements of the age, the spread of Spiritualism is certainly the most conspicuous, if not the most important."²⁹

The spark that fuelled widespread interest in Otago, as it did in Melbourne,³⁰ was the spiritualist investigations of the London Dialectical Society. Composed largely of professional men, this organisation aimed to give unpopular and contentious subjects a hearing. In January 1869, the Society appointed a special committee "to investigate the Phenomena alleged to be Spiritual Manifestations, and to report thereon."³¹ Six sub-

²⁶*ODT*, 22 Aug. 1868, p.3.

²⁷*Otago Witness*, 14 Aug. 1869, p.16, 9 Oct. 1869, p.10; *Echo*, 11 June 1870, p.2. Meers (1826?-1909) was based in Christchurch, though he spent time in Dunedin, London and Nelson. When in London, he met Emma Hardinge Britten and allegedly foretold her mission to New Zealand. According to an obituary in the *Christchurch Press*, Meers was "much respected" and "took a very active interest in all matters affecting the young city, and was intimately associated with many philanthropic enterprises." [Meers], *The Ultimate of Man*, pp.1-5; *Press*, 22 Oct. 1909, p.5; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 Sep. 1879, p.4; *Echo*, 2 Mar 1872, pp.2-3. With respect to Meers' alleged twelfth century spirit guide, it should be noted that the Franciscan friars were founded in the thirteenth century.

²⁸*Cromwell Argus*, 9 Mar. 1870, p.5; *Otago Witness*, 30 July 1870, p.15; *Timaru Herald*, 13 July 1870, p.2.

²⁹*ODT*, 30 Jan. 1873, p.2.

³⁰Gabay, *Alfred Deakin*, p.7.

³¹Committee of the London Dialectical Society, *Report on Spiritualism, of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society, together with the Evidence, Oral and Written, and a Selection from the Correspondence*, London 1873, p.iv.

committees were set up, each forming their own circles and later submitting reports of their findings. They also received evidence from leading English spiritualists and mediums. A report of their findings was first published in 1871 and was favourably inclined toward spiritualism. It claimed to confirm the existence of a range of seance phenomena and attributed intelligence to its manifestations, thereby suggesting that spirits might be involved.³² Both the preliminary findings and published report were widely publicised and discussed in Europe and Australasia.³³

Another event which fuelled interest in New Zealand at this time was an article on spiritualism in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* in 1871 by the editor, William Crookes. Crookes was an eminent British physicist and chemist who later became president of the Royal Society. The article detailed experiments with D.D. Home and concluded that there existed a "psychic force" which could move objects from a distance. His published report in 1874 "made a powerful impression on intellectuals of his day and contributed greatly to the climate that led to the formation of the Society for Psychical Research." Crookes more than any other person made the scientific establishment stand up and take notice of spiritualist phenomena.³⁴ His experiments were reprinted and publicised in New Zealand and instigated considerable discussion within the New Zealand Institute, the country's leading scientific organisation.³⁵

The Australasian goldrushes and the presence of spiritualism in Melbourne and Victorian goldmining districts were important factors in the rise of spiritualism in New Zealand. These influences are discussed below.

THE GOLD-RUSHES AND THE 'VICTORIAN INIQUITY'

Following the discovery of gold at Gabriel's Gully in 1861, Otago was swamped by shiploads of miners, entrepreneurs and adventurers seeking their fortune. In the 1870s, discoveries at Thames and on the West Coast fuelled further immigration. Many of these immigrants had worked in America in the 1850s and '60s when spiritualism was at its height, while others arrived from towns tinged with spiritualism in the state of Victoria. Fuelled by such immigration, Dunedin and Thames developed spiritualist communities in

³²London Dialectical Society, *Report on Spiritualism*, pp.1-6; Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.84-5.

³³For an extensive report published in Dunedin, see *Otago Witness*, 29 July 1871, p.17.

³⁴Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, pp.268; Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, pp.86-7; Jon Palfreman, "Between Scepticism and Credulity: a Study of Victorian Scientific Attitudes to Modern Spiritualism", in Roy Wallis, (ed.), *On the Margins of Science: the Social Construction of Rejected Knowledge*, University of Keele 1979, p.201.

³⁵*Report of the Meeting of the Otago Institute*, [Dunedin 1871], Stout Pamphlet Collection, Beaglehole room, Victoria University; *Otago Witness*, 23 Dec. 1871, p.17. Crookes' experiments were reprinted in the *ODT*, 5 Dec. 1871.

the early-1870s. The links between Victoria and Otago are especially relevant to the growth of spiritualism.

In Otago, there was considerable consternation among settlers over the arrival of what was perceived as a wild group of immoral rogues from Victoria. Friction between miners and the 'old identities' was common in the 1860s. This phenomenon was noted by the Baptist minister, J. Upton Davis, in 1880: "though we can afford to laugh at the dismay of the old settlers, they were not far wrong when they christianed this influx the Victorian iniquity. There was no moral purpose in their coming; they brought with them, it is true, the relentless energy of mining pioneers; but they brought with them also a wildness and a looseness in no way kindred to the staid, set tone of the early settlers."³⁶ This 'Victorian iniquity' populated the ranks of spiritualists and freethinkers in later years, a phenomenon observed by Charles Bright (a leading spiritualist and freethought orator in Australasia): "the digging influx brought in a class of men who superseded the old identities and overcame the influence of doctrinal religion."³⁷

This 'Victorian iniquity' had a conspicuous impact on colonial culture. In Victoria, Gabay notes that the "development of intellectual life in the colony was aided by rapid changes in population and living standards which came in the wake of the goldrush migration". This wave of settlers was independent, individualistic and imbued with the spirit of enquiry, and they helped develop "an atmosphere welcoming innovation". A similar phenomenon occurred in New Zealand. The goldrushes introduced diversity, increased geographical and social mobility and caused general upheaval to many settler communities. Many Victorian miners were Chartists, and they brought with them a strong sense of democracy and individual rights.³⁸ The goldrush generation fostered comparatively heterogeneous and egalitarian communities which tolerated heterodox belief and fostered intellectual enquiry. This made areas that were heavily affected by the mining influx more receptive to spiritualism.

Victoria itself experienced a prolonged wave of interest in spiritualism from the late-1860s. F.B. Smith illustrates the strength of spiritualism in Victorian goldfield towns. For example, the Stawell Psychological Society, formed in 1871, had 100 founding members and its office-bearers included leaders in the community. By August 1872 it had a Lyceum which seated 250 people and a 20 person choir. A tour by J.M. Peebles, an American spiritualist, throughout Victoria in 1872 attracted audiences only a little smaller than those in Melbourne in towns such as Sandhurst, Geelong, Ballarat and Castlemaine.³⁹

Influenced heavily by Melbourne culture, Dunedin became the stronghold of spiritualism in New Zealand in the 1870s. The Otago press was very interested in the

³⁶*Saturday Advertiser*, 25 Dec. 1880, p.21.

³⁷*Harbinger of Light*, no.193, Mar. 1886, p.3159.

³⁸Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", pp.194-5; Tony Simpson, *The Immigrants: the Great Migration From Britain to New Zealand, 1830-1890*, Auckland 1997, pp.145-50.

³⁹Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.67-70.

events and opinions emanating from Melbourne in the 1870s, at that time the hub of European culture in Australia. Lurline Stuart points out that Melbourne led other Australasian centres in the production of colonial periodicals from the 1850s to the 1880s. Liberal journals such as the *Melbourne Review* (1876-1885) and the *Victorian Review* (1879-1886), both containing articles on spiritualism and kindred subjects, were read and reviewed in New Zealand. The latter was under the de facto editorship of spiritualist James Smith. Robert Stout regularly penned articles for the former. As early as 1862, the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute subscribed to four Victorian newspapers.⁴⁰

Through informal networks and press channels, Melbourne and New Zealand spiritualists developed close links in the early-1870s. W.H. Terry, Australasia's leading distributor of spiritualist literature, advertised in New Zealand organs such as Dunedin's *Echo* and in the 1880s, the *Freethought Review* of Wanganui, selling "books on Freethought, Spiritualism, Mesmerism, Phrenology, Physiology, Hydropathy, Chromopathy, social Science and advanced literature." A draper by trade, Terry was the secretary of Melbourne's Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists (VAPS) for 40 years and became a well-known medical clairvoyant, bookshop proprietor and Theosophist.⁴¹ He made the very latest and most progressive literature of America and Europe accessible to many New Zealanders who might otherwise have had no avenue to explore them. He edited the spiritualist journal, the *Harbinger of Light*, which reported news and received correspondence from New Zealand, Australia and around the world. As late as 1886 the Dunedin spiritualist D.H. Cameron, a grocer, wrote to the editor declaring that "this communication is anxiously looked for here by a large number who constantly read the *Harbinger*." Melbourne spiritualists occasionally contributed to liberal New Zealand organs. B.S. Naylor, who founded the *Glow Worm* in 1869 (Australia's first spiritualist periodical), contributed a series of articles on spiritualism to the *Echo* in 1872.⁴² James Smith visited Dunedin in 1872 at the invitation of the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Association, an organisation which contained a large number of spiritualists and sympathisers. During 1876-86 Melbourne's Charles Bright made several lengthy trips to New Zealand, strengthening the links established between spiritualists in the two colonies. New Zealand had its own exports, such as Thames medium Jane Elizabeth Harris, who lived in Melbourne for most of 1887-96 and became revered by local spiritualists.⁴³

There was limited spiritualist activity on the Otago goldfields themselves because most spiritualists lived and investigated in Dunedin. When Robert Wilson attempted to

⁴⁰*Catalogue of the Library of the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institution*, Dunedin 1862; Stuart, *James Smith*, pp.94,100; for Stout's articles, see *Melbourne Review*, volumes 3,5-8,10.

⁴¹*Freethought Review*, no.8, May 1884, p.9; *Echo*, 30 July 1883, p.3; Gabay, *Alfred Deakin*, p.9.

⁴²*Harbinger of Light*, no.197, July 1886, p.3249; *Echo*, 27 Apr. 1872, p.2, 4 May 1872, p.2, 1 June, 1872, p.2, 8 June 1872, p.2, 6 July 1872, p.2, 20 July 1872, p.3.

⁴³Bright and Harris are discussed in later chapters.



W. H. TERRY,
EDITOR OF THE "HARBINGER OF LIGHT"
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.

organise lectures by J.M. Peebles in Central Otago towns in 1873, a columnist in the *Bruce Herald* wrote that "we certainly could not give any encouragement, judging from the little sympathy that has hitherto attended efforts to attract attention to the subject here."⁴⁴ However, there was an obvious interest and curiosity throughout Otago fuelled by publicity from Dunedin and Victoria. Newspaper columnists on the goldfields and surrounding districts regularly discussed spiritualism with occasional reference to local activity. The editor of the *Bruce Herald*, J.L. Gillies, was liberal in his coverage of spiritualist issues in the early-1870s and contributed a series of articles himself under the pseudonym of 'Stockwhip' in 1872.⁴⁵ A "small circle of Spiritualists" were active "for some time past" in the Queenstown area in August 1870, their seances "crowned with success", while in Tokomairiro another circle was reported to be active. There was also seance activity on the Taieri plain and in Oamaru.⁴⁶ A well-known mesmerist, Dr Carr, encountered eager audiences for his lectures and public displays of mesmerism, phrenology and spiritualism on Otago and Thames goldfields, as he did elsewhere in New Zealand and Australia.⁴⁷ One retailer advertised "Spirit Medium!!!" in an effort to sell alcohol. In 1870 Joseph Braithwaite, a leading Dunedin bookseller, advertised in some goldfield and country districts' newspapers "all the latest Books and Magazines on Spiritualism and the Harmonial Philosophy" including current issues of the *Banner of Light* and *The Spiritual Telegraph*.⁴⁸

Spiritualism was a topic of interest in Thames' goldfields, where a spirit of religious enquiry prevailed. Thames spiritualists were closely affiliated with Melbourne adherents from at least 1872, when both groups attempted to institute a utopian community based on socialist principles and the Harmonial philosophy of A.J. Davis. This venture was named the Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association (ACLLA). The brainchild of Robert Fluker Cunningham (secretary) and Robert Wood (chairman) of Thames,⁴⁹ the ACLLA canvassed in Dunedin and advertised in Melbourne's *Harbinger of Light* for "SPIRITUAL ADHERENTS OF THE HARMONIAL PHILOSOPHY

⁴⁴*Mt Ida Chronicle*, 28 Feb. 1873, p.3; *Bruce Herald*, 18 Feb. 1873, p.6.

⁴⁵The *Echo* learnt Stockwhip's identity through a source in Tokomairiro, 21 Sep. 1872, p.2. For his articles, see *Bruce Herald*, 24 July 1872, p.4, 31 July 1872, p.9, 7 Aug. 1872, p.4, 14 Aug. 1872, p.4, 21 Aug. 1872, p.4, 28 Aug. 1872, p.9.

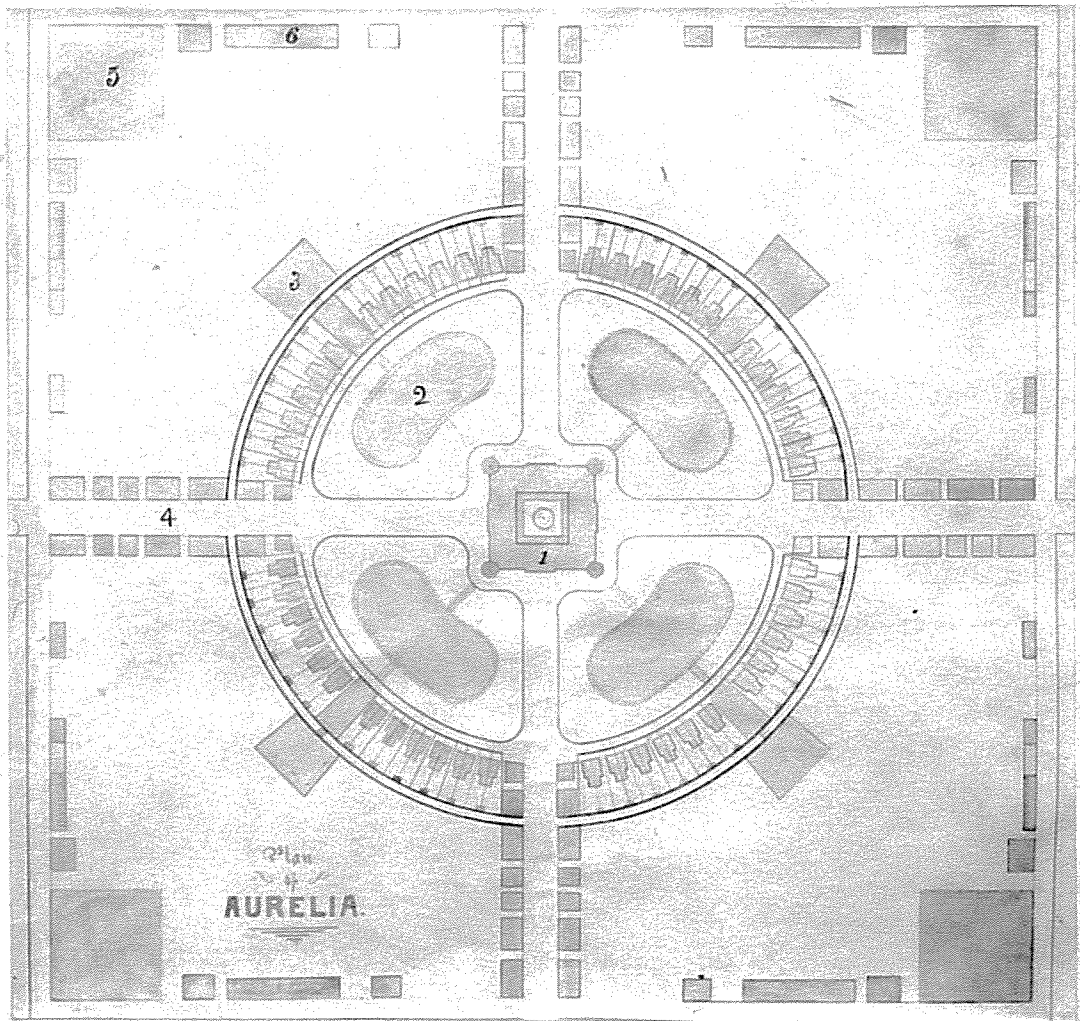
⁴⁶*Otago Witness*, 13 Aug. 1870, p.14; *Bruce Herald*, 17 Aug. 1870, p.5; *Echo*, 18 June 1870, p.2; *Oamaru Times*, 11 June 1872, p.2.

⁴⁷For Carr's performances see, for example, *Bruce Herald*, 29 June 1870, pp.4-5, 13 July 1870, pp.5-6, 27 July 1870, p.7; *Otago Witness*, 25 June 1870, p.17; *Thames Advertiser and Miners News*, 17 June 1872, p.1, 20 June 1872, p.2. Carr is discussed in chapter six.

⁴⁸*Bruce Herald*, 20 July 1870, p.1; *Waikouaiti and Shag Valley Herald*, 1 Jan. 1873, p.1; *Dunstan Times*, 27 May 1870, p.3.

⁴⁹I have been unable to trace the background of Cunningham and Wood. Cunningham's general philosophy was captured in a fundraising pamphlet, a publication "strongly recommended" by W.H. Terry, who advertised and sold it in Melbourne. It brought together disparate strands of German nature-philosophy, positivism, socialism and spiritualism into an evolutionary world view predicated on eternal progress and personal immortality. *Harbinger of Light*, no.28, Dec. 1872, pp.356-7; [Cunningham], *Crums [sic] of Thought*.

GROUND PLAN OF AURELIA.



1. Lyceum and Public Buildings.
2. Ornamental Pleasure Grounds.
3. Dining Rooms, Kitchens, Baths and Laundries, in the rear of the centre of each division of our dwelling circle.
4. Approaches with Stores and Factories on each side.
5. Stack Yards.
6. Farm Buildings, &c.
7. Garden Ground, containing about 15 acres in each quarter, or 60 acres in all.

Outside the above our agricultural lands will be situated, and these will be again surrounded by our unreclaimed woods and grazing lands.

ONLY." A fundraising pamphlet and prospectus were published, as were *The Articles of Association, Rules, Regulations, Manners and Customs of the Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association*.⁵⁰ The ACLLA was to be "a beacon on a hill lighted by the spirits of the great and good who have left their mark upon all bygone ages of the world."⁵¹

The ACLLA was in existence from around 1872 to 1874 and evoked considerable interest in both Australia and New Zealand. It intended to purchase 10,000 acres of communal land in either New Zealand or Australia on which to construct dwellings for 100 families around a central Lyceum and workshops. In January 1873, a writer in the *Harbinger* reported that the ACLLA was "rapidly progressing". A screening process became necessary following a flood of applicants. Though R.F. Cunningham appeared to be its inspirational founder, its executive planning was based in Victoria, where most recruits resided. Cunningham himself travelled there around 1872.⁵²

Despite considerable planning and enthusiasm, the ACLLA collapsed in January 1874. Smith writes that "No land was taken up and after a year of bickering over the repayment of capital to the initial subscribers, the Aurelia Co-operative was wound up."⁵³ Several months later, the *Harbinger of Light* reported the following news: "We understand that the 'Aurelia' Association is undergoing an entire recast and that a number of members from New Zealand are expected to arrive here in a few weeks, for active service." Paucity of news on the Aurelians after this date suggests that this revived effort also collapsed.⁵⁴

DIGGERS, SETTLERS AND SPIRITS

Many settlers found spiritualism attractive for pecuniary reasons. Adherents believed that spiritualism had the potential to unlock the latent psychic powers of humanity in the interests of science, progress and profit. Ardent spiritualists were dismayed at the use of spirits and clairvoyance for pecuniary gain, but many dabblers saw in spiritualism the potential to predict the future, find lost objects and discover hidden riches. The following paragraphs discuss the useful tasks that spirits often performed at the bidding of

⁵⁰*Echo*, 5 Oct. 1872, p.2; *Tuapeka Times*, 20 Feb. 1873, p.5; *ODT*, 15 Feb. 1873, p.1(supplement); *Harbinger of Light*, no.24, Aug. 1872, p.294; ACLLA, *Prospectus of the Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association*, Grahamstown [1872]; [R. F. Cunningham], *Crums [sic] of Thought*; R.F. Cunningham, *Articles of Association, Rules, Regulations, Manners and Customs of the Aurelia Co-operative Land and Labour Association*, [Melbourne 1873?]. This latter publication was discussed at length in the *Harbinger of Light*, no.37, Sep. 1873, pp.491-2.

⁵¹ACLLA, *Prospectus*, pp.4-6.

⁵²*ODT*, 15 Feb. 1873, p.1(supplement); *Harbinger of Light*, no.29, Jan. 1873, p.373, no.31, Mar. 1873, p.400; "Form of Application", attached to ACLLA, *Prospectus*.

⁵³Smith, "Religion and Freethought", p.46.

⁵⁴*Harbinger of Light*, no.46, June 1874, p.637.

miners and other settlers, and provides two vignettes of prominent New Zealand settlers from the goldrush generation who dabbled in spiritualism.

It must have been tempting for many miners to consult the spirits on the location of lucrative digs. According to the *Geelong Advertiser*, this was common practice in Victoria. Citing a report in the *Advertiser*, Thames and Otago papers reported how "it is a very common practice to call in the aid of clairvoyance before going into a fresh speculation, and to take no action in the matter except such as the oracle may direct." The article referred to a particular woman who received considerable income for her services.⁵⁵ Other Australian sources reported that water diviners were active and successful in a number of districts.⁵⁶ The spirits served a similar purpose for some New Zealand miners. One Thames miner, writing to the *Pleasant Creek News* where he formerly resided, revealed how the spirits aided his endeavours:

I saved a claim here at the Thames through a spirit communication. It had been neglected, and was liable to be jumped, when I was told by spirit writing that six men were coming at nine o'clock the next morning on the claim to jump the ground, with other particulars of their programme. It was there with the men that I got, just in the nick of time to save the claim. The jumpers came exactly at the time I was told they would do, and they saw at once that they were completely checkmated, and looked sheepishly disappointed and as white as ghosts when they saw we were too much and too strong to be bounced by them. You see by this that I am a Spiritist.⁵⁷

Emma Hardinge Britten related a story in *Nineteenth Century Miracles* of a miner living in the King Country named "Mr Marsden" who found his fortune in gold after following directions given to him by an old friend from beyond the grave. While soliciting the services of a "native seeress", a misty vapour appeared and spoke to Marsden who, following directions, found a mass of gold in the depth of a forest.⁵⁸

The spirits were put to other utilitarian uses in New Zealand goldfield areas. A circle in Tokomairiro consulted the spirits about a robbery in Clyde in August 1870. Over £12,000 in gold and money were stolen. This sum and the £500 reward offered for information leading to the capture of the thieves doubtless motivated the seance-goers. They also investigated the possibility of using the 'spiritual telegraph' as a means of communication: "it is thought that if the same spirit can be called up here and also in, say Great Britain, the laying down of electric telegraphs may be unnecessary as the 'invisibles'

⁵⁵*Thames Advertiser and Miners News*, 4 Sep. 1872, p.3.

⁵⁶These reports were taken from the *Beaufort Chronicle* and the *Ararat Advertiser*, and reported in the *Echo*, 30 Apr. 1870, p.2.

⁵⁷*Echo*, 29 Jan. 1870, p.2.

⁵⁸Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles; or, Spirits and their Work in Every Country of the Earth*, New York 1884, pp.264-5.

may be employed to transmit the messages."⁵⁹ Enquiries to the spirits about ships lost at sea, horse races and elections also took place at various times.⁶⁰ Following the visit of James Smith to Dunedin in 1872, James Macandrew, the Superintendent of Otago, was rumoured to be "tinged" by spiritualism and swayed in his politics by its influence.⁶¹ During a discussion of the country's financial situation, a parliamentary journalist for the *New Zealand Herald* observed that Macandrew "consoles himself with the reflection, gleaned from the "Spirit World," by Mr Smith, of Melbourne, that our mineral resources are inexhaustible, and that no matter how much waste there may be, our financial position will remain sound."⁶² The idea that the spirits could be put to practical and profitable use infiltrated the highest levels of society.

Some of New Zealand's leading spiritualists spent large periods of time on goldfields in America, Australia and New Zealand. From humble beginnings, they attained positions of respect and renown in the community despite their heterodox beliefs. Two such individuals are discussed below to illustrate the centrality of miners and mining environments to the growth and spread of spiritualism.

Robert Wilson (1820-79) traversed the American and Victorian goldfields before emigrating to Dunedin in the early-1860s. Wilson was born in Cork, Ireland, and spent his younger days in Montreal, Louisiana and California where he became successful in journalism and worked as a storekeeper, collector of tree seeds, explorer, quartz miner and scientific lecturer. In 1853 Wilson moved to Australia. While in Castlemaine, Victoria, he founded the *Miner's Right*, later moving to nearby Inglewood where he replaced Julius Vogel as proprietor of the *Inglewood Advertiser*. "Acting on Mr Vogel's advice", Robert and his wife Sarah, emigrated to Dunedin in 1862 where Robert was appointed publisher of the *Otago Daily Times* (of which Vogel was co-owner and editor). He became editor of the *Otago Witness* from 1875 until his death in 1879 and received commendation for converting a rather dull paper into a vibrant and popular publication.⁶³

Wilson was a formative influence on spiritualism in Otago, expounding the cause in public lectures from 1869.⁶⁴ In his philosophy, he drew heavily from Swedenborg, A.J. Davis, Emma Hardinge Britten and Auguste Comte, believing that spiritualism was a verifiable science in harmony with the positive phase of intellectual evolution.⁶⁵ He and

⁵⁹*Bruce Herald*, 3 Aug. 1870, p.4, 17 Aug. 1870, p.5; *Otago Witness*, 20 Aug. 1870, p.14.

⁶⁰See, for example, *Timaru Herald*, 2 July 1870, p.2, 13 July 1870, p.2; *Saturday Advertiser*, 21 Feb. 1885, p.13; *ODT*, 24 Sep. 1887, p.7; *New Zealand Watchman*, 22 Aug. 1885, p.5.

⁶¹*ODT*, 16 Aug. 1872, p.2; *Echo*, 31 Aug. 1872, p.2.

⁶²*New Zealand Herald*, 15 Aug. 1872, p.3.

⁶³While employed to collect tree seedlings Wilson was reputedly "a member of one of the first parties of white men who entered and explored the now celebrated Yosemite Valley." *Saturday Advertiser*, 13 Sept. 1879, p.7; *Otago Witness*, 6 Feb. 1901, p.32; *Lyttelton Times*, 19 Sep. 1879, p.6; *The Colonial Printers' Register*, vol.1, no.8, 24 Apr. 1880, p.17.

⁶⁴An early lecture delivered by him at Port Chalmers was extensively reported in the *Otago Witness*, 9 Oct. 1869, p.10.

⁶⁵His beliefs can be gleaned from a lecture at Oamaru by T.L. Langbridge (a press worker of some kind) which was reported extensively by the *Oamaru Times* in 1872. Langbridge read from a manuscript



MR ROBERT WILSON,
Editor Otago Witness from 1875 to 1879

his wife were posthumously described as "prominent members of the Spiritualistic body" in Dunedin and "the latter a noted medium".⁶⁶

In one of Dunedin's worst fires, Robert, Sarah and three of their five children were among twelve lives lost in a blaze which engulfed Ross's Buildings in the Octagon in September 1879.⁶⁷ A dramatic and controversial disaster, the 'Octagon fire' was highly publicised and lingered long in the memory of the city. The family lived in the building, where Sarah Wilson ran a drapery warehouse and servants' registry. Various lodgers and a cafeteria also shared the premises. In "a perfect rabbit warren" with a faulty fire escape ladder, residents "were afforded but small opportunity for saving themselves".⁶⁸ The death of the Wilsons in such circumstances evoked the sympathies of Dunedin citizens. An enormous number of spectators and mourners - estimated at 10,000 by the *Otago Daily Times* - gathered to witness the funeral procession. Some 2000 attended the funeral service, where Archdeacon Edwards and Rev. Thomas Roseby officiated. Spiritualists and their sympathisers were at the forefront of proceedings: John Tyerman, Joseph Braithwaite, John Logan, C.C. Armstrong, W.M. Bolt, W.H. Walter and Robert Stout among them. "Retiring and unobtrusive in his disposition", Wilson had earned considerable respect in the community. A relief fund was organised as far afield as Sydney, where Charles Bright sent over £20, while the Premier, George Grey, sent the two surviving Wilson daughters a letter of sympathy.⁶⁹ According to a columnist of the *Saturday Advertiser* - probably his friend Thomas Bracken - Wilson was a model spiritualist whose beliefs commanded respect: "In his religious views he was the reverse of Orthodox, but he never obtruded his opinions upon those to whom they might have proved distasteful, and, setting a good example to others of his own mind, he was gentle and considerate even in his unbelief."⁷⁰ In his stirring poem "The Octagon Fire", Dugald Ferguson concluded with these words regarding the Wilsons:

Wrapped in their tombs, no further part have they,
Yet to their God consigned in hope their spirits stay.⁷¹

written by Wilson and was later reprimanded by him for his unauthorised use of it. *Oamaru Times*, 11 Jan. 1872, p.2, 21 Jan. 1872, p.2, 1 Feb. 1872, p.3, 4 Feb. 1872, p.3; *ODT*, 10 Sep. 1872, p.3; *Otago Witness*, 9 Oct. 1869, p.10, 14 Sep. 1872, p.17.

⁶⁶*ODT*, 16 June 1880, (supplement).

⁶⁷Events surrounding this disaster have been chronicled by McCraw, though its spiritualist significance has been overlooked. John McCraw, *Dunedin Holocaust: the Tragic Fire in the Octagon Buildings Dunedin, 1879*, Dunedin 1998. See also J.S. Little, *A Century of Fires and Fire Brigades in Dunedin*, Dunedin 1948, pp.118-21.

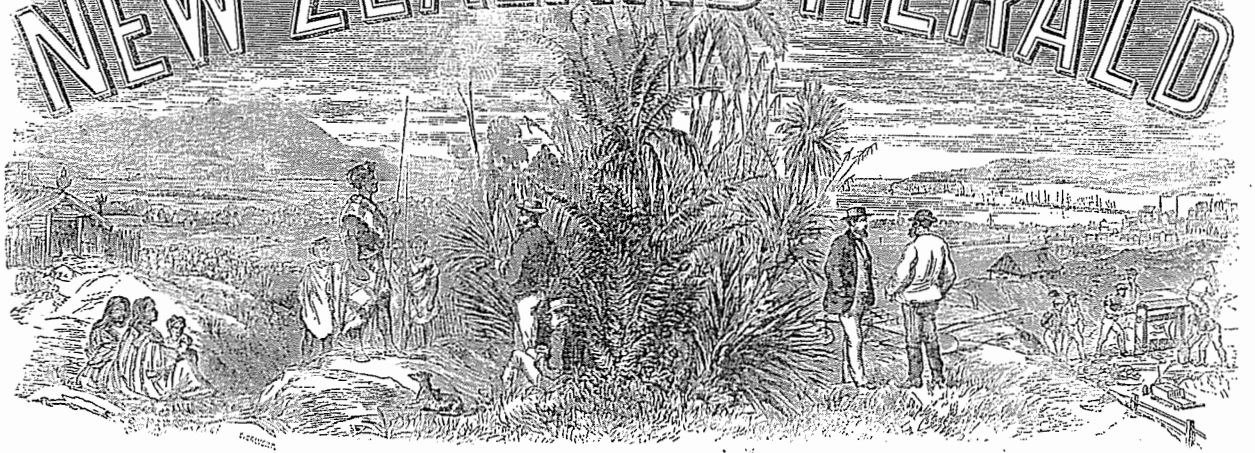
⁶⁸*Saturday Advertiser*, 13 Sep. 1879, p.7.

⁶⁹*The Colonial Printers' Register*, vol.1, no.1, 15 Oct. 1879, p.5; *Morning Herald*, 13 Sep. 1879, pp.2-3; *ODT*, 15 Sep. 1879, p.3; Dugald Ferguson, *Castle Gay, and Other Poems*, Dunedin 1883, p.148.

⁷⁰*Saturday Advertiser*, 13 Sep. 1879, p.7.

⁷¹Ferguson, *Castle Gay*, pp.146-8.

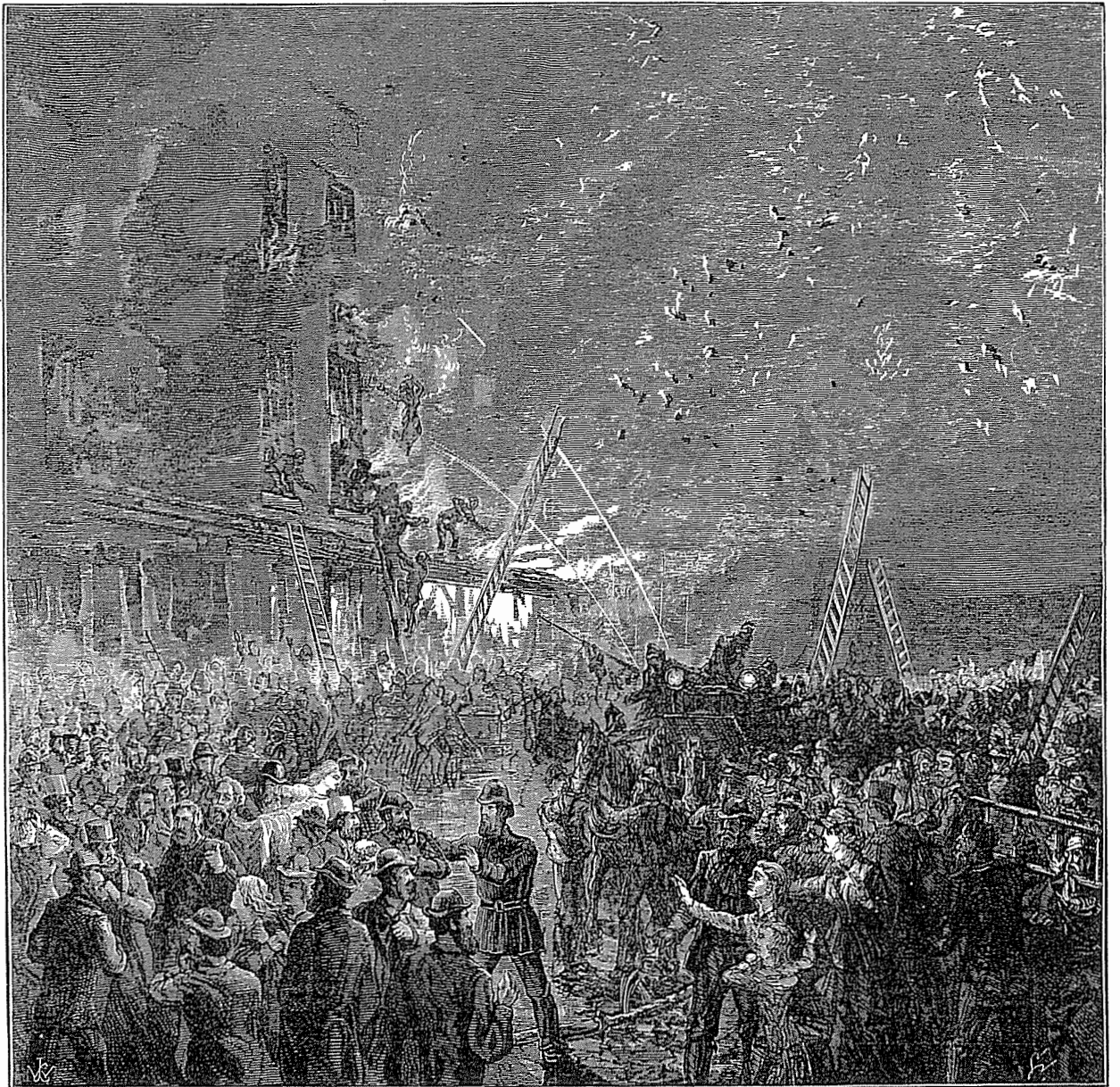
THE ILLUSTRATED NEW ZEALAND HERALD



NO. 151.

DUNEDIN, NOVEMBER 6, 1879.

PRICE SIXPENCE.



FATAL FIRE AT DUNEDIN

The death of the Wilsons provoked comment from some quarters about the efficacy of spiritualist belief. On the night of the fire the family were at a lecture delivered by the spiritualist orator, John Tyerman, and only three hours later they perished. A similar tragedy occurred earlier in the year involving another spiritualist family.⁷² James Neil, an evangelical Christian and herbalist, captured the thoughts of many when he wrote many years later: "if these knowing Spirits could not tell their mediums that they were going to be burned to death, ... what in the earth is the use of them?" However, in 1882 the *Echo* noted Robert Wilson's apparent victory over death: he re-appeared in seances in Australia.⁷³

A man of similar repute to Wilson, John Phillip Armstrong, also became involved in spiritualism following years working on goldfields. Armstrong was a dentist who represented Mt Ida, the Naseby and St Bathans goldfields area, on the Otago Provincial Council during 1871-3 and 1875. He sympathised strongly with spiritualism while in New Zealand, though he was buried in the Anglican church. His sympathy was made public in 1873 when, along with several other prominent citizens, he shared the lecture platform with J.M. Peebles, the eminent American spiritualist orator. Having worked in America and on the Victorian goldfields before arriving in Otago in 1861, Armstrong was an experienced individual who gained renown through his dentistry and popular lectures on subjects such as "the early days of Victoria" and "An Irish Pilgrim in Victoria." His Australian work also brought him into contact with Julius Vogel, and like Vogel, he was liberal in his politics and religious disposition.⁷⁴ F.R.J. Sinclair observes that Armstrong's "wide experience of life instilled in him a deep regard for individual liberties", and that he developed a contempt for any form of religious or political dogmatism. In Victoria he was "well known for his part in the liberal agitations of the day". He was also a prominent freemason.⁷⁵

In 1878 he relayed his personal views on spiritualism to fellow members of the Dunedin Barracouta Club. When aged 17, his deceased grandmother appeared to him and predicted the future course of his life. She also taught him that "there is no death, but change, and that there is no place called heaven, but that everywhere is heaven to the good, everywhere hell to the wicked." Though deemed "a little strange" at the time, Armstrong

⁷²The daughter of spiritualist John Jackson, a Dunedin china dealer, received fatal burns when her dress caught fire from the family hearth while her father was attending an oration by Emma Hardinge Britten. *ODT*, 15 July 1879, p.2, 16 July 1879, pp.2-3, 18 July 1879, p.4, 19 June 1880, (supplement).

⁷³James Neil, *Spiritualism and Theosophy Twain Brothers of Anti-Christ*, Dunedin 1901, p.46; *Echo*, 14 Jan. 1882, p.2, 25 Mar. 1882, p.2.

⁷⁴*ODT*, 8 Feb. 1876, p.1, 25 Dec. 1880, p.3; *Saturday Advertiser*, 25 Aug. 1877, p.9; *Mt Ida Chronicle*, 21 Feb. 1873, p.4; *Bruce Herald*, 18 Feb. 1873, p.6; ; *Otago Witness*, 21 Feb. 1906, p.28; *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, vol.4, Christchurch 1905, p.374; G.H. Scholefield, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol.1, Wellington 1940, p.19.

⁷⁵F.R.J. Sinclair, "High Street Quaking: a History of Dunedin's 'Inner Circle'", PhD thesis, Otago University 1996, pp.199, 22-3 (appendix 38).

declared that "since I have mixed among the Spiritualists, it does not seem so, but all quite natural and rational." Nevertheless, he maintained a public stance of suspended judgement: "there is something in it, but what that something is, I ... cannot say."⁷⁶

The following section attempts to quantify the growth and distribution of spiritualists in New Zealand in the 1870s and '80s. This is a difficult task given the inadequacy of census returns and the nature of spiritualist belief. These problems will be discussed in depth before outlining local factors behind the advent of spiritualism in the main provinces.

GROWTH, STRENGTH AND DISTRIBUTION

According to census figures, spiritualists never constituted more than .044 per cent of the non-Maori population in the 1870s and '80s. However, census records are not an accurate source for quantifying cult adherence. As a rule, census numbers of cults tend to identify hardcore adherents only, while figures of larger denominations contain a large proportion of nominal adherents. Affiliation to a larger denomination in census returns may signify baptism, marriage or ancestry rather than active membership.⁷⁷ It was from nominal adherents of larger Protestant denominations that spiritualism frequently found recruits and sympathisers. There were also a variety of other census categories under which spiritualists may have placed themselves.⁷⁸

Perhaps because of their poor showing in official statistics, cult members often assert that they have a large invisible congregation of believers in the population in order to inflate their importance in the eyes of others. This was certainly the case with spiritualists. Over-zealous assessments about the influence and future importance of spiritualism characterised much of their writing. In 1870, one author (probably Robert Stout), asserted that "in New Zealand - in every province - there are vast numbers of Spiritualists, but as yet there is no sufficient organisation."⁷⁹ Spiritualist claims to a large number of believers should not be totally dismissed, particularly since they were in the best position to judge adherence to an often covert belief. J.M. Peebles wrote in 1873 that it "was frequently said to me in Dunedin - 'There are but five, or seven at most, outspoken Spiritualists in our city.' Is there a worse tyrant than popular opinion? Though there are hundreds in

⁷⁶The Barracouta Club was a private social debating club founded in Dunedin in 1853. It was patronised by intellectuals of varying repute, beliefs and backgrounds. In 1878 men such as Jock Graham, J.G.S. Grant, Robert Stout, Thomas Roseby, H.J. Walter, Samuel Slesinger, Alexander Sligo and W.H. Reynolds, M.P., were involved. A number of spiritualists took part in debates, though I have been unable to ascertain their identity. *Saturday Advertiser*, 1 June 1878, p.15, 15 June 1878, p.15.

⁷⁷Hill, "Religion", p.179.

⁷⁸Probable categories include: "Deists", "Progressionists", "Universalists", "Freethinkers", "No denomination", "Unsectarian", "Christian of no denomination" and "Object to State".

⁷⁹A Spiritualist, *Spiritualism*, 2nd ed., Dunedin 1870, p.8. According to a reporter for the *Echo*, this tract was "said to be from the pen of Mr Stout", *Echo*, 15 Oct. 1881, p.2.

Dunedin who firmly believe in a present ministry of spirits, they generally prefer to be known as "investigators." This takes off, so they think, considerable of the odium." Peebles was well aware of nominal and flirtatious attachment to spiritualism: he criticised other elements in Dunedin who were thrill-seekers or anti-orthodox rather than earnest adherents of the faith.⁸⁰

Opponents occasionally noted a high level of covert spiritualist belief. Discussing spiritualism in Australia, John Alexander Dowie of the Free Christian Tabernacle in Melbourne observed "a most erroneous impression abroad, in the minds of many sincere christians, that Spiritualism is not rapidly spreading, and many point to the recent census in proof of that view". He believed there were

probably tens of thousands of infidels and Spiritualists in this country who allowed themselves, for various reasons, to appear under religious denominations with which they have no real connection whatever. There are also many persons, who openly profess Christianity, but who are secretly Spiritualists; and - I say it with care, and caution, and with deep regret - several of these traitors are to be found occupying christian pulpits.

There was much truth to Dowie's assertions, and there is little reason to believe that New Zealand was markedly different.⁸¹ Commenting on the small number of spiritualists in the 1878 census, "W.M." of the *New Zealand Wesleyan* was "surprised to find that only 52 have so enrolled themselves." Reasons put forward for this were that "some have not the courage of their opinions, and it may be that others who believe in spiritism still remain members of other churches."⁸²

Anecdotal reports of spiritualist numbers indicate that census findings underestimated active adherents by over 100 per cent in some areas at certain times. The Dunedin Society for Investigating Spiritualism embraced around 110 paid members in 1872 and spiritualist grove meetings in Dunedin attracted up to 200 people in 1875-6, yet the census provided numbers of between 24 and 43 for the whole of the Otago province (which included Southland) in the 1870s.⁸³ In 1886, a spiritualist source claimed that the Wellington Association of Spiritualists had 90 members, with an average weekly attendance of 100.⁸⁴ In the mid-1880s, spiritualistic organisations also existed in other parts of the Wellington province such as Greytown, Fielding, Woodville and Palmerston North. Despite its obvious popularity, census numbers for the entire province (which

⁸⁰*Harbinger of Light*, no.37, Sep. 1873, pp.493-4.

⁸¹John Alexander Dowie, *Spiritualism Unmasked; being a Correspondence Between the Rev. John Alexander Dowie and Mr Thomas Walker*, Melbourne 1882, p.iv. Dowie visited New Zealand and lectured against spiritualism in 1887.

⁸²*New Zealand Wesleyan*, vol.9, no.10, 1 Oct. 1879, p.1.

⁸³*ODT*, 3 July 1872, p.2, 5 Jan. 1876, p.3; *Otago Witness*, 3 Aug. 1872, p.10, 31 Aug. 1872, p.5, 14 Sep. 1872, p.17; *Harbinger of Light*, no.54, Feb. 1875, p.777. See table (i).

⁸⁴*Harbinger of Light*, no.202, Dec. 1886, p.3349.

extended beyond Wanganui on the west coast) were only 94 in 1886. In Auckland, "nearly 200 names" were handed in prior to the first meeting of the New Zealand Psychological Association in 1884, and its president, W.A. Ellis, claimed to lecture to 300-400 each week. A spiritualist organisation also existed in Thames in 1881. However, the census only listed between 31 and 38 spiritualists for the entire Auckland province in the 1880s.⁸⁵ Furthermore, thousands attended venues across New Zealand throughout the period to hear the orations of itinerant spiritualist lecturers and receive treatment from spiritualist healers. Demand for private seances and consultations was high.

It is important to note that many of these activities, especially public lectures, were dominated by the curious and sceptical. Spiritualism was good entertainment in a society dominated by long periods of monotony. When 1200 people packed Queen's Theatre in Dunedin in 1873 to witness J.M. Peebles' opening lecture, the scene was clearly not indicative of pious belief: "Hats were kept on, laughing and chatting were freely indulged in, and when the curtain did not rise punctually at the appointed time the more impatient began to stamp on the floor". It was clear that "curiosity was the feeling that had attracted the vast majority of those present, and this feeling quite overmastered that of devotion."⁸⁶

Given these factors, an increase of 25 per cent on census figures is a reasonable (if conservative) estimate of actual hardcore adherents at any one time. During periods of heightened interest, this percentage would increase significantly as less committed believers were inspired into renewed activity and fresh converts added to the fold. The level of diffuse belief in the population cannot be quantified in any way, except to note that the majority of settlers were familiar with the topic of spiritualism and many entertained belief in spiritualist phenomena and doctrines.

Census information offers valuable insights into the growth and distribution of spiritualism in New Zealand during the 1870s and '80s. It reveals the towns, localities and provinces where significant numbers of hardcore believers resided. Spiritualist numbers were not provided for each province until 1886, but estimates for previous years can be made by using the category "other denominations".⁸⁷ Unfortunately, spiritualist numbers for boroughs and counties were not provided until 1891, though this information is a valuable window into their distribution at the end of the period under study.⁸⁸ In general, the data illustrates clearly an erratic though definite increase in spiritualist numbers, both numerically and proportionately, throughout the century from the early-1870s.

⁸⁵*Echo*, 30 Apr. 1881, p.2; *Fielding Star*, 24 Mar. 1885, p.2; *Freethought Review*, vol.2, no.14, Nov. 1884, p.4. See table (i).

⁸⁶*ODT*, 8 Feb. 1873, p.2(supplement).

⁸⁷*Census*, 1874, table iv, p.57; 1878, table iv, p.255; 1881, table iv, p.219. Enumerators placed "Spiritualists" and several other beliefs under this heading from 1874. Spiritualism constituted 50-62% of the category in the 1874, 1878 and 1881 censuses. The remainder were mainly "Universalists", who were apt to support spiritualism themselves.

⁸⁸*Census*, 1891, table vi, pp.113-23, table vii, pp.124-35. See tables (ii) and (iii) in this thesis.

Several key factors account for its greater presence in certain areas. The social and religious background of settlers was influential. Spiritualists were disproportionately recruited from Protestant denominations, particularly smaller evangelical groups, or from ex-evangelicals in the secularist and freethought movements, a phenomenon which is explored in chapter three. Localities with greater religious plurality, a greater proportion of evangelicals, a history of revivalism and/or intellectual diversity were more receptive to spiritualism. Areas heavily affected by the goldmining influx also had a high level of spiritualist activity. On the other hand, its presence in some areas may be due to the arrival of a charismatic enthusiast or medium able to generate interest in the subject.

Spiritualism only became established in areas outside Otago and Thames in the late-1870s and early-1880s, when itinerant spiritualist propagandists began touring the country *en masse*. Between 1872 and 1885 at least eleven itinerant spiritualists from abroad traversed New Zealand, some of them eminent international personalities. In many cases they kick-started local believers into activity. The most influential figures were: J.M. Peebles, the prominent American lecturer who visited Dunedin and Christchurch in 1873; Charles Bright, the Melbourne orator; Thomas Walker, a teenage medium who delivered public trance lectures to Auckland and Dunedin audiences in 1877; and Emma Hardinge Britten, a relatively conservative British orator who visited Dunedin, Wellington, Nelson and Auckland in 1879. A nationwide tour in 1882 by William Denton, a popular geology lecturer, was probably the most influential of any spiritualist during the 1880s, though spiritualist healers such as George Milner Stephen and Otto Hüg also attracted publicity. The spread of spiritualism was also aided by magicians who followed the sawdust trail of spiritualist orators, advertising themselves variously as 'Exposers of Spiritualism', 'Anti-Spiritualists', 'Spirit Mediums' and 'Clairvoyants'. A stream of touring magicians in the 1870s and '80s is testament to their popularity.⁸⁹ The popularity of spiritualism at this time was also reflected in the proliferation of spiritualist societies in the early-1880s, some of which are discussed in later chapters. The advent of spiritualism in the main provinces will be analysed briefly below.

From its first prolonged outbreak during 1868-74, Dunedin remained the centre of spiritualism in both Otago and New Zealand throughout the period. In the 1891 census, the proportion of spiritualists in the boroughs of Dunedin city were among the highest in the country, particularly in Caversham and West Harbour (see table ii). Dunedin city was populated by a wide variety of peoples of diverse religious inclinations. It was the intellectual centre of New Zealand in the 1870s and '80s. With the discovery of gold in 1861 it developed a rather cosmopolitan flavour that belies its historical image as a staid

⁸⁹Robert Heller in 1870, W.A. Chapman and Miss Ida Bonifon in 1874, the Knottigem Brothers, Davenport Brothers and their rival debunkers, the Rose Brothers in 1877, the Royal Illusionists and Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin in 1879 and 1886, Professor Anderson, Kudarz and Verno and Madame Cora in 1884 are a sample from the period under study. Illusionists are discussed in chapter seven.

Presbyterian centre. In *The History of Otago*, A.H. McLintock found it unsurprising that Dunedin "won for itself an unenviable reputation for dullness and blind worship of convention." He claims that following the gold-rushes Dunedin was characterised by "sedate decorum". Intellectual tastes "betokened the staid and thoughtful mind." Though the sober influence of Presbyterianism was a conspicuous aspect of Dunedin culture, McLintock's construction must be amended to take into account a vigorous cosmopolitanism and diversity of thought. Portraying Dunedin's citizens as independent and unrestrained, J. Upton Davis declared in 1880 that "the varied origin and the composite character of our population are the most important factor in the moral tone of our Dunedin life." Dunedin had "no dominant note, no prevailing defined accent". The city was prone to embracing novelty and fads and indulging in "gusts of debate".⁹⁰ Spiritualists played a significant part in fostering this environment from the late-1860s. It is clear that both Dunedin and the Otago province as a whole provided fertile soil for the growth of spiritualism.

Outside Otago, spiritualism was most popular in the province of Wellington. Wairarapa and Manawatu experienced a wave of interest from 1884, its popularity due largely to publicity surrounding seances at the home of William Nation, a Greytown spiritualist who is discussed in the following chapter. Spiritualism became popular in areas such as Woodville, Fielding and Palmerston North under the leadership of a number of mediums and propagandists.⁹¹ Though much of its popularity can be attributed to Nation, it was also linked to the revivalism that swept these areas in the early- and mid-1880s, and to the fact that the 'bush provinces', Wellington, Taranaki and Hawkes Bay, were settled by a large number of Methodists who "were familiar with revivalism and either expressed their religious emotions very strongly, or were antagonistic to any form of religion."⁹²

In Wellington city, William McLean led the Wellington Association of Spiritualists during 1884-91 and much of its popularity there was sustained by local mediums and publicity emanating from the Wairarapa and Manawatu. Popularity was also sustained through the editorial influence of J.C. Harris, a spiritualist and proprietor of the *New Zealand Times* and the *New Zealand Mail*.⁹³ The prominence of spiritualism in

⁹⁰A.H. McLintock, *The History of Otago: the Origins and Growth of a Wakefield Class Settlement*, Dunedin 1949, pp.705-6; *Saturday Advertiser*, 25 Dec. 1880, p.21, 1 Jan. 1881, p.19.

⁹¹Some of these individuals are discussed in chapter three.

⁹²Peter J. Lineham, *There We Found Brethren: a History of Assemblies of Brethren in New Zealand*, Palmerston North 1977, p.33. See also chapter three of this thesis.

⁹³Born in Bath, Harris (1830-1895) was the son of a sculptor, though was apprenticed a sailor and became a captain before trying his luck on the Victorian goldfields. After working in Thames, he lived in Dunedin during 1873-8 as a reporter for the *ODT*. He worked for the *Southland Times* and wrote a guidebook for the hot lakes before moving to Wellington and investing in the *Mail* and the *Times* in 1880. He was involved in several mining ventures in Wellington. Selling his newspapers in 1890, he purchased and edited the *Bruce Herald* until his death. He was an active spiritualist in Wellington in the 1880s. His wife was president of the Wellington SPCA. *ODT*, 14 Feb. 1895, p.2; Scholefield, *DNZB*, vol.1, p.362; Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.253.

the Wellington province during the 1880s is reflected in periodicals such as *The Dawn*, which ran during 1887-8 and was edited by Angus McCurdy of Wellington, and *More Light*, published and edited during 1887-90 by William Nation.⁹⁴

A sustained interest in spiritualism developed in Napier from about 1885. In this year a Napier spiritualist wrote to the *Harbinger of Light* claiming that there were "a number of circles of earnest, intelligent investigators" and that "there are bright hopes for the not distant future."⁹⁵ In 1888, sufficient numbers and enthusiasm led to the formation of the Hawkes Bay Christian Spiritualist Association.⁹⁶ By 1891, when the initial wave of enthusiasm in the Wellington province waned, significant numbers of spiritualists appeared to remain in Wellington city, Napier and Fielding.⁹⁷ In the adjacent Taranaki province, spiritualism did not penetrate the populace to a significant degree in the period. However, by 1891 substantial numbers resided in the rural Taranaki and Hawera counties.⁹⁸

As noted earlier, spiritualism became established in the Auckland province in the early-1870s at Thames, largely through its gold-mining community and connections with Victoria. Any formal organisation among spiritualists in Thames probably collapsed in the mid-1870s following the demise of the ACLLA, though a "Thames Spiritualistic Association" was active in 1881. The 1891 census records only five spiritualists in the Thames borough.⁹⁹ In 1896, Jane Elizabeth Harris returned to Thames after nine years abroad and found "a little band of spiritualists" associated there, "faithful though few".¹⁰⁰ Anecdotal evidence suggests that Auckland city also contained a significant number of spiritualists, though probably not until the late-1870s. In 1877 a writer in the *New Zealand Herald* noted that "Spiritism has many believers in Auckland."¹⁰¹ However, the city gained a reputation as a difficult place for both spiritualism and freethought to gain momentum. When J.C. Wilkes, a spiritualist, attempted to form a freethought society in Auckland in 1881, he became exasperated by the lack of interest among the populace. A writer in the *New Zealand Christian Record* reported that "The prime mover in the project deplores the apathy of the Auckland public ... and complains that he is growing weary for lack of sympathy." The lack of enthusiasm for spiritualist and freethought societies in the

⁹⁴No issues of either *More Light* or *The Dawn* appear to have survived, but they are mentioned in the following sources: *Typo*, 26 Feb. 1887, p.14, 28 May 1887, p.35, 24 Nov. 1888, p.103, 29 Dec. 1888, p.116; *Message of Life*, no.325, vol.27, 1 July 1930, p.2. Angus McCurdy (1860-1941) was a printer, later a telegraphist, unionist and newspaper proprietor. He was secretary of the WAS in 1887. He became an organiser and liaison officer for the New Zealand Farmers' Union in 1902 and was later owner and editor of the *Upper Hutt Independent*. Les Cleveland, *The Anatomy of Influence: Pressure Groups and Politics in New Zealand*, Wellington 1872, pp.71-80.

⁹⁵*Harbinger of Light*, no.190, Dec. 1885, p.3109.

⁹⁶*Hawkes Bay Herald*, 13 Apr. 1888, pp.2-3, 4 May 1888, p.3, 6 Oct. 1888, p.3.

⁹⁷See table ii.

⁹⁸See tables i-iii.

⁹⁹*Echo*, 30 Apr. 1881, p.2. See table ii.

¹⁰⁰*This World and the Next*, no.24, 15 June 1896, p.185.

¹⁰¹*New Zealand Herald*, 26 Apr. 1877. p.2.

city may have been due to the moderating presence of figures such as the liberal independent minister, Rev Samuel Edger (who died in 1882) and Bishop Cowie, a liberal Anglican. Many spiritualists and liberals frequented Edger's services.¹⁰² There were also divisions between atheist and spiritualist factions within the city. Separate associations and Lyceums were established in the 1880s, most conspicuously the Auckland Rationalist Association (founded in late-1883) and the New Zealand Psychological Association (founded in late-1884). Few spiritualists resided in the counties and boroughs of the Auckland province in 1891.¹⁰³

Very few spiritualists lived in Canterbury during the period. The city of Christchurch was more conservative than Dunedin, less intellectually diverse and predominantly Anglican, all of which points to a lack of enthusiasm for spiritualism (in its radical and anti-clerical forms at least). The sparse ranks of believers in Christchurch were enhanced by the arrival of W.D. Meers in 1872 and his success in luring J.M. Peebles to lecture there in 1873. Peebles' lectures were the first introduction to spiritualism for many in the city. In comparison to Dunedin, he attracted very modest audiences and little publicity: 250 attended his first lecture, compared with 1200 in Dunedin. In the 1880s, Canterbury registered no more than 23 spiritualists in census returns (see table i). When William Denton lectured on spiritualism at Christchurch in 1882, a correspondent for the *Echo* wrote that "there are very few Spiritualists in Christchurch, and the subject was so foreign to the opinions of his audience, that I venture to say it takes some of the gilt off his other lectures."¹⁰⁴ The relative unpopularity of spiritualism in Christchurch may also be related to the disreputable Lotti Wilmot, an American spiritualist who was at the centre of a number of controversies in the city in the early-1880s. According to her own account, she formed a spiritualist organisation in 1881 which collapsed after seven weeks. Christchurch had a strong freethought movement and the Canterbury province was "fertile with nonconformist chapels",¹⁰⁵ but remained unreceptive to spiritualism. The 1891 census lists no spiritualists in any Christchurch borough. Outlying centres experienced periods of activity and publicity (such as Timaru and Rangiora in 1873, and Ashburton and Temuka in 1886) though spiritualist belief was probably restricted to a handful of individuals.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²*New Zealand Christian Record*, 24 Dec. 1880, p.6; *New Zealand Herald*, 21 May 1881, p.5; *Freethought Review*, no.4, Jan. 1884, p.8, no.14, Nov. 1884, p.4; Samuel Edger, *Autobiographical Notes and Lectures*, London 1866, p.111.

¹⁰³See tables ii and iii.

¹⁰⁴J.M. Peebles, *Around the World; or, Travels in Polynesia, China, India, Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and other "Heathen" Countries*, Boston 1875, p.86; *Press*, 24 Feb. 1873, p.4; *ODT*, 3 Feb. 1873, p.3; *Echo*, 22 Apr. 1882, p.3.

¹⁰⁵Peter J. Lineham, "New Zealanders and the Methodist Evangel: An Interpretation of the Policies and Performance of the Methodist Church of New Zealand", *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, no.42, Sep. 1983, p.9.

¹⁰⁶*Timaru Herald*, 6 Aug. 1873, p.3, 28 July 1873, p.3; *Press*, 1 Mar. 1873, p.2; *Harbinger of Light*, no.37, Sep. 1873, p.493, no.203, Jan 1887, pp.3363-4; Lotti Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds; A Sequel to Beds I Have Slept In*, Christchurch 1882, pp.52-3. See table iii.

Though few spiritualists lived in Westland, the adjacent Nelson province sustained a significant number of spiritualists from the late-1870s. The Nelson province encompassed many of the gold-mining areas of the West Coast in the 1870s and '80s. Nelson city itself was an explicitly secular and non-denominational Wakefield settlement which was "basically Protestant, with a decidedly low church or evangelical cast to the local Anglicanism."¹⁰⁷ Gardner contends that it conformed to the "'Paradise of Dissent' pattern proclaimed by South Australia."¹⁰⁸ These factors suggest that the general climate of the province was not unfavourable to spiritualism. It is likely that spiritualism in Nelson city received impetus through the visit of Emma Hardinge Britten in 1879 and the presence of W.D. Meers, who was active in forming a freethought society in 1883. According to a local reporter, a lecture by Britten on "the origin and destiny of the human soul" attracted "one of the largest audiences we have ever seen in the Theatre Royal".¹⁰⁹ In 1891, most spiritualists in the Nelson province appeared to reside in the Buller and Inangahua counties on the West Coast.¹¹⁰

Though spiritualism grew steadily throughout the period, it was always dogged by negative perceptions circulating in wider society. As further background for later chapters, the second half of this chapter discusses these perceptions and outlines the changing image and nature of spiritualism in the 1870s and '80s. It examines first a general shift in attitude among intellectuals from curiosity to relative scepticism toward spiritualist claims over the period. Second, it outlines perceptions circulating in wider society that spiritualism had subversive and pathological tendencies injurious to the community. The specific reactions and opinions of various Christian groups is reserved for detailed analysis in chapter three.

CURIOSITY AND INCREDULITY

Very generally, the 1870s were a period of relative curiosity toward spiritualism, and the 1880s one of growing incredulity. This trend is illustrated below through examining opinions among members of the New Zealand Institute (NZI), the country's leading intellectual body (comprised of several affiliated provincial organisations).

The NZI is a useful gauge of educated and scholarly opinion. In the 1870s and '80s, the institute was not a fully exclusive and elite body, nor the organ of a small clique

¹⁰⁷Jim McAloon, *Nelson: a Regional History*, Nelson 1997, p.44.

¹⁰⁸W.J. Gardner, "The Founding of Nelson and Canterbury: a Comparative Study", *Historical News*, no.48, May 1984, p.4.

¹⁰⁹*Nelson Evening Mail*, 27 Oct. 1879, p.2. See also *Colonist*, 1 Nov. 1879, p.3. Britten delivered lectures in Nelson under the auspices of the Nelson Institute. F.W. Irvine (a local surgeon and well-known Nelson dignitary who is discussed in chapter four) appeared to openly support her. Meers' involvement in a freethought association was alluded to in the *Echo*, 13 Oct. 1883, p.3.

¹¹⁰See tables ii and iii.

of scientists. School teachers, clergymen, doctors and local identities discussed a wide range of scientific and intellectual topics alongside formally educated scientists. The NZI, therefore, represents a significant and reasonably diverse body of opinion in settler society. (Scientific investigations into spiritualism in the wider community is reserved for detailed discussion in chapter seven).

In the first four years of the NZI (founded in 1869), many members expressed the view that spiritualism was worthy of scientific investigation. President of the Otago Institute, Justice Charles Ward, spoke extensively on spiritualism to a "large and fashionable gathering" during his inaugural address of 1869. Referring to a subject "which has recently been much discussed among us," Ward declared that "there are few psychological phenomena of our time which call for keener investigation from men of science than those attributed to spiritualism." He urged scientists to rise above their prejudices and embrace the study of spiritualist phenomena: "When there arises a philosopher who will not pretend to despise these phenomena for fear of injuring his reputation for good sense - a man of science, unswayed by imagination and superstition, ... - we may then hope to learn by what cause, and in what manner, are produced the marvels, real or pretended, to which spiritualism owes its present celebrity."¹¹¹ In 1871, J.S. Webb (secretary of the Otago Institute) felt "very much obliged to those scientific men who have taken in hand to examine the phenomena on which spiritualists base their theories". At the Auckland Institute, president Theophilus Heale (a surveyor and Native Land Court Judge) asserted that by virtue of spiritualism's presence in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* "it cannot be unbecoming in anyone to refer to it."¹¹²

Many leading scientists and intellectuals investigated the topic in depth. The Dunedin astronomer and mathematician, Arthur Beverly, wrote a paper for presentation at the Dunedin Society for Investigating Spiritualism. Dr. Joseph Giles, president of the Westland Institute, formed a circle with friends and discussed results in the pages of the *New Zealand Magazine*.¹¹³ The eminent Canterbury geologist, Julius Von Haast, was also interested in spiritualism. Describing his spiritualist neighbour, John Marshman, as "rather a shrewd man", Haast discussed spiritualism with him in the 1860s and read a work by A.R. Wallace on the Davenport Brothers. Though he believed Wallace's views would not stand "the test of sound reasoning", in 1873 he attended lectures by J.M. Peebles, who later described him as "a scholar, a liberalist, thoroughly up in geology and biological studies, and pre-disposed in favour of Spiritualism."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Justice Ward, "Inaugural Address", *TPNZI*, vol.2, 1869, p.427.

¹¹²[Otago Institute], *Report of the Meeting of the Otago Institute*, p.3; *TPNZI*, vol.4, 1871, p.421; Theophilus Heale, "Anniversary Address", *TPNZI*, vol.5, 1872, p.448.

¹¹³*Echo*, 21 Sep. 1872, p.2; J Giles, "Spirit Seeking and Table Talking", *New Zealand Magazine*, 1876, pp.293-309.

¹¹⁴Some of Peebles' lectures were chaired by Haast's friend and colleague Michael Brenan Hart, the Mayor and owner of coal mines in the Malvern hills. *Press*, 27 Feb. 1873, p.3, 1 Mar. 1873, p.2; obituary

The experiments of William Crookes were the primary stimulus behind scientific interest in New Zealand at this time. At the Otago Institute, J.S. Webb responded with a paper entitled "Notes upon the experiments on the so-called Psychic Force recently made by Mr Crookes". Webb invoked the likelihood of fraud, dismissed Crookes' experimental method as unscientific and cast aspersions on his state of mind.¹¹⁵ Webb's assessment was hotly contested by Robert Stout, who supported Crookes' findings during a lengthy reply.¹¹⁶ At the Auckland Institute, Theophilus Heale echoed Webb's sentiment. He branded spiritualism "the most popular dream of our day." However, T.B Gillies informed fellow members that he hoped to demonstrate the existence of a psychic force.¹¹⁷ As Superintendent of Auckland, Gillies attended several public experiments and debates on spiritualism in later years, though never formally presented his own investigations.

Opinions hardened among detractors in the 1880s. A dim view of spiritualism was expressed in 1883 by the president of the Otago Institute, Alexander Montgomery, a Scottish-born schoolmaster. In an oration entitled "Science and Ordinary Knowledge", he portrayed spiritualism as akin to savage superstition and the uncritical observations of the ignorant. It was deemed "a notable example both of the indiscriminating manner in which appearances are accepted as facts, and of the hasty, unreasoning way in which causes are assumed by the multitude." Quoting men such as Huxley and Bain, he contrasted scientific knowledge with the "ordinary man's knowledge" which "cannot be regarded as the result of observation in the true sense of the term."¹¹⁸ Montgomery's stance echoed the frustration of many intellectuals in Britain who bemoaned the lack of scientific education among the Victorian public. He disliked the confidence of laymen to speak with authority on matters of science. His views reflect a gradual shift in Victorian society in which the practice of science moved away from the public sphere and into the professional laboratory, the domain of 'experts'.¹¹⁹

Montgomery's stance may have been influenced by William Lant Carpenter, who toured New Zealand in 1880 crusading for increased scientific education in schools. As the son of W.B. Carpenter, one of the foremost scientific critics of spiritualism in Britain and a leading advocate of scientific education,¹²⁰ William Lant's visit had some significance for those interested in spiritualism. Carpenter informed his audience that

for M.B. Hart, *Press*, 10 Aug. 1878, p.4; Von Haast, *Sir Julius Von Haast*, pp.322,541-2,643-8,697-8; Peebles, *Around the World*, p.87.

¹¹⁵[Otago Institute], *Report of the Meeting of the Otago Institute; Otago Witness*, 23 Dec. 1871, p.17.

¹¹⁶[Otago Institute], *Report of the Meeting of the Otago Institute*. See also "a Spiritualist" who replied in the columns of the *Echo*, 27 Jan. 1872, p.3.

¹¹⁷Heale, "Anniversary Address", p.442; *New Zealand Herald*, 25 June 1873, p.3.

¹¹⁸*New Zealand Journal of Science*, no.1, vol.2, Jan. 1884, pp.38-45; *TPNZI*, vol.16, 1883, p.566.

¹¹⁹Alison Winter, *Mesmerised: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*, Chicago 1998, pp.300-4.

¹²⁰Winter, *Mesmerised*, pp.287-93,303.

spiritualism was the deplorable result of a lack of training in scientific observation among the young.¹²¹

In 1883, a striking debate took place at the Auckland Institute which epitomised the hardening of attitudes in the 1880s. This debate was provoked by William D. Campbell, a geological surveyor, engineer and spiritualist. Formerly affiliated to the Westland and Wellington Institutes, he was a member of the Auckland Institute during 1881-5, elected vice-president in 1883. Campbell wrote several papers for the *TPNZI* and held an interest in Australian Aboriginal culture.¹²² In September 1883, he delivered an oration entitled "Psychological Investigations", a paper intended as a summary of research on spiritualist phenomena. He believed spiritualist phenomena were real, and that their existence effectively brought the spiritual into the domain of science, rescuing it from "the whirlpool of metaphysical discussion into which it has drifted." Spiritualism, he argued, was involved in the important task of elucidating the spiritual dimension of matter. Discrediting sceptical disbelief, Campbell concluded with the following statement: "Will it not be probable that in future ages savans [sic] will quote how until the end of the nineteenth century people thought they knew all about matter, when they had weighed, measured, and chemically examined it, and had no idea of the spiritual essence in it all, and had not even proved the earthly and spiritual existence of the human soul?" At the subsequent meeting of the Institute, Edward Augustus Mackechnie, a solicitor, wrote a paper entitled "The Spell of the Supernatural" which bluntly dismissed spiritualism as superstitious and pathological. He argued that "a very large number of persons" - by which he meant mediums, mystics and other visionaries - possessed minds which were predisposed to hallucinations and indulging in "ideal realisations of spiritual possibilities". Mackechnie then stated that "There was reason to believe that such minds were ... imperfectly constituted, or that they were enfeebled by disease, or that by constant indulgence in hallucination, they became so degenerated that they would be prepared, ... upon insufficient evidence, to believe in Mumbo-Jumbo, or the fetish of the African". His fellow members heartily endorsed Mackechnie's assassination of the subject.¹²³ Campbell was not elected an officer of the Institute the following year.

Several factors help explain why spiritualism was increasingly dismissed in the Institutes. As a rule, controversial subjects were held in disdain and carefully side-stepped. As Stenhouse points out, they threatened the viability of the struggling young

¹²¹In Dunedin, T.M. Hocken drew attention to Carpenter's connection with spiritualism when introducing him. *ODT*, 24 Dec. 1880, pp.2-3.

¹²²Campbell was an Associate of King's College (London), Fellow of the Geological Society, and an Associate Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. According to Horace Leaf, a British spiritualist, Campbell was "probably the greatest authority" on Aboriginal rock art. He moved to Sydney in 1886. For his NZI publications, see *TPNZI*, vol.11, 1878, pp.146-9,297-8, vol.12, 1879, pp.25-6; vol.14, 1881, pp.450-8; vol.15, 1882, pp.459-60. Horace Leaf, *Under the Southern Cross: a Record of a Pilgrimage by Horace Leaf*, London 1923, p.126.

¹²³*New Zealand Herald*, 20 Sep. 1883, p.1(supplement), 16 Oct. 1883, p.3.

New Zealand Institute. In addition, many colonial scientists conceived of their role as fact collectors rather than theorists. Rather than debate controversial theories, they deferred to authorities from Europe.¹²⁴ Sectarian religious discussions were frowned upon. Spiritualism had been inciting fierce religious debate in the wider community, and dragging these unsavoury episodes into the Institutes would have caused disharmony and conflict. A general consensus was reached with regard to debates over science and religion: the thorny issues raised in them were diluted by a hazy Natural Theology which assumed an all-wise Creator at the heart of nature but required little further elaboration, thereby avoiding sectarian squabbles. God was viewed as tending to work through invariable natural law rather than direct divine intervention. Another factor behind hostility was members' desire to foster an elite image as respectable and objective expounders of scientific truth. Many in the Institutes hoped to spread the gospel of science and scientific expertise in wider society. Discussing spiritualism could militate against this desire, since the movement was often associated with fraud, 'quackery', immorality and scandal.

The atmosphere during Mackechnie's reply to Campbell at the Auckland Institute reveals the degree of controversy and animosity spiritualist topics could provoke. Disharmony and ill-feeling prevailed. A chemist, J.A. Pond, complained that Campbell's paper was "one of that debatable kind which, like discussion on a religious subject, did not admit of inference and demonstration from observed facts, and consequently would be interminable if they became the ordinary topics for consideration." Campbell could not understand why his colleagues had criticised him so harshly, to which Mackechnie allegedly replied "it was not to be expected that he should after describing a class of persons who stood so near the boundary line of insanity." The *New Zealand Herald* comically portrayed the evening's debate as "incandescent with cerebral activity."¹²⁵ Mackechnie's attack was probably motivated by religious and ideological antipathies. A writer for the *Freethought Review* insinuated that "the author of this able and useful paper was propitiating the religious feeling of his audience".¹²⁶ Mackechnie's religious scepticism, his distaste for socialism and his belief that idealism commonly led to error (a stance expressed in his work *The Influence of the Ideal*), was ample motivation to attack spiritualism. Nevertheless, Mackechnie was deeply interested in the powers of the mind and religious issues on life after death.¹²⁷

¹²⁴John Stenhouse, "The 'Battle' between Science and Religion over Evolution in Nineteenth Century New Zealand", PhD thesis, Massey University 1985, pp.60-2.

¹²⁵*New Zealand Herald*, 16 Oct. 1883, p.3.

¹²⁶*Freethought Review*, no.4, Jan. 1884, p.3.

¹²⁷E.A. Mackechnie, *On the Influence of the Ideal*, Auckland 1897; *New Zealand Herald*, 16 Oct. 1883, p.3; *New Zealand Journal of Science*, vol.1, no.4, June 1882, p.193; E.A. Mackechnie, *The Closed Bible: a State Error*, Auckland 1898. Mackechnie supported the Bible-in-Schools mainly because he believed that religious belief of some kind was essential to personal well-being, thus he supported the teaching of Confucius in China, the Koran in Islam and Buddha in Buddhist countries. Influenced by Herbert Spencer, he was laissez-faire and Social Darwinist in disposition: see his paper on "The Curse of Charity", *TPNZI*, vol.17, 1884, pp.453-4. E.A. Mackechnie, "A Mysterious Therapeutic Agent",

The move away from the open-minded curiosity of the 1870s can be traced in the lives of individuals. One such individual was Arthur Beverly, a prominent mathematician and astronomer. Beverly immersed himself in spiritualist investigations in the early-1870s, but by the turn of the century was sceptical of the spirits and their messages.

Beverly was a member of the Otago Institute, elected vice-president for 1869-70. Retiring early in life from his watch-making business, he devoted his life to pursuits such as astronomy, botany, mathematics, pyramidology and spiritualism. K.C. MacDonald observes that he was "a kind of public consultant to whom difficult calculations were constantly referred by industrialists and local authorities."¹²⁸ However, Beverly did not court fame and self-aggrandisement. "Modest and retiring",¹²⁹ he preferred not to publish either his scientific work or philosophical speculations. This was in contrast to his good friend, Alexander Bickerton, the professor of Chemistry and Physics at Canterbury College for much of 1878-1902. They maintained a correspondence for many years, occasionally visiting each other and regularly exchanging ideas and calculations.¹³⁰ Bickerton was a rather eccentric figure. He was very liberal in his views, to the point where he earned a reputation as an advocate of free-love. He spent most of his life propounding Cosmic philosophy, a romantic evolutionary philosophy predicated on the immortality of the universe, and his 'partial impact' thesis, a theory on the origin and evolution of stars.

Beverly disapproved of Bickerton's rather eccentric and speculative science, but sympathised with his liberal world-view. In 1878, Beverly cautioned his friend: "hypotheses that will not stand the test of figures are not worth a straw." When comparing Bickerton's theoretically-driven research with his own, he told him that "you, like a bird, hop lightly from branch to branch in the tree of science" whilst "I prefer acting the part of the sloth, always keeping at least three holds on a bough at a time." This did not constitute a rejection of Bickerton's philosophy. On the contrary, Beverly sympathised with his world-view and sought, like his friend, to mould modern evolutionary science into a palatable religious world-view. Beverly once told Bickerton that "We want badly at present, a reliable work giving the history of cosmic philosophy up to date."¹³¹ He regularly guided, criticised and informed Bickerton on various issues, giving his thoughts on drafts before their publication in the *TPNZI*. Bickerton acknowledged the assistance he received from Beverly, noting on one occasion that "Mr Beverly ... has been studying the

TPNZI, vol.22, 1889, p.122; E.A. Mackechnie, "The Story of Lazarus", *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine*, vol.1, no.3, 1899, pp.171-4.

¹²⁸K.C. MacDonald, *City of Dunedin: a Century of Civic Enterprise*, Dunedin 1965, p.76.

¹²⁹His friend Henry William Reid said this of him. Hardwicke Knight, "Arthur Beverly", (pre-publication version), Hocken Library, MS 91/86, p.15.

¹³⁰Letters between Beverly and Bickerton have survived for the period 1878-1894: Beverly-Bickerton correspondence, 1878-1894, box 1, folder 1, Canterbury Museum Library. Beverly to Bickerton, 17 May 1879, box 1, folder 1, item 5, Canterbury Museum Library.

¹³¹Beverly to Bickerton, 8 June 1879, box 1, folder 1, item 9, Canterbury Museum Library; Beverly to Bickerton, 14 Sep. 1887, Box 1, folder 1, item 17, Canterbury Museum Library.



Arthur Beverly

various mathematical problems of complete cosmical impact for more than a dozen years."¹³²

One of Beverly's favourite academic interests was pyramidology. Drawing from the work of John Taylor and C. Piazzi Smyth, many pyramidologists believed that the Great Pyramid of Egypt was a divinely inspired monument - a Bible in stone - which painted a colossal stone picture of the millennium. Though regularly ridiculed, pyramidology attracted the interest of several prominent New Zealand citizens, including Sir George Grey, F.W. Irvine, Archdeacon Stock, Rev. M.W. Green and Alfred Brunton. Probably the only work published in New Zealand during the period under study was that of John Leith, the lighthouse keeper at Manakau, whose eccentric theories were dismissed as absurd by Beverly. Peebles claimed that Beverly "knows more about the geometrical and astronomical purposes of the great pyramid *Ghizeh* than any other living man."¹³³

Beverly's views on spiritualism are neither acknowledged nor delineated by historians. According to recollections of his close friends, Beverly was a spiritualist in his early years, though drifted away from belief late in life. In 1872 he was treasurer of the Dunedin Society for Investigating Spiritualism. In the same year, he wrote a paper (read in his absence) in which "he related some extraordinary experiences which he has had during the last two or three years." Beverly maintained a small and select coterie of friends throughout his years in Dunedin. Robert Stout was among them. Stout often went for walks around the hills of Dunedin with Beverly - accounts of which were published - and in 1873 they both sat on the stage during the orations of J.M. Peebles in support of his spiritualist views. In 1907, Stout recalled solemnly that "there are not many left of those who used to assemble with Mr Beverly and myself at his house."¹³⁴

Following Beverly's death, Sir Frederick Revans Chapman was given the task of detailing Beverly's life and interests in order to assess how best to administer his estate. His summary of Beverly's views on spiritualism pointed to belief in his early Dunedin years: "He had in his later years left to drift out of sight his fantastic opinions of the existence of a spirit-inhabited world which had the merit, or demerit, of being entirely, and perhaps refreshingly at variance with those of Crookes and Wallace." Chapman also recorded these comments from Beverly in the early-1900s: "Pursued Spiritualism as a

¹³²Beverly to Bickerton, 20 Sep. 1878, box 1, folder 1, item 3, Canterbury Museum Library; Bickerton, "Partial Impact (Paper No.4): On the General Problem of Stellar Collision", *TPNZI*, vol.12, 1879, p.184.

¹³³*ODT*, 10 Apr. 1886, p.4; John Leith, *An Answer to Professor Piazzi Smyth's Questions as to the Meaning of the Symbols of the Great Pyramid of Egypt*, Auckland 1885; see also Leith's *The Zone of Water*, Christchurch 1886; Peebles, *Around the World*, p.100. According to Knight, Beverly wrote to Piazzi Smyth to inform him of errors and false reasoning. Knight, "Arthur Beverly", [pre-publication version], p.14.

¹³⁴*Echo*, 22 June 1872, p.2, 21 Sep. 1872, p.2; *Bruce Herald*, 18 Feb. 1873, p.6; "Memorandum to the Chancellor from Mr Justice Chapman", 4 Dec. 1908, in material for a biography of Arthur Beverly, Sir Frederick Revans Chapman collection, MS-227, Hocken Library; Letter, Robert Stout to Mr Burton, among papers relating to the Beverly Bequest, MS-287, Hocken Library.

science. Nothing came of it. Spirits are liars (laughing)." Chapman wrote further that Beverly was "on friendly terms with the Great Spiritualists." Indeed, J.M. Peebles gave affectionate mention of him in *Around the World*, eulogising his scientific abilities and noting that he had corresponded with Augustus De Morgan.¹³⁵

Hardwicke Knight finds an interest in the Great Pyramid "inconsistent with Beverly's reputed agnosticism",¹³⁶ yet clearly it was perfectly consistent with several other interests which Knight has not cited. Spiritualism, pyramidology and Cosmic Philosophy offered intellectual challenges and an opportunity to discern a naturalistic basis for religious belief. A letter from Beverly's mother in 1853 suggests that evangelical Christianity formed a conspicuous part of his childhood.¹³⁷ It appears that Beverly drifted away from this religion but later sought a surrogate belief more in accordance with his progressive scientific views. This was a central motivation behind his interest in spiritualism. However, neither spiritualism, Cosmic Philosophy or pyramidology appear to have provided him with the sort of evidence that inspires enduring belief. A member of the Dunedin Freethought Association, Beverly's headstone suggests that he died as he lived, a "searcher after Truth."¹³⁸

SOCIAL SUBVERSION AND MENTAL PERVERSION

As spiritualism expanded and increased in visibility in New Zealand, so too did negative perceptions surrounding its practice. Spiritualism was equated in many settlers' minds with mental illness, physical debility and the perversion of the social order. Such notions had their roots in early nineteenth century European responses to mesmerism, Owenism and related 'isms' of that time, and are discussed in depth below.

The notion that spiritualist belief, and mediumship in particular, was a manifestation of physical and mental weakness had widespread currency among settlers. This perception was related to Victorian constructions of the female gender. Women were active and visible within the spiritualist movement in Europe and America as propagandists, mediums and rank-and-file adherents. Though women were probably less prominent in the New Zealand movement (due to the sex imbalance of settler society),

¹³⁵C.W. Adams to F.R. Chapman, [early 1900s], in material for a biography of Arthur Beverly, Sir Frederick Revans Chapman collection, MS-227, Hocken Library; F. R. Chapman, "Memorandum to the Chancellor from Mr Justice Chapman", 4 Dec. 1908, in material for a biography of Arthur Beverly, Sir Frederick Revans Chapman collection, MS-227, Hocken Library; "Notes of Conversations with F.R. Chapman", in material for a biography of Arthur Beverly, Sir Frederick Revans Chapman collection, MS-227, Hocken Library; *Bruce Herald*, 18 Feb. 1873, p.6; Peebles, *Around the World*, pp.99-101.

¹³⁶Hardwicke Knight, "Arthur Beverly", (a paper delivered at a Physics Department seminar in 1984 at Otago University), MS-191/84, Hocken Library, p.5.

¹³⁷Beverly's mother to Beverly, dated 27 May 1853, MS/190, folder 1, Acc 8614, Hocken Library.

¹³⁸Knight, "Arthur Beverly", p.7.

spiritualism still remained a visibly feminised practice (see chapters two and six). Historians observe that such visibility fortified public opinion around the idea that spiritualism denoted feminine weakness: irrationality, hysteria and insanity. In the Victorian age, madness itself was deemed feminine in nature. Victorians situated women on the side of "irrationality, silence, nature, and body" and men on the side of "reason, discourse, culture, and mind." A belief common among doctors was that female physiology rendered women physically vulnerable and emotionally unstable. Oppenheim claims that the dictates of female biology were deemed by doctors to be "utterly beyond the regulatory power of the individual will." An excess or deprivation of sexual activity could suggest some form of illness. In Showalter's view, "uncontrolled sexuality seemed the major, almost defining symptom of insanity in women."¹³⁹

An American physician, Frederic Marvin, claimed to elucidate an ailment called "mediomania". This affliction was linked to a condition called "uteromania", the incorrect position of the uterus in the female body. Marvin contended that this condition was liable to lead women to "embrace some strange ultra-ism - Mormonism, Mesmerism, Fourierism, Socialism, oftener Spiritualism."¹⁴⁰ In America and Europe there were cases in which women were declared insane because of a belief in spiritualism and were committed to asylums by their husbands. An interesting case is Georgina Weldon, who fought for her sanity in London against her husband Henry and a "mad-doctor alienist" called L. Forbes Winslow during 1878-1885. In a similar incident, Louisa Lowe was incarcerated by her husband for her spiritualist beliefs. She later formed an 'Alleged Lunatics Friend Society'.¹⁴¹ Though these are rather extreme examples, they lend weight to Owen's contention that "spiritualism had become the special prerogative of perverse womanhood."¹⁴² From its first entry into the public arena in Britain, spiritualism provoked a general medical debate which led to the conclusion that spiritualism was pathological. As Owen explains: "experts in the field of lunacy were troubled by what they perceived as an association between the mediumistic trance and an entire range of pathological conditions. In particular, they regarded with distaste and suspicion the close involvement of women in spiritualist practice, likening female mediumship to hysteria - a condition which had unsavoury sexual and expressive connotations."¹⁴³

The belief that spiritualism was symptom of mental illness was common in New Zealand. In 1869, the Presbyterian minister of West Taieri, Rev. William Gillies, declared

¹³⁹Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, London 1985, p.74; Janet Oppenheim, "Shattered Nerves"; *Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England*, Oxford 1991, pp.201-5.

¹⁴⁰Cited in Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, London 1989, p.149; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, p.137.

¹⁴¹For Weldon, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London*, London 1992, pp.171-89; for Lowe, see Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.153-4, 168-201.

¹⁴²Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.149-50.

¹⁴³Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.139.

that many spiritualist manifestations were the result of "diseased imaginations" and "a peculiar development of hysteria."¹⁴⁴ In later years, father Le Menant Des Chesnais (a conservative Roman Catholic priest), A.R. Fitchett (a liberal Methodist minister who later joined the Anglican church), James Copland (a conservative Presbyterian minister) and reverend Matthew W. Green (a Church of Christ evangelist) were among many clergymen who linked spiritualism with insanity and hysteria. In 1874 the *Otago Christian Record* reprinted an article from the *New York Medical Review* which stated that in 25 years spiritualism had "attacked" three million people in the United States. The article claimed that of 24,000 insane persons there, 7500 "may be directly traced to spiritualism." The *New Zealand Tablet* published an article in 1879 which claimed that in America "spiritism" had driven 7522 people mad in one year alone.¹⁴⁵ Atheist and rationalist settlers held similar views. Archibald Campbell stated that "in this year of 1879 one is almost ashamed to write even so little in condemnation of a belief in visions and dreams as being other than results of a distempered brain or disordered stomach." Joseph Evison, a freethought lecturer, believed apparitions were due to "organic mental disorder and disease" of the brain.¹⁴⁶

Spiritualism was also linked by its critics to perverse sexuality in New Zealand. Since the practices of mesmerists prior to the French Revolution, seance-like activity and trance states were inextricably linked with female frailty, immorality, and social subversion.¹⁴⁷ Fara argues that in Britain these associations were fostered by male medics and other antagonists to prevent women from gaining equality and to maintain social order in the face of the subversive tendencies of the French Revolution.¹⁴⁸ Detailing experiments into mesmerism in Britain in the 1830s, Alison Winter describes how mesmerism became "a practice whose fundamental effect was to make people deceive each other and themselves, lose control of their bodies and minds, and become the means of each other's ruin." Reports circulated about mesmerists using their powers to seduce female subjects. "For some onlookers mesmerism was a dramatic subversion of the moral and social order."¹⁴⁹

In the seance room, men and women held hands in darkened confines. Playful and affectionate touching, games and petty amusement were commonly indulged in. During seances at the house of Thomas Allan, a Dunedin horticulturist, singing, laughing and chatting were a common feature of sittings. Spirits flitted about the room touching seancegoers and playing games, and musical instruments played tunes such as "Auld Lang

¹⁴⁴*Otago Witness*, 14 Aug. 1869, p.16.

¹⁴⁵*Otago Christian Record*, no.28, 28 Mar. 1874, pp.10-11; *New Zealand Tablet*, 20 July 1879, p.15.

¹⁴⁶*New Zealand Herald*, 30 Apr. 1879, p.6, 16 Oct. 1883, p.3; *Wairarapa Standard*, 19 Nov. 1884, p.2.

¹⁴⁷These associations are discussed by Lindsay Wilson, *Women and Medicine in the French Enlightenment: The Debate over Maladies des Femmes*, Baltimore 1993, pp.104-24.

¹⁴⁸Patricia Fara, "An Attractive Therapy: Animal Magnetism in Eighteenth-Century England", *History of Science*, vol.33, 1995, pp.130,145-6,154-5; Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, pp.25-174

¹⁴⁹Winter, *Mesmerised*, pp.100-2,128.

Syne" to the accompaniment of spirit voices. "Thomson", a playful spirit who frequented their seance chamber, regularly touched and brushed by sitters. Though predominantly a family affair, Allan's seances appeared exhilarating to those present.¹⁵⁰ These sorts of practices raised suspicions among non-believers, who detected immoral tendencies and fraud. An article in the *New Zealand Christian Record* in 1879 alluded to seances in Melbourne. It observed how "young ladies and gentleman anxious to investigate are compelled to sit in darkness" in which men could conceal their "tricks of hanky-panky".¹⁵¹

The activities of the American spiritualist, reformer and advocate of 'free-love', Victoria C. Woodhull, had not gone unnoticed in the colonies. Free-love adherents in America, many of whom were spiritualists, argued that marriage ought to be based on 'spiritual affinity' rather than custom, economics, reproduction and expediency. Though the term 'free lover' was often used as a blanket label to denote promiscuity and infidelity, Anne Braude notes that most free-lovers opposed promiscuity and continued to support marriage as long as it was based on love. She argues that free-love critiques of marriage should be viewed within the nineteenth-century context of the elevation of motherhood and separate spheres.¹⁵² Nonetheless, spiritualists and women's rights reformers were often tainted by the promiscuous and subversive reputation of American free-lovers. As in Britain, spiritualists in New Zealand distanced themselves from free-love to maintain respectability.¹⁵³

Rev. M.W. Green was one of many who sought to discredit spiritualism in New Zealand by citing its links with free-love. Green painted spiritualism as wild, shamelessly immoral and thoroughly supportive of free-love. Spiritualism, he argued in *The Devil's Sword Blunted*, was "the Enemy of Marriage" and of "Social and Domestic Happiness." Quoting Dr Talmage, an ex-spiritualist, Green attacked spiritualism in no uncertain terms:

I indict spiritualism ... because *it is a social and marital curse*. The worst deeds of licentiousness, and the worst orgies of obscenity, have been enacted under its patronage. ... *Families innumerable* have been broken up by it. It has pushed off hundreds of young women into a life of profligacy. It talks about 'elective affinities,' and 'affinital relations,' and 'spiritual matches,' and adopts the vocabulary of free-lovism.

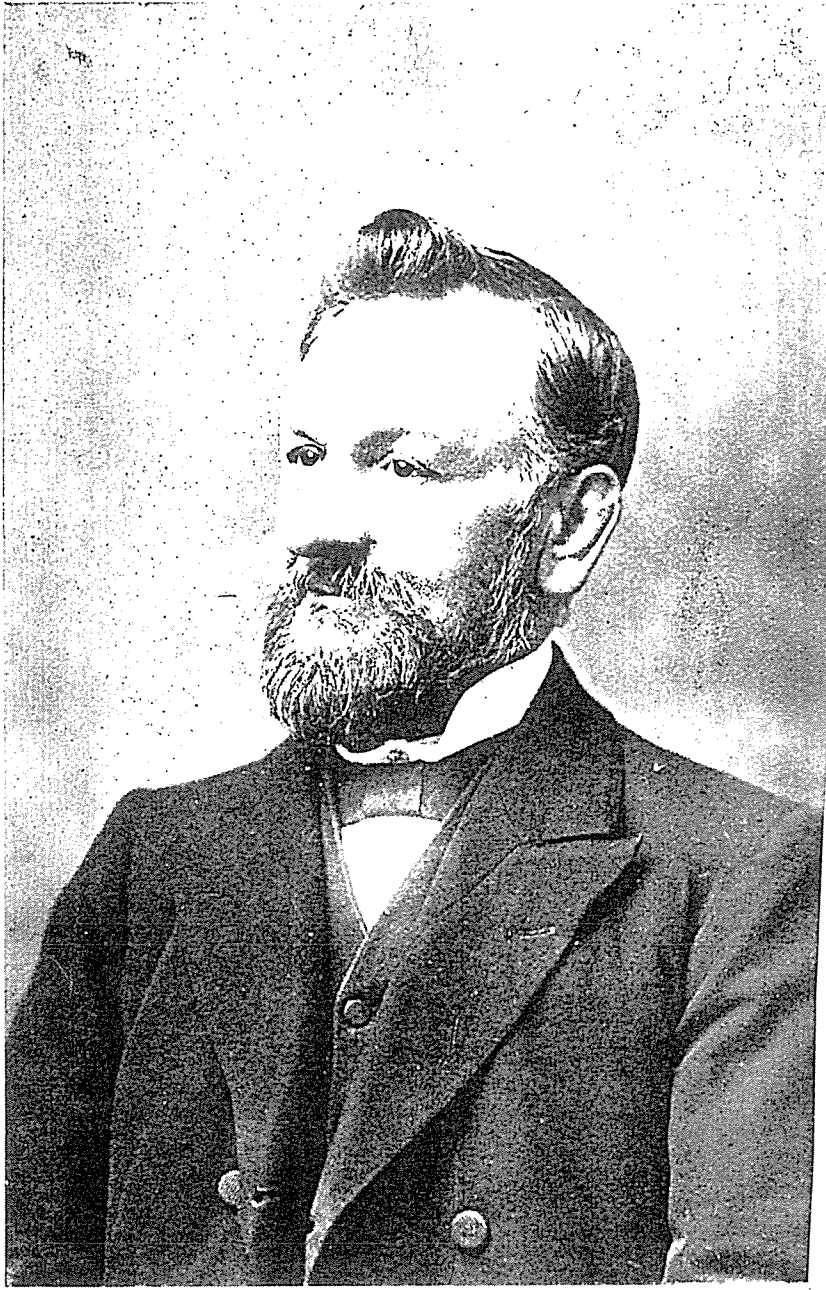
Liberal in many of his political views, Green supported marriage reform but believed spiritualism went well beyond this end: "whoever were seeking to correct its abuses, might

¹⁵⁰*Harbinger of Light*, no.39, Nov. 1873, pp.528-30; *ODT*, 25 Sep. 1873, pp.1-2(supplement), 26 Sep. 1873, p.1 (supplement), 19 May 1877, p.1(supplement).

¹⁵¹*New Zealand Christian Record*, 16 May 1879, p.11.

¹⁵²Anne Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, Boston 1989, pp.117-25,127-9,135-6.

¹⁵³Braude, *Radical Spirits*, p.80; Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.37-8.



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be encouraged and aided in so laudable a work; but it is not the reform of marriage, but its entire destruction, that spiritualism is seeking." He went on to argue that spiritualism aimed to institute a new world order opposed to Christ and based on self-sovereignty, an order that would lead to social anarchy.¹⁵⁴

Spiritualists and their sympathisers rallied to defend spiritualism's moral rectitude. Robert Stout took up the cause against Green by producing a number of spiritualist sources from America which rejected the doctrines of free-love.¹⁵⁵ In 1887, William McLean defended spiritualism in a similar fashion against criticisms Rev. Alexander Dowie. He declared that "the principles of Spiritualism and the unrestrained indulgence of the animal passions, are so irreconcilable as to be incapable of permanent co-existence."¹⁵⁶

To some critics, spiritualism served to demonstrate that the female gender itself contained inherent moral and spiritual dangers to the community. Father Des Chesnais warned Christians that women were used by Satan as a vehicle for his destructive purposes. Des Chesnais expressed these views in a pamphlet which condemned spiritualism as a satanic plot to encourage demon-worship:

Even to our first mother Eve, the devil appeared as medium to enlighten her about good and evil, pretending to be very much interested about her spiritual and temporal welfare, whilst making a desperate effort to deceive and ruin her, and, through her, her husband also and all the human race, as he did, alas, with too much success. It is still principally by female mediums this arch-deceiver tries to lead us astray. Let us beware!¹⁵⁷

The feminised and sexualised image of spiritualism served to discredit spiritualists in many different contexts. Women heavily patronised professional spiritualist healers.¹⁵⁸ Following public healing sessions conducted by G.M. Stephen, a magnetic healer and spiritualist from Australia, press observers commonly referred to the presence and support of women. The *Otago Daily Times* reported these sessions to be patronised on one occasion by "a very large number of men, women and children." Another report noted that Stephen was attended by many well-dressed women, while another "was marked by the presence of a considerable number of ladies, including Mrs M. Stephen, who, with another lady, sat on the platform."¹⁵⁹ In Christchurch, Stephen was discredited by one antagonist who claimed that "there were lots of old women present who held up their hands and said,

¹⁵⁴Matthew W. Green, *The Devil's Sword Blunted; or, Spiritualism Examined and Condemned out of the Mouths of its Own Advocates*, Dunedin 1879, pp.90-1,104-11.

¹⁵⁵*ODT*, 15 July 1879, p.3, 16 July 1879, p.3, 17 July 1879, p.3, 18 July 1879, p.5, 22 July 1879, p.3, 25 July 1879, p.3.

¹⁵⁶McLean, *Spiritualism Vindicated*, p.36.

¹⁵⁷Theophilus Le Menant Des Chesnais, *Animal Magnetism and Spirit Mediums*, Wellington 1884, p.14.

¹⁵⁸Healers' clientele are discussed in chapter four.

¹⁵⁹*ODT*, 2 Apr. 1883, p.3, 9 Apr. 1883, p.3, 16 Apr. 1883, p.2, 23 Apr. 1883, p.3, 31 Mar. 1884, p.3, 5 May, 1884, p.2-3, 5 June 1884, p.4; *Echo*, 14 Apr. 1883, p.3.

'wonderful, wonderful!'" Many people in Christchurch were sceptical about spiritualist healers because, as another reporter wrote, they doubted "the willing testimony in the first instance of half-frightened women, and of men whose minds had evidently received no great amount of training in accuracy of observation".¹⁶⁰

Settlers occasionally alluded to parallels between sentimental 'feminised' men and nervous women. Dr. James Copland, a conservative Presbyterian minister and qualified medical doctor from Dunedin, believed that spiritualist cures were obtained mainly from female hysterics and hypochondriacs, and he noticed that men were not exempt from this "nervous condition".¹⁶¹ Speaking at the East Taieri church in 1872, a fellow Presbyterian minister, D.M. Stuart, believed spiritualism would only entrap "a few nervous ladies and sentimental young men."¹⁶²

Occasionally, events occurred which reinforced the link between spiritualism, illness and feminine weakness. In Auckland in November 1876, the *Evening Star* reported the news of an alleged spiritualist exorcism. A few days earlier, the melancholic news surfaced of a painter named John Soar committing suicide by slashing his throat after an attempt to use poison had failed. Soon after "Mrs Wilson", a friend of the deceased, reported strange scraping noises and rapping in her house. Described by the *New Zealand Herald* as "old and nervous", she recruited the services of J.C. Wilkes and a number of other local spiritualists to investigate the likelihood of ghostly agency. The spirit of John Soar allegedly returned from beyond. Expressing regret at taking his life, he wished to talk with and console his wife who was committed to the lunatic asylum. Sceptical press reports, dismissed as misinformed by Wilkes, alleged that youths were responsible for the phenomena by throwing stones on the roof of Mrs Wilson's house. The incident was reported in several colonial newspapers.¹⁶³ In this instance, nervous and mentally ill women and spiritualists were depicted as credulous victims of a youthful prank.

Trance states carried connotations of mental perversion and moral danger that reflected poorly on spiritualism. As Owen notes, trance states were intimately linked with epilepsy, hysteria, hallucination and psychoses, as well as moral degeneracy. "It was seen [by doctors] as a psychological abnormality whereby normal consciousness gave way to a lower and more automatic level of mental functioning." Psychiatrists interpreted abnormal mental phenomena as the result of some form of physical ailment. Mediumship was deemed either fraudulent or a serious medical problem.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰*Press*, 16 Mar. 1883, p.3; *Taieri Advocate*, 21 Feb. 1883, p.3.

¹⁶¹Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.149-50; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, p.105; James Copland, *Two Lectures on the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, Dunedin 1873, p.20.

¹⁶²*Oamaru Times*, 28 June 1872, p.4.

¹⁶³*Evening Star*, 20 Nov. 1876, p.2; 22 Nov. 1876, p.2; *New Zealand Herald*, 17 Nov. 1876, p.2.

¹⁶⁴Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.143; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, pp.134-6.

Ethical issues were at the heart of opposition to trance states. The objections raised by critics of spiritualism were similar to those raised in earlier decades during the heyday of mesmerism.¹⁶⁵ The idea of forfeiting will-power in an unconscious state opened up the prospect of exploitation by magnetisers and seance-goers. There was also a danger of opening the mind to morbid influences and evil spirits, raising moral issues over the loss of individuality. M.W. Green told a Dunedin audience that such loss of individuality was anti-God: "the giving up of *individuality* is what these beings are seeking", he stated. "Nothing can be of God which requires the giving up of our manhood; nothing can be good which requires the suspension of will and judgement". He also raised the concern that mediumship deteriorated character, eroded will-power, incited crime and led to suicide. Violent convulsions and bodily contortions were cited as common elements of the seance.¹⁶⁶ Green cited several incidents from Dunedin seances of "personal violence used by the spirits, and the destruction of will power." At one seance, a man "was taken possession of by a spirit, doubled up like an indian rubber ball, and thrown with great violence about the room, and at last leaving him on the floor foaming at the mouth and vomiting."¹⁶⁷

The prospect of giving oneself over to unknown entities was a real concern for mediums. Jane Elizabeth Harris had considerable reservations about her "calling" into the spiritualist cause: "I was afraid of being 'controlled' by invisible entities, or of being deceived by untruthful messages". At one seance, however, she was overcome: "I sat still, frightened, and presently the table rocked towards me, and I lost consciousness I was entranced. The control spoke to Mr. Harris [her husband], told him I was to be a messenger, and work for the cause. When I came to myself, Mr. Harris told me, and I could not believe it."¹⁶⁸ Spiritualists acknowledged that mediums were often passive, sensitive individuals of highly refined constitutions who, through trance, exposed themselves to spiritual dangers and expended considerable energy doing so. Their sensitive constitutions and natural empathy made them receptive to all manner of psychic, mesmeric and magnetic influences.¹⁶⁹ A central reason why Madame Blavatsky turned her back on spiritualism was because seances summoned unsavoury entities, cast-off lower principles and deceptive spirits which threatened the health of mediums. Blavatsky co-founded Theosophy with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott in 1875 and subsequently condemned mediumship and the seance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵See Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, ch. 6, and Winter, *Mesmerised*, *passim*.

¹⁶⁶Green, *The Devil's Sword Blunted*, pp.63-75; See also Theophilus Le Menant Des Chesnais, *Animal Magnetism and Spirit Mediums*, Wellington 1884, pp.18-19.

¹⁶⁷Green, *The Devil's Sword Blunted*, pp.73-4.

¹⁶⁸"Autobiographical Writings of Jane Elizabeth Harris-Roberts", in Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.206.

¹⁶⁹Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, New South Wales University 1986, pp.4-5; Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", p.210.

¹⁷⁰Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.165.

The more sinister aspects of spiritualism were often glossed over by spiritualists. A publication simply entitled *Spiritualism*, written between 1883 and 1886 by a "John McLean" of Otago for the benefit of the Spiritualistic Association of Victoria, revealed a darker side to the spirit world that was rarely publicised by adherents. *Spiritualism* was intended to serve as advice and warning to spiritualists concerning evil spirits which inhabit the earth and cause pain and disease. A disturbing and incoherent tract, McLean's work described the insidious methods by which evil spirits maliciously torture humans and inflict disease, depicting the seen and unseen worlds as one coalescent whole that is continually interpenetrated by hordes of diabolical entities.¹⁷¹

Historians have identified common denominators in the lives of many mediums. They were often recruited from disenfranchised, marginalised groups in society. Female mediums predominated. Their childhoods were characteristically unhappy, lonely and sickly. Fits, trances, daydreaming and rich fantasisation were not uncommon. Owen contends that female mediums tried to escape their miserable childhoods through fantasy. They were "young girls who inhabited rich worlds of their own creation" and their fantasies "represented a flight from an unpalatable present into the comfort of daydreams and imaginings."¹⁷²

Ill-health and general debility were commonly referred to in connection with mediums in New Zealand, by both adherents and non-believers. In 1879 an unidentified Dunedin medium possessed several bodily afflictions, though when entranced his ailments subsided. Otto Hüg, a clairvoyant, was prone to cataleptic fits from an early age and suffered ill-health through expending considerable energy while entranced. A reporter who visited Hüg in Christchurch was met by a "nervous and ailing man" who had recently suffered a severe fit.¹⁷³

The life and background of David Rayne Wright (1858-1930) provides an interesting insight into mediums and mediumship. Wright was one of several mediums affiliated to the Wellington Association of Spiritualists in the 1880s. Born in Stockton-on-Tees, Durham, the son of a master mariner, he emigrated to Wellington in 1879 and married Emily Trevor in 1882, whose parents were members of a Methodist Free Church in the city. Wright himself was from a Methodist background, an affiliation he appears to have shed quickly: he later became a spiritualist and an Anglican lay preacher. Wright was a building inspector in England, but in New Zealand he was listed as a 'bricklayer' in directories and later become a farmer in Taranaki. However, according to memoirs of his grand-daughter, Winifred Malcolm, he was rather pretentious in character, prone to illness and averse to physical labour. "I do not think David ever worked with bricks or as a

¹⁷¹John McLean, *Spiritualism*, Dunedin 1886.

¹⁷²Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.206-8; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, pp.10,125.

¹⁷³*Evening Star*, 16 June 1879, pp.1,4; [Otto Hüg], *Otto Hüg the Swiss Medical Clairvoyant; the Voice of the Press*, [undated]; *Tairi Advocate*, Feb. 1883, p.3.

workman". He "suffered from Angina" and "liked being David Rayne Wright Esq. and was very much so in his dealings with local people." Winifred claimed that Wright taught her that English folk were superior to others, a trait which took her "a lot of unlearning". Wright was once reported as very nervous and "in indifferent health" when lecturing to the Wellington Association of Spiritualists in 1884. Interestingly, another grand-daughter who came under Wright's influence, Winifred Esther, developed symptoms not uncommon among nascent mediums. Though she attended a Wesleyan Church with her family, Winifred Esther did not relate to other children at Sunday school - she was an only child - and instead came under the tutelage her spiritualist grandfather. Her character was described by Winifred Malcolm: "She lived in a fairy land world with herself as princess. She did not want other children. She preferred her imaginary friend Jean, horses and her dogs, plus the fairy folk who were always with her. She was totally English, so even spoke with a Yorkshire accent. Her grandparents played a large part in making her the individual person she became."¹⁷⁴

Clearly, many mediums developed within a complex social and psychological matrix of marginalisation, emotional despair, frustration, rebellion and physical debility. However, this point should not disguise the significance of gender in the construction of spiritualism as pathological. The assumption that women were innately susceptible to mental illness, dominated by the dictates of their biology, irrational and emotional were powerful ideological forces shaping contemporary perceptions of spiritualism. Most spiritualists did not conform to the pathological image constructed by their detractors.

To conclude this introductory survey, a few observations about the character and status of spiritualism in the late-1880s and 1890s are appropriate. Some of the enthusiasm behind spiritualism was siphoned into other causes which gained momentum at this time, such as women's rights, socialism, trade unionism, Theosophy and alternative healing movements. Spiritualism decreased in status and ceased to attract widespread public attention, and firm believers parted company with sympathetic but unconvinced investigators. In Britain, many spiritualists grew disillusioned with the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882) in the mid-1880s and left in disgust. An "uneasy alliance" between the two groups prevailed prior to World War One.¹⁷⁵ Similar divisions precipitated the demise of New Zealand's most successful spiritualist organisation during the period, the Wellington Association of Spiritualists. Ellwood notes that it finally collapsed in 1891 following resolutions made in 1888 to rid the society of "'the quasi-religious element from the Sunday meetings'." A Psychological Association succeeded

¹⁷⁴Mary Ann "Nell" Bayne, (compiler), "Robinson Wright and Mary Ann Wright. Their Family History", unpublished manuscripts, 1984, genealogical collection 115(2), ATL, pp.85-96; *New Zealand Times*, 16 Sep. 1884, p.2.

¹⁷⁵Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp.139-41; Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, p.270.

it.¹⁷⁶ New spiritualist societies tended to be more sect-like, with less flexible membership criteria, unpublicised meetings and private investigations. The 1890s were also a time when ardent believers increasingly demarcated phenomenal spiritualism (or spiritism) from the 'higher' belief in spiritualism as a philosophical world-view. This trend was clear in a pamphlet published by the Dunedin Psychological Society in 1900. Anxious to distance itself from mediumistic fraudulence and disreputable adherents, the Society stressed that: "Those who believe that departed spirits communicate with man, however they disagree, are spiritualists; but only as they cultivate the noble faculties, and harmonise their lives, are they entitled to the name in its HIGHEST meaning".¹⁷⁷

However, spiritualism rose and fell in popularity at different times in different parts of the country. The simple model of development from curiosity to incredulity, precipitating the retrenchment of the spiritualist community, is a very general one which overlooks regional variations in the timing of its arrival, its growth and local factors which coloured the character of spiritualism. Somewhat inaccurately, this model also implies that spiritualism failed and collapsed in New Zealand. Though spiritualism was not particularly successful in terms of mass converts, it persisted and expanded into the twentieth century. Census returns reveal that spiritualists increased in number in the 1890s and kept pace with population growth (see table i). The New Zealand spiritualist community soon bubbled into life again in the late-1890s following the apostolic efforts of Jane Elizabeth Harris. Harris returned to New Zealand from Melbourne in 1896 and was surprised by her success as a lecturer. As she herself wrote:

A pleasant surprise awaited me, for I had heard that Spiritualism was dead, or forgotten now. However the large audience that filled the Opera House on our first night showed at least an active interest in our mission and we were able to meet all expenses. Three months there [Auckland], then we were asked to form and start a society, which we easily did, from the audience, willing friends came forward...

Harris instigated spiritualist societies in following years in other New Zealand centres,¹⁷⁸ and the rise in spiritualist numbers in the late-1890s and early-1900s (see table i) was due in large part to her mission. This culminated in the formation of the National Association of Spiritualists in 1907. What is more, as later chapters will demonstrate, spiritualist ideas and energies were injected to a wide range of liberal movements in settler society that took root and expanded beyond the 1890s. Spiritualism, therefore, neither collapsed nor failed

¹⁷⁶Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.44-5. *Stones'* Wellington directory for 1892-3 records the existence of the "Wellington Psychological Association" lead by former WAS officers William McLean and Isaac Plimmer. Though the WAS collapsed in 1891, it did not become extinct. In 1907 McLean claimed that he had been president of the WAS for 25 years, *AJHR*, vol.5, 1907, I-14, pp.1-5.

¹⁷⁷Dunedin Psychological Society, *What is Spiritualism? Its fundamentals and the gist of its teachings*, Melbourne 1900.

¹⁷⁸Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.211-12.



Delegates and visitors at the first conference of the New Zealand National Association of Spiritualists, Christchurch 8-10th Feb., 1907. William McLean is third from the left in the middle row, Jane Elizabeth Harris (at this time Harris-Roberts) is third from the left in the front row and William Nation on the far right of the front row

to influence the direction of settler society. The following chapter expands on these points through dissecting the nature of settler society and the character of the New Zealand spiritualist community.

CHAPTER TWO

SPIRITUALISM AND SETTLER SOCIETY

The general structure and philosophical climate of New Zealand settler society nurtured spiritualist beliefs, sympathies and practices. This chapter outlines the spiritualist community in New Zealand, noting that many adherents were respected, successful and often influential members of society. It then discusses the general features of settler society and their relationship to the rise of spiritualism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the nature and significance of interactions between Pakeha spiritualists and Maori.

THE SPIRITUALISTS

As a group, spiritualists have received little attention from historians in New Zealand. Ellwood's *Islands of the Dawn* offers few details on most of New Zealand's leading spiritualists and does not analyse the composition of the spiritualist community as a whole. On the other hand, analysis of the spiritualist community is fraught with difficulties. Spiritualists were a diverse group of individuals with varying degrees of commitment to the movement and who were changeable in their actual beliefs. Nevertheless, a number of trends emerge which shed light on a relatively unknown category of settlers.

As noted earlier, spiritualism was in many respects a feminised religious belief. It preached women's rights and offered opportunities for leadership, personal development and social advancement. It also offered healing and consolation, particularly for mothers during bereavement, and was a religious practice that could be performed in the privacy of the home circle. The sentimental, gentle and empathetic features of spiritualist philosophy probably resonated more strongly with Victorian women. Census data suggest that, proportionately, women predominated from the 1890s, a trend which (in light of such small numbers) may have been present in earlier decades.¹ Adherents often acknowledged that female mediums were of a higher quality than male. Female mediums certainly predominated in Melbourne.² Whatever their actual number, women were relatively visible within the movement in New Zealand, particularly as public speakers as chapter six will demonstrate.

¹See table iv and graph i of this thesis.

²Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", p.204.

There is a general perception among scholars and laymen alike that spiritualism was dominated by the elderly whose nearness to death encouraged them to look more favourably on the subject. This perception is inaccurate, though not totally without foundation. The more visible adherents in New Zealand were somewhere between their late thirties and late fifties when active for the cause. Nevertheless, spiritualism was attractive to young idealistic settlers of various shades, and many mediums were young men and women, teenagers and children.³

F.B. Smith observes that members of the VAPS were "independent, self-confident migrants" with initiative and confidence in their own judgement. They tended to be prosperous, strove to educate themselves and read widely. Its leaders were well-off and respectable, and the bulk of the spiritualist vanguard were probably drawn from the artisan class.⁴ These observations are also true of New Zealand adherents.

Leading spiritualists in New Zealand tended to be prosperous, respected and established members of the community. In Dunedin, Robert Wilson (newspaper publisher and editor), Robert Rutherford (an accountant influential in local politics), Joseph Braithwaite (the leading bookseller in Otago), John Logan, J.P. (secretary to the Superintendent and a wealthy landowner), and Thomas Allan (a leading horticulturist) were among the leaders of the movement. In Auckland, Samuel Coombes (a wealthy draper and clothier) and J.C. Wilkes (an ex-printer and retired soldier) were vocal defenders of the new faith. Their Wellington counterparts included William McLean, M.P., J.C. Harris (newspaper proprietor and publisher) and Angus McCurdy, a printer who later became a well-known unionist and newspaper proprietor. In Palmerston North and surrounding districts, men such as T.R. Walton (a draper and insurance agent) and Joseph Dinsdale (a teacher, later town clerk in Devonport) pioneered the cause while William Nation did the same in the Wairarapa. W.D. Meers (a clothing manufacturer) was "one of the more prominent business men in Christchurch".⁵ Adherents were not limited to settlers of British descent. German, Danish and Swiss spiritualists lived in New Zealand.⁶

Spiritualism had considerable popularity among well-to-do sections of the populace. Part of the attraction of spiritualism for this class in Britain was explained by Professor William F. Barrett, a leading British psychical researcher: "not only do they have much greater means and leisure to conduct inquiries, but those for whom life is

³Census enumerators collated the age distribution of each religious denomination in 1901. Compared to orthodox Christian denominations, spiritualists had significantly more adherents over the age of 21 (61.5% compared to 53.4% for Anglicans, 51.8% for Roman Catholics, 54% for Presbyterians and 49.3% for Brethren) and significantly less adherents under the age of 21 (for example, in the 5-15 age bracket, 14.6% compared to 22% for Anglicans, 23% for Roman Catholics, 21.7% for Presbyterians and 26.2% for Brethren). These findings may be due to a plethora of factors and are far from conclusive. *Census*, 1901, part II, table IX, pp.117-18.

⁴Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.54,66-7.

⁵*Press*, 22 Oct. 1908, p.8.

⁶For example, Otto Hüg (a Swiss-born clairvoyant who is discussed in chapter four), Oscar Heiden (a Danish man living in Wellington) and R. Schmidt (a German who lived in Rangiora and was mentioned by Peebles, *Around the World*, p.88).

somewhat blase', find in Spiritualism an ever-new sensation: they enter on its pursuit with zest, and, from inquirers, rapidly become converts."⁷ The wealthy, influential and fashionable commonly attended the orations of well-known spiritualists when they toured New Zealand. Mayors, local councillors and politicians often patronised these figures, frequently chairing and endorsing their lectures. When J.M. Peebles and Dr. E.C. Dunn first appeared on stage in Dunedin in 1873, seated behind them were "nine or ten highly respectable citizens", including two members of the Provincial Council and one of the City Council.⁸

The bulk of the spiritualist vanguard appeared to be composed of petty proprietors and white collar workers from what can loosely be called the respectable segments of the lower middle class. The 1891 census, which listed spiritualist numbers in boroughs and counties, reveals that lower middle-class suburbs in Dunedin and Invercargill contained significant numbers of adherents. Clerks, drapers, journalists, editors, printers, booksellers, teachers, small retailers and businessmen of various kinds, along with their wives and families, were commonly involved in the movement. It is noteworthy that a significant number of spiritualists were drapers and clothiers.⁹ This may stem from the fact that in Britain tailors were involved in Owenism more than any other group of workers in the 1830s and were heavily involved in political radicalism in general.¹⁰ The working classes were less well represented within the movement, though this may have more to do with their relative invisibility in historical sources. Among the most active and visible adherents, some level of education, a degree of financial independence and an aspiration to respectability were common denominators, though in the depressed 1880s many spiritualists, like other citizens, suffered heavily.¹¹

A significant number of spiritualists were printers, editors, journalists, booksellers and writers.¹² These groups combined reading and intellectualism with work and were confronted with the major controversies of the day on a regular basis. Spiritualists, secularists and radicals of all persuasions gravitated toward such occupations. Journalists

⁷Quoted in Benjamin Wills Newton, *Reflections on the Character and Spread of Spiritualism*, 2nd ed., London 1882, pp.7-8.

⁸They included the following: John Logan (at that time a deacon of Knox Church), Robert Stout (at that time a Provincial Councillor for Caversham), Arthur Beverly, J.P. Armstrong (at that time Provincial Councillor for Mt Ida), John Millar, F.S.A. (former Provincial Councillor 1867-70 and well-known civic engineer), Thomas Redmayne (a member of the old Road Board and the former caricaturist and proprietor of Otago's *Punch*), Henderson Carrick (bookseller) and H.H. Moody (hotelkeeper). *Echo*, 8 Feb. 1873, pp.2-3; *Bruce Herald*, 18 Feb. 1873, p.6; *Evening Star*, 3 Feb. 1873, p.3.

⁹Examples include Samuel Coombes, W.D. Meers, T.R. Walton and an unidentified draper mentioned in the autobiographical writings of Jane Elizabeth Harris-Roberts, in Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.206.

¹⁰Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1983, pp.100-1.

¹¹A number of prominent spiritualists and their sympathisers suffered financially during the long depression, including T.R. Walton, W.D. Meers, Samuel Coombes, Thomas Allan, Angus McCurdy, J.N. Merry (a Dunedin accountant) Arthur Bettany (an Auckland provision dealer), J.P. Armstrong and John Logan. See index for *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette of New Zealand*.

¹²Examples include J.C. Harris, T.L. Langbridge, Angus McCurdy, J.B. Hunter, Robert Wilson, J.C. Wilkes, George Moore and William Nation. Several booksellers were spiritualists: Joseph Braithwaite, Newton Fairs, Thomas Price and Henderson Carrick.

commonly investigated spiritualism as part of their work, occasionally becoming believers as a result. Some clerics noted with dismay the anti-clerical element within predominantly secular publications. Writing in the Presbyterian *Evangelist*, John Elmslie cited an "editorial delinquency" in the press and bemoaned a lack of knowledge of Biblical issues and the circulation of "much bumptious talk about 'advanced thought' and the like." He labelled the newspaper press "a Literary poison which is fitted to hurt the souls of men."¹³ John Dickson echoed these sentiments in his *History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*.¹⁴

Regardless of background, spiritualists were liberal in sentiment and often radical in politics. An aversion to orthodox Christianity was almost universal. Spiritualism was intimately linked with freethought in New Zealand and shaded effortlessly into ultra-liberal Christianity. Spiritualists with Anglican and Presbyterian backgrounds were common in New Zealand, though a disproportionate number came from evangelical groups such as Methodists and Baptists, and from liberal denominations such as Unitarianism and Swedenborgianism. Among the 33 in Otago who declared themselves spiritualists to census enumerators in 1871 were six "Unitarian Spiritualists" and six "Presbyterian Spiritualists".¹⁵ Spiritualism commonly became the temporary resting place of spiritually restless individuals seeking to 'find' themselves in a world of increasing change and religious uncertainty.

In common with their Melbourne counterparts, many prominent New Zealand spiritualists read widely and possessed literary talent. F.B. Smith claims that a "tense imaginative state induced by spiritualist beliefs gave many a creative impulse." He argues that a "pre-occupation with fantasy led many Victorian spiritualists to dramatise their thoughts in Utopian novels and verses." Their works were often allegorical criticisms of contemporary society and religion, and served as a form of catharsis for the authors.¹⁶ Spiritualist philosophy was infused with romantic and utopian sentiment and spiritualism appeared to both foster and attract a significant degree of utopian speculation, literary originality and artistic preoccupations. There were significant links between spiritualist reform efforts and utopian writing, and these are explored in chapter five.

Several New Zealand spiritualists were skilled literary figures. Henderson Carrick (1823?-86), a bookseller and commission agent, possessed "considerable literary ability" and was a noted writer for the *Otago Witness*. He was also reputed to be the author of the "The Chronicles of the Barracouta Club" in the *Saturday Advertiser*.¹⁷ Thomas

¹³John Elmslie, "The Newspaper Press", *Evangelist*, vol.5, no.4, 1 Apr. 1872, pp.102-8. See also "Spiritualism and the Press in Dunedin", *Evangelist*, vol.5, no.4, 1 Apr. 1872, pp.97-8.

¹⁴John Dickson, *History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, Dunedin 1899, p.338.

¹⁵J.T. Thomson, *Social Problems: An Enquiry Into the Law of Influences*, London 1878, p.202.

¹⁶Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.104-6.

¹⁷Born in Ireland, Carrick came to Dunedin from Glasgow in 1872 and opened a bookshop on George Street, later becoming a commission agent. He was a combative spiritualist who "was known as a very keen debator." He was liberal in politics, being a follower of Robert Owen and an advocate of co-operative societies along the lines of those "successfully carried out by several religious communities in America." Carrick was also an active member of the Dunedin Athenaeum, and he owned £450 worth

Redmayne (1832-86) came from a highly creative family and gained repute as a humorous writer and cartoonist for Dunedin's *Punch*.¹⁸ Several New Zealand women writers had an interest in spiritualism, including Jane Elizabeth Harris and Ellen Ellis (see chapter six).

Susan Nugent-Wood and Lady Barker, both recognised literary figures in their day, appeared to hold a deep interest in the subject. Though their specific religious views remain unclear, their spiritualist sympathies deserve mention. Lady Mary Anne Barker, well known to many settlers for her work *Station Life in New Zealand*, spent three years living on a Canterbury sheep station with her husband, Frederick Broome, during 1866-8. Her biographer, Betty Gilderdale, notes that an interest in spiritualism preceded her move to New Zealand. A childhood visit to an old gypsy apparently placed her on course for an interest in spiritualism. The gypsy was "uncannily accurate" in her assessment of Barker's future. Later in life Barker had many conversations with friends about spiritualism, and after the death of her first husband in 1861, she confessed a "strong hope and firm belief that my dear husband is ever near me."¹⁹ Lady Barker and her husband moved to London and were adopted into high society. According to gossip circulated by the "Melbourne correspondent" of the *Otago Daily Times* in 1873, Barker was alleged to be a spiritualist medium and Frederick was revealed to be the anonymous author of articles on spiritualism in the *London Times*.²⁰

Susan Nugent-Wood, the wife of John Nugent-Wood (the Otago goldfields Warden and later Resident Magistrate of Southland) became well known in Otago as a writer of verse, short stories and articles in newspapers.²¹ She delivered what may have been the first public lecture in favour of spiritualism in New Zealand. On 21 April 1869 she gave "a night with the spirits" at Switzers, Central Otago, to help fundraise for a local hospital. Lecturing to a packed audience, Nugent-Wood began by "at once asserting her own steadfast belief in spirits being permitted to visit this world of ours, and ... expressed the happiness which such a conviction gave her." She went on to recite a number of ghost stories, "each of which depended on evidence apparently irrefragable".²²

Nugent-Wood's poetry echoed her spiritualist sympathies. Its warm sentimentality, emphasis on family and religion, and ubiquitous allusion to death, longing and the nearness of angels and spirits had obvious appeal to spiritualist tastes. Her work

of land in Caversham. *ODT*, 31 July 1872, p.2, 29 Jan. 1886, p.5; *Echo*, 22 May 1880, p.2; *Otago Witness*, 6 Feb. 1901, p.32; Isaac Selby, *Memories of Maoriland*, (bound with *Hinemoa: the Leap-Year Pantomime*), Melbourne 1925, p.78; New Zealand Property Tax Department, *A Return of Freeholders of New Zealand*, Wellington 1884.

¹⁸ Redmayne was a Presbyterian from Settle, West Yorkshire. He was variously a carpenter and land speculator, and married Elizabeth Fazakerly, the daughter of a renowned amateur horticulturist. Scholefield, *DNZB*, vol.2, p.208. See especially John Drummond's entry on the Redmaynes in Jane Thomson (ed.), *Southern People: a Dictionary of Otago-Southland Biography*, Dunedin 1998, pp.411-12.

¹⁹ Betty Gilderdale, *The Seven Lives of Lady Barker: author of Station Life in New Zealand*, Auckland 1996, pp.18,81; Lady Barker, *Station Life in New Zealand*, London 1871; Lady Barker, *Station Amusements in New Zealand*, London 1873.

²⁰ *ODT*, 8 July 1873, p.3; Gilderdale, *Lady Barker*, pp.137-41.

²¹ *DNZB*, vol.1, p.608.

²² *Otago Witness*, 8 May 1869, p.5.

captured the tribulations of life as a female settler far from home, separated from loved ones. She herself struggled with illness for much her life, endured the death of several children and longed for the sunnier climes of her Australian homeland.²³ In "Thoughts of Home" she alluded to old friends in distant lands watching over her and being ever near:

In the whirl of busy life
Let thy thoughts a moment stray
From the world and all its strife
To those dear ones far away.
Quench not all the holy light,
Which their love hath poured on thee,
Say, God keep those spirits bright,
Ever watching close to me!²⁴

"A Matin Song" dealt with a mother's loss of child and the nearness of "spirit-children" in heaven:

Blessed be He who lifts our darlings up,
Yet lets us hear their tiny voices call;
Bidding us follow them and find the land
Of ceaseless morning, never-ending spring,
Where nothing e'er grows old!²⁵

Nugent-Wood succinctly and sympathetically expressed themes dear to the hearts of female settlers and spiritualists.

Other leading poets catered specifically for spiritualist tastes. Thomas Bracken, who penned New Zealand's national anthem, published a collection of poems entitled *Behind the Tomb* (1871). This volume received a favourable review in Melbourne's *Harbinger of Light*. "Some of the poems are of more than ordinary merit", the reviewer wrote, "and full of progressive ideas and foregleams of immortality." Dunedin's Presbyterian organ agreed. Positive and congratulatory, a reviewer in the *Evangelist* wrote that Bracken was "powered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love."²⁶ Bracken's *Lays of the Land of the Maori and Moe* (1884) contained poems that could easily bear spiritualist interpretations, as "The Other Side" illustrates:

²³Susan Nugent-Wood and Henry Lapham, *Waiting for the Mail*, Melbourne 1875, pp.120,123; *DNZB*, vol.1, p.608.

²⁴Susan Nugent-Wood, *Bush Flowers From Australia*, London 1867, pp.85-6.

²⁵Nugent-Wood, *Bush Flowers*, pp.55-7.

²⁶*Evangelist*, vol.7, no.1, Jan. 1875, p.2.

When the midnight gusts are sighing -
 Sighing through the saplings tall,
 Tapers dim, and embers dying,
 Paint weird shadows on the wall,
 Treasured forms start up before us,
 Softly through the room they glide,
 And we hear, in loving chorus,
 Voices from the other side.

Who shall say, in vile derision,
 "There is nought but clod to clod?"
 Slavelings of a stunted vision,
 Ye cannot discover God.
 Fenced within your narrow hedges,
 Truth ye have not yet descried -
 Ye have no immortal pledges
 Coming from the other side.

Writing in the *Freethought Review*, Robert Pharazyn described Bracken's work as "egoistic sentiment" that had great appeal among those whose belief in immortality was less than certain.²⁷

Another noteworthy trait among spiritualists was an affinity with the natural world. This affinity stemmed from their sentimentalism and love of beauty, and from a belief in the benevolence of the laws of nature. The natural world provided a metaphor for human immortality and the renewal of life in a different sphere. This was vividly illustrated at spiritualist funerals. At the grave of a Dunedin blindmaker, James Johnston, mourners were told that "no portion of Nature is lost." The constant renewal of life in nature was dwelt upon: "innumerable germs are ready to spring up when the winter has passed. Wherever we turn we discover new organisms taking the place of the old. There is no destruction of life. It is by the law of life, that though a thing fades yet it doth not perish, that the soul claims eternal life."²⁸ A visiting American spiritualist, George Chainey, echoed the views of many spiritualists and freethinkers when he contrasted the orthodox afterlife with a pantheistic picture in which humans died to be born again in the natural environment: "Better a million times that we reappear only in the grass or flowers, or be

²⁷Thomas Bracken, *Lays of the Land of the Maori and Moea*, London 1884, p.107; *Freethought Review*, no.8, May 1884, p.12.

²⁸*Echo*, 1 May 1880, p.3. At the funeral of Mary Williamson in 1873, Thames spiritualists "wore evergreen immortelles bound with white ribbon on the left breast and ... [held] bouquets of flowers in their hands." Whiteness and white flowers (which were usually tossed into the grave) symbolised not only separation, but renewed life. An inversion of Christian practice, the use of white (a symbol of virginity and innocence) rather than black was a common feature of spiritualist funerals. *Harbinger of Light*, no.36, Aug. 1873, p.475; Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, pp.240-2.

part of the dust of the most common highway, along which living feet run on errands of mercy and justice, than to wail in hell, or sit with folded hands eternally singing psalms in an orthodox heaven."²⁹ Events such as lectures, farewell gatherings and opening ceremonies were often sites for the symbolic display of nature. Flowers and evergreens were common decorative elements.³⁰

Many New Zealand spiritualists enjoyed greenery and were involved in botanical pastimes and occupations. Two examples among many were William Nation and Thomas Allan. William Nation has been credited by various writers with being the founder of Arbor Day in New Zealand, instigating and organising the first Arbor Day in the country at Greytown in 1890.³¹ Less known to historians is Thomas Allan, one of Otago's leading seedsmen and nurserymen in the 1870s. Secretary of the Royal Horticultural Society of Otago in 1870, Allan imported plant varieties from around the world and published catalogues advertising his wares. Born in Stirlingshire and arriving in New Zealand from Tasmania in the early-1860s, Allan and his family were at the heart of spiritualism in Otago, their large section in Forbury (named Allandale) hosting 200 people for Otago's first annual spiritualist picnic ('grove meeting') in 1874.³²

To reiterate, the spiritualist movement was not monopolised by one particular sex, class or age group, but spiritualists tended to be liberal, anti-clerical and from Protestant backgrounds. A degree of education and an aspiration to respectability were common denominators. Many were infused with the sentimentalism and romantic utopianism characteristic of spiritualist philosophy, and this fuelled creative and reformist energies. These traits made spiritualism popular among a diverse groups of settlers, as well as a magnet for extremists and eccentrics, contributing to its fad-like, fractious character. Nonetheless, most believers were respectable, accepted and often influential members of society.

Believers often experienced persecution in New Zealand, but this persecution was rarely crippling and did not preclude success and acceptance in the community. The experience of William Nation, the editor and proprietor of the *Wairarapa Standard*, is worth quoting in depth. Referring to his active promotion of spiritualism in the Greytown in the 1880s, he wrote:

²⁹George Chainey, *How and Why I Became a Spiritualist*, Boston 1885, p.2. Chainey and his wife toured New Zealand in 1887.

³⁰See, for example, *Bruce Herald*, 18 Feb. 1873, p.6; *ODT*, 2 May 1884, p.3, 21 Mar. 1873, p.2; *Harbinger of Light*, no.37, Sep. 1873, p.493; *Auckland Evening Star*, 9 Dec. 1879, p.3.

³¹*DNZB*, vol.3, pp.355-6; Nation, *The Unseen World*, pp.42-3; Hogg Scrapbook no.17, p.65, Hocken Library, Dunedin; *Message of Life*, no.325, vol.27, 1 July 1930, p.1; A.G. Bagnall, *Old Greytown: the Story of the First Hundred Years of Greytown's Settlement 1854-1974*, Greytown 1953, p.76.

³²Thomas Allan, *Thomas Allan's General Descriptive Catalogue of Garden, Farm, and Flower Seeds, Horticultural implements &c.*, 1878-9, Dunedin 1878; *Mackay's Otago, Southland and Goldfields Almanac for 1870*; *Otago Witness*, 30 Mar. 1926, p.33. An account of the grove meeting (extracted from the *ODT*) appeared in the *Harbinger of Light*, no.54, Feb. 1875, p.777.

Did I suffer in business? some one may ask. Yes, I did. Being the proprietor of a newspaper, Simon Pure and Co., who belonged to the Church, got at me by withdrawing advertisements, giving up the paper, and getting their jobbing work done in other towns; and my family was almost cut off by these Christian professors, and I realised that when the Church persecutes it has no mercy. ... However, I weathered the storm, and did my best for the advancement of the town, I devoted myself to the welfare of the young people, and the trees that were planted on the road-sides were the outcome of Arbor Day efforts, carried through by my energy. For this I was publicly thanked by the Mayor and Borough Council, and to-day I look back and find pleasure in the thought that I did my duty and held on to the truth of spirit return.³³

Nation also recalled an incident when his mediumistic daughter was spoken of at school as "a little imp" by her teacher. Determined to arrest such harassment, he wrote a letter to the "offending teacher" warning that "if he spoke of my little girl among the children as an imp again ... I would meet him in the school ground and horsewhip him." This letter "cleared the atmosphere all round."³⁴

UNSETTLED SPIRITS?

Many historians and sociologists observe that cults such as spiritualism thrive during times of social upheaval. As Diana Basham puts it, "occultism" flourishes when "disruptions of existing hegemonic structures become acute."³⁵ The birth of spiritualism in antebellum America alongside numerous other social and religious movements is the subject of an immense body of scholarship. Referring to such work, R. Laurence Moore writes the following: "The bulk of sensible scholarship tends to treat the movement [spiritualism] simply, as yet another expression of a restless, troubled society. As such, these scholars have placed it in the same category as Mormonism, Shakerism, Millerism, and Grahamism - antebellum movements that Alice Felt Tyler has described as the unstable products of 'freedom's ferment.'"³⁶ Spiritualism is treated as a product of social instability, anomie and rootlessness.

The work of Geoffrey K. Nelson, a sociologist, is a good example of an approach that embraces this 'social disturbance' paradigm. Nelson attempts to account for the rise of spiritualism in America by analysing social conditions in New York State. He traces spiritualism to conditions of anomie, the result of a culture where large numbers of people are uprooted from traditional patterns of life. He identifies a lack of social norms, high

³³Nation, *The Unseen World*, pp.42-3.

³⁴Nation, *The Unseen World*, p.9.

³⁵Diana Basham, *The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society*, London 1992, p.90.

³⁶Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, pp.5-6.

social and geographic mobility, pluralism and tolerance in religion, a rise in rationalist ideas and a milieu of "ethical or psychic deprivation" in which "individuals no longer find the value system of their society meaningful as a guide to the organisation of their way of life." He also notes an "excessive individualism", a lack of regulation and the "breakdown of social control".³⁷ Nelson notes that these conditions were accentuated in New York State prior to the advent of spiritualism.³⁸

W.H. Oliver points out that the 'social disturbance' approach to understanding the rise of prophetic and millennialist movements is derived largely from studies of non-Western cultures.³⁹ Indeed, Nelson compares the rise of spiritualism with cargo cults in indigenous societies: they are responses to the stress of social change and dislocation and tend to be non-ritualistic, enthusiastic (rather than formally organised) and mystical in character.⁴⁰ Spiritualistic practices were a common feature of Maori responses to the disruption caused by the arrival of Europeans and Christianity. The Papahurihia sect in Northland in 1833, for example, was born during a time of social dislocation and involved the use of traditional seance-like rituals, trance mediumship and speaking to the dead.⁴¹ Bronwyn Elsmore provides numerous examples of Maori sects, cults and social movements which employed spiritualistic techniques. Some adopted the practices of European spiritualists. In the 1890s, spiritualism was popular among Maori in the Upper Waihou (Hokianga) district during discontent over the enforcement of the Dog Tax in the area. Seances and spirit-rapping took place. Elsmore writes that this outbreak "was a further symptom and manifestation of the dissatisfaction felt by the local people because of social and political issues."⁴²

The correlation between social disturbance and the birth of new social and religious movements is indisputable. However, as a causal explanation it is simplistic. Such a model is rather ahistorical and risks reducing human thought and activity to socio-economic determinants. Moore rightly states that in accepting this model "we risk losing sight of spiritualism's connection with the dominant cultural values in the nineteenth century."⁴³ Spiritualism was indelibly influenced and shaped by nineteenth-century social and religious concerns and the milieu of mid-century America. What is more, this study demonstrates clearly that spiritualism was not simply a passive product of wider social forces, but a movement of consequence that helped shape those forces.

The root causes behind the appearance of new religious movements in nineteenth-century New Zealand is a topic of debate among scholars, and some of the issues raised in

³⁷Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, pp.69,267, and chapters five and fifteen.

³⁸Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, pp.71-2.

³⁹W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: the Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s*, Auckland 1978, p.16.

⁴⁰Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, pp.76-7.

⁴¹Judith Binney, "Papahurihia: Some Thoughts on Interpretation", *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol.75, Sep. 1966, pp.321-31.

⁴²Elsmore, *Mana From Heaven*, pp.342-5.

⁴³Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, p.7.

these debates are equally relevant to spiritualism. This issue of why so many Maori appeared to embrace Christianity during the 1830s has been discussed at length. Reviewing this debate, Allan Davidson writes: "While it is possible to describe the context in which this [Maori conversion to Christianity] took place and point to various factors which made it possible, it is important to recognise that people became Christians for their own reasons."⁴⁴ The same was true of conversion to spiritualist belief among Pakeha. The rise of spiritualism was, to a significant extent, the result of individuals making personal choices.

Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that spiritualistic beliefs and practices, and the religious longings which fuelled them, remained common (though less visible) during times of relative social stability. Spiritualism persisted and prospered beyond the long depression. Furthermore, many spiritualists were settlers of some standing in the community who enjoyed respect and financial security. Spiritualism was not simply a refuge for social deviants, the disempowered and the confused. These facts must be taken into account when constructing models for cult activity.

Nonetheless, New Zealand settlers' interest in spiritualism was related to social disruption and psychological stress. The traumatic experience of a long sea voyage, the severing of many Old World ties and the hardships of settlement created considerable trauma. The institutional structures and social networks of the Old World were attenuated in the New, creating difficulties of adjustment but also allowing greater permissiveness. The goldrushes exacerbated these conditions and injected wealth, diversity and upheaval to many settler communities. This was followed by depression: bankruptcy, insecurity and threatened utopia. In 1880, Dunedin's Baptist minister, J. Upton Davis, described how in the colonial environment "the rupture of a thousand ties leaves scars upon the soul" and that "the old props are removed and none take their place immediately." He also observed that "everyone does what is right in his own eyes. External authority is small. Independence is easy, and all conduct is free to be eccentric, exaggerated, fast, reckless, and even licentious."⁴⁵

Miles Fairburn paints a bleak picture of colonial life dominated by transience, individualism, bondlessness and atomisation. He contends that "the atomising effect of immigration was greater in New Zealand than in early Australia and in British North America" and that by comparison, "a larger proportion may have immigrated as bondless individuals." Fairburn argues that settlers severed their associations from the Old World but had not dwelt long enough in the New to replace what had been lost. The rootlessness, transience, and dullness of life in isolation fostered anxiety and sense of desperation which

⁴⁴Allan K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: a History of Church and Society in New Zealand*, Wellington 1991, p.16.

⁴⁵*Saturday Advertiser*, 25 Dec. 1880, p.21, 1 Jan. 1881, p.19.

led to a high incidence of loneliness, violence and drunkenness.⁴⁶ Though Fairburn may be overstating the case, he paints an accurate picture of many aspects of colonial life.

The depressed social and economic conditions of the 1880s are particularly relevant to the growth of spiritualism, as they are to many other cults, sects and novel social movements.⁴⁷ Alongside spiritualism emerged freethought, political radicalism, the Salvation Army, Adventism, Mormonism and revivalism generally. The collapse of relative prosperity in the 1880s caused not only bankruptcy, psychological stress and community upheaval, it threatened the realisation of an advanced New World society that so many settlers cherished. In such conditions, settlers explored alternative avenues for hope, happiness and inspiration. Spiritualism offered an optimistic world-view in tune with many settlers' hopes and aspirations. It also offered a range of tangible benefits during a time of uncertainty: consolation, prediction of the future, healing and personal advice on life strategies.

Other features of settler society were also important. On a purely statutory level, there were few legal barriers in colonial society to prevent the growth of spiritualistic practices. Chapter four will demonstrate that laws regulating the medical profession were ineffectual and completely failed to deter spiritualist healers from practicing. Attempts to prosecute and discredit such healers were largely unsuccessful. The New Zealand *Police Offences Act* (1884) had little scope to prosecute clairvoyants, fortune-tellers, mediums and necromancers. In 1892, for example, Madame Zenobia (a fortune-teller) was taken to court in Auckland on the charge of "fraudulent representation ... with a view to obtain money." The case was dismissed by the Judge, Dr. Joseph Giles, himself tolerant of spiritualism, because it did not fall under the 1884 Act. The police prosecutor bemoaned the fact that all references to fortune-tellers and necromancers in the English legislation had been "studiously" omitted in New Zealand.⁴⁸ In the *Criminal Code Act* of 1893, however, scope was given to prosecute spiritualistic fraudulence: "Every one is liable to one year's imprisonment with hard labour who pretends to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration, or undertakes to tell fortunes, or pretends from his skill or knowledge in any occult or crafty science to discover where or in what manner any goods or chattels supposed to have been stolen or lost may be found."⁴⁹ In spite of such legislation, the complex nature of spiritualist practices and phenomena ensured that prosecution remained difficult under the best of circumstances.

The nature of colonial religion did not militate against spiritualism. Broadly speaking, colonial Christianity was characterised by pluralism, tolerance, attenuated church attendance and a relative lack of structure. At the General Assembly of the Presbyterian

⁴⁶Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies*, pp.11-13,134-41,191-3,195-225.

⁴⁷This is noted by Peter H. Ballis, "Introduction: Seventh-day Adventists in New Zealand", in Peter H. Ballis, *In and Out of the World: Seventh-day Adventists in New Zealand*, Palmerston North 1985, pp.12-14.

⁴⁸Section 28, subsection 4, *Police Offences 1884* (NZ); *New Zealand Herald*, 12 Sep. 1892, p.6; *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 Sep. 1892, p.35.

⁴⁹Section 240, *Criminal Code 1893* (NZ).

Church of New Zealand in Auckland in 1876, John Elmslie delivered a discourse on "the State of Religion in New Zealand". Elmslie was a minister in Aberdeenshire before emigrating to Wanganui in 1867 to take charge of St Paul's Presbyterian Church, and his tenure there coincided with the resumption of military conflict in the area between Maori and colonial forces.⁵⁰ The differences in religion between the Old World and the colonial frontier were acutely apparent to him. Lamenting a high degree of nominalism and a lack of church funding, he described a "free and easy indifference which prevails amongst our scattered country population." He characterised "religious declension and religious indifference" as "amongst the most painful features of our colonial life." The "happy influence and needful constraints" of Britain were absent in the colonial environment where "money-making and pleasure-hunting" and popular "manias" engrossed the bulk of the population. He also noted a competitiveness or "unworthy jealousy" amongst the churches which had led to many becoming "alike attached to all, and alike indifferent to all." This, he claimed, fostered a common, broad-based church accepting of all doctrines, true or false and led to "a 'mingle-mangle' Gospel - to the teaching of doctrines that are so incongruous or incompatible that sooner or later religious indifference or practical infidelity must of necessity be the result."⁵¹ Bucking this trend, in 1875 the evangelistic Elmslie and his flock were spiritual beneficiaries of a religious awakening in Wanganui, though he was sufficiently concerned about spiritualism to deliver a public lecture on the topic in the town.⁵²

Elmslie described aspects of religion that scholars such as Michael Hill, Peter Lineham and Hugh Jackson highlight as being characteristic of settler society. Jackson estimates that church attendance in nineteenth-century New Zealand was significantly lower than it was in Britain: 28 per cent in the 1880s compared with 35 per cent in Britain. He argues that a major factor in this trend was the lack of places of worship. Churches had to start from scratch and accommodate greater population increase than in Britain, therefore they struggled to provide adequate facilities for worshippers.⁵³ Lineham points out how the voyage to New Zealand alienated emigrants from regular church disciplines. He notes their disappointment with the churches on their arrival and subsequent declension.⁵⁴ High geographic mobility and dispersed settlement probably played a role in attenuating church attendance, along with the fact that the upper middle classes, who were the most regular church attenders in Britain, comprised a minority of settlers.⁵⁵

New Zealand was a relatively denominational society. Church-based settlements in Otago and Canterbury could not prevent the growth of rival groups in their midst and New

⁵⁰J.G. Elmslie, *John Elmslie 1831-1907: he came from Bennachie*, Christchurch 1963, pp.32-48.

⁵¹*New Zealand Herald*, 9 Dec. 1876, (supplement).

⁵²Elmslie, *John Elmslie*, p.48; *Evening Herald*, 13 Sep. 1872, p.3.

⁵³Hugh Jackson, "Churchgoing in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.17, no.1, Apr. 1983, pp.51-9.

⁵⁴Peter Lineham, "Religion", in Colin Davis and Peter Lineham (eds), *The Future of the Past: Themes in New Zealand History*, Palmerston North 1991, p.12.

⁵⁵Hill, "Religion", pp.54-5.

Zealand became "a patchwork of denominations and sects."⁵⁶ Sectarianism was usually frowned upon, due in part to the non-denominational nature of worship during the early period of settlement and the co-operative and democratic sentiment which pervaded society. Lineham detects a "feeling of distaste for denominational pedantry" among laity of all denominations. Pickens writes: "old world religion was subjected to a process of democratisation, or perhaps homogenisation, the end result being the appearance of a diffused, non-denominational religiosity."⁵⁷ Lineham is impressed by the popularity of non-denominational 'primitive Christianity' in New Zealand, particularly in rural areas and bush settlements. With the remoteness of settlement and the pragmatic necessities of colonisation, this less structured, revivalist form of religion was more practical and appealed as a sort of 'do-it-yourself' Christianity. It was attractive to "settlers who saw less significance in ecclesiastical order and structure, and more value in the security of a warm fellowship built on laity, not clergy."⁵⁸ This religious climate contained spaces for spiritualism to take root. The high degree of nominalism, religious pluralism, the relative weakness of organised religion and the unstructured nature of the colonial environment all suggest that spiritualism had considerable leeway in settler society. The pragmatic necessities of colonial life which fostered 'primitive Christianity' also provided an environment where spiritualism could prosper. Spiritualism itself was often propagated as form of primitive Christian belief, since it rejected clericalism and established doctrine, and adhered solely to the universal fact of spirit communion.

The general outlook of settler society resonated well with spiritualist philosophy. Spiritualism was liberal, democratic, permissive, utopian and progressive. These sentiments were prominent undercurrents within wider society. As Ellwood notes, mid-Victorian romanticism and utopianism infused the population. An optimistic faith in progress and science, and the idea of "building the kingdom of heaven on earth" prevailed. Ellwood writes colourfully: "the romantic mood with its exaltation of feeling and experience over reason, its talk of love reaching beyond the grave, its belief in the human ability always to transcend prior limits, together with its dreams of the distant and the past, of wisdom hidden and primordial, set a climate conducive to Spiritualism, Theosophy, the occult, and the east."⁵⁹ Settler society was also characterised by a pragmatic ethic, fuelled by the necessities of pioneering existence. Spiritualism was often propagated by its adherents as a thoroughly useful, pragmatic belief system. Its philosophy was deemed democratic and egalitarian and in harmony with modern science and philosophy. Robert

⁵⁶Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*, p.45.

⁵⁷P.J. Lineham, "How Institutionalised was Protestant Piety in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand?", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.13, 1984-5, pp.374-5; Lineham, *New Zealanders and the Methodist Evangel*, pp.9-10; K.A. Pickens, "Denomination, Nationality and Class in a Nineteenth-Century British Colony: Canterbury, New Zealand", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.15, no.1, June 1988, p.139.

⁵⁸Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*, pp.19,32-3.

⁵⁹Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.199.

Ellwood is probably correct in his observation that this pragmatic mentality favoured spiritualism's empirical claims.⁶⁰

Spiritualism also resonated with the undercurrent of liberal experimentalism in wider society. Tony Simpson demonstrates that many immigrants came to New Zealand with radical political agendas, and that as a community, settlers had a clear vision of New Zealand as a new beginning where values such as equality, egalitarianism and individual rights ought to be enshrined. Hamer makes similar points in his study of the New Zealand Liberals.⁶¹ As later chapters illustrate clearly, spiritualists were similarly radical and visionary. The hopes and aspirations of spiritualists echoed those of wider society.

The final section of this chapter discusses occasional interactions between Maori and Pakeha spiritualists in New Zealand. It is likely that such interaction, coupled with traditional Maori religious beliefs, helped foster the growth of spiritualism.

SPIRITUALISTS AND MAORI

In the 1870s and '80s, there were significant points of contact between spiritualists and Maori in New Zealand and many striking similarities in belief. Some of these interactions are discussed by Ellwood, who argues that Maori spirituality, like Asian spirituality, inevitably attracted interest from European settlers by virtue of their close proximity. Indigenous religions "presented a challenge of comprehension to settler society - despite times of hatred and bloody conflict - with mixed and interesting results."⁶² Whatever the outcome, Maori spiritualistic practices and beliefs constituted common cultural ground between Maori and Pakeha and demonstrated, in the eyes of spiritualists, the universality of the truths they adhered to. This validated spiritualism among Pakeha believers and fostered a sympathetic interest in Maori spirituality.

Many spiritualists viewed indigenous cultures in a sympathetic light. This was primarily because such cultures usually believed and practised some form of spiritualism, a fact which confirmed the veracity of spiritualism in the eyes of its adherents by illustrating its universality. There was a general belief among adherents that spiritualism was a unifying religious phenomenon that could be sampled in all cultures and was destined to form the basis of a universal religion of the future. Sympathy was also motivated by the perceived hypocrisy of missionaries in converting heathen "whose morality is frequently better than their own."⁶³

Significantly, traditional Maori religion shared with spiritualism a belief in the immortality of the soul/spirit or *wairua* and held that the spirits of the dead interpenetrated

⁶⁰Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.198.

⁶¹Simpson, *The Immigrants*, pp.206-16; David Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals: the Years of Power, 1891-1912*, Auckland 1988, pp.54-64.

⁶²Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.199.

⁶³[Meers], *The Ultimate of Man*, p.18.

the world of the living at every turn. Prophecy, omens, healing, second sight and advice commonly came through the activity of *wairua*, either when sleeping or awake, through tapu objects or through direct communication via *tohunga* or *waka/kauwaka* (mediums) in seance-like rituals. Many Maori believed firmly in the malignant activity of evil spirits (*atua*), particularly in illness and disease. Elsdon Best noted that sufferers of *mate kikokiko* ("an expression used to denote bodily ailments believed to be caused ... by evil beings") sometimes became a medium for the spirits. The link between sickness and mediumship in Maori society had vivid parallels in Pakeha society.⁶⁴ Significantly, some religious tohunga performed feats which rivalled, and perhaps exceeded, the feats of European mediums and illusionists. Teone Taare Tikao described the feats of a tohunga, Te Maiharoa, who in the presence of a large crowd, "took a boy on the stage, and, seizing the lad's arms, whirled him round over his head and let go. The boy's body went through the air, turning round and round meanwhile, and passing over the heads of the audience, it came to the back of the hall, where, in a clear space, the boy landed on his feet, unhurt."⁶⁵ Though practiced within different cultural paradigms, the points of overlap between spiritualists and many Maori are striking.

These similarities were commonly noted by Pakeha observers and investigators. Charles Oliver Bond Davis appeared deeply interested in the similarities between Maori and Pakeha religious traditions.⁶⁶ Maori tohunga were commonly equated with spiritualist mediums by Pakeha. One example quoted frequently was an incident recalled by F.E. Maning in *Old New Zealand*, who claimed to "have seen many of these exhibitions." In this instance a tohunga evoked the spirit of a dead chief, who relayed the whereabouts of an important book that had been lost for some time. Maning was impressed by the tohunga's exhibition. "'A ventriloquist', said I! - 'or - or - perhaps the devil'." Vocal opponents of spiritualism, such as Rev. Theophilus Le Menant Des Chesnais, commonly compared spiritualism with traditional Maori beliefs and practices, citing demonic agencies in both cultures.⁶⁷ Significantly, spiritualists were rather apprehensive about the

⁶⁴R.S. Oppenheim, *Maori Death Customs*, Wellington 1973, pp.75-100; Elsdon Best, *Spiritual and Mental Concepts of the Maori*, Dominion Museum Monograph no.2, Wellington 1986, reprint, pp.19-20; Elsmore, *Mana From Heaven*, ch. 14; Herries Beattie and Teone Taare Tikao, *Tikao Talks: Treasures From the Ancient World of the Maori*, Christchurch 1990, reprint, pp.74-7,81-93.

⁶⁵Beattie, *Tikao Talks*, p.84.

⁶⁶See, for example, letters to the *New Zealand Herald*, in Flotsam and Jetsam 11/80 and 11/106, Hocken Library. Davis was a well-known interpreter, land agent and writer who helped produce a number of Maori newspapers in the 1840s and 50s. In 1877, he wrote to the *New Zealand Herald* to criticise those who ridiculed spiritualism and Thomas Walker, the 19-year-old trance lecturer. "As a sincere searcher after truth in these times of wonderment", he wrote, "I cannot close my mind against reliable evidence from all parts of the world bearing on this modern phenomenon". Davis subsequently put forward several possible explanations for spiritualist manifestations, though told readers that he was not an advocate of spiritualism. *New Zealand Herald*, 1 May 1877, p.3, 4 May 1877, p.3, 9 May 1877, p.3, 12 May 1877, p.2; *DNZB*, vol.1, pp.99-100.

⁶⁷F.E. Maning, *Old New Zealand; A Tale of the Good Old Times*, Auckland 1863, pp.156-62. Maning's account was quoted by Des Chesnais in *Animal Magnetism and Spirit Mediums*, pp.23-4. See also Des Chesnais' lecture, "Psychomancy; or Historical and Scientific Investigations of Spiritualism", *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 25 Aug. 1888, p.1(supplement). Spiritualist references to Maning occur in the following: *Harbinger of Light*, no.187, Sep. 1885, pp.3039-41; Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, pp.265-6, and Peebles, *Around the World*, pp.97-9.

introduction of the Tohunga Suppression Bill (1907). As Ellwood notes, they feared "that their own mediumistic practices might be seen - perhaps rightly - as no more than a European version of the same shamanism."⁶⁸

Both J.M. Peebles and Emma Hardinge Britten wrote extensively on Maori and Aborigines after visiting Australasia in the 1870s. Britten glorified Maori, portraying their mythology as the equal of the Greeks: "The Maori sings, believes, and teaches, all that the Greek classics enshrine, but alas! his legends only bear the opprobrious name of 'savage superstitions.'" She claimed to have "had several proofs of the Mediumistic power possessed by these 'savages,'" but deemed them "of too personal a character" to elaborate. She did note however, that "the best natural prophets and seers amongst Maoris are, as amongst the Spiritualists, of the female sex." Britten stated that:

this interesting people illustrate fully ... the astounding fact that the modern Spiritualism, which seems to have fallen upon this century as a new revelation, not only finds a parallel in the Biblical account of the Jewish nation, but in its more subtle phases of science through magnetism and psychology, has been, and still is unconsciously practised by those children of nature whom we so contemptuously call "heathens" and "savages."⁶⁹

Spiritualist healers also had contact with Maori communities. George Milner Stephen occasionally visited and ministered to Maori while touring New Zealand in the 1880s.⁷⁰

Maori-Pakeha comparisons, whether made by spiritualists or their detractors, served to demonstrate the universality of certain religious phenomena. For men such as Des Chesnais, they demonstrated the universality of demonic activity and demon worship. For sceptics in general, they demonstrated the universal aptitude for humans to be led astray by religious delusions, illusions and superstition. For spiritualists however, and perhaps for Maori, this universality revitalised and validated their belief in spirit communion and spiritualist phenomena.

New Zealand spiritualists occasionally had contact with Maori communities, though to what extent is not entirely clear. The most vivid example of this was that between William Nation (1840-1930) and Ngati Kahungunu of Wairarapa. Born in Sydney, Nation moved to Nelson in 1857 where his father established the *Colonist* and taught William the printing trade. In 1881 he became editor and proprietor of the *Wairarapa Standard* in Greytown, later editing a number of newspapers and publishing two spiritualist periodicals, *More Light* (Wairarapa 1887-90) and the *Message of Life* (Levin 1903-30).⁷¹ In 1883 Nation's Greytown house was the centre of a wave of interest in spiritualism following publicity surrounding the mediumship of his two daughters, who

⁶⁸Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.51.

⁶⁹Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, pp.264,267.

⁷⁰See for example, *Wairarapa Daily*, 25 Jan. 1883, p.2; *Press*, 16 Mar. 1883, p.3, 21 Mar. 1883 (supplement).

⁷¹The *Message of Life* continued publication until 1934.

were able to perform a wide range of feats in broad daylight. Their skills, Nation wrote, "were witnessed by scores of persons well known in and around Greytown" and "shrewd and critical sceptics were nonplussed." This outbreak gained widespread publicity and was compared by one spiritualist to the Rochester outbreak of 1848. Formerly an Anglican Sunday school superintendent, Nation henceforth became an ardent propagandist for the spiritualist cause.⁷²

While in the Wairarapa, Nation developed a close relationship with many Maori through giving seances and discussing spiritual topics with them. On one occasion, six Maori chiefs (including Tamahau Mahupuku) attended a seance at his house. Nation wrote: "the Natives were amazed and talked together in their own tongue, calling to remembrance what their people had seen through their Tohungas (mediums) in days gone by. They said before the missionaries came they always had communication with the spirits. The missionaries taught that it was wrong." Nation often visited Papawai pa in 1884. Nation claimed that Maori appreciated these visits, "for I spoke to the understanding of minds not opened to any extent to the lessons Nature was teaching us on every hand." As coroner of Levin from 1909, Nation often came into close contact with Maori at times of death: "I have often had to go amongst the Maoris when a death has occurred by accident or otherwise, necessitating an inquest, and I have spoken with them on the nearness of the spirit world and the conditions of life there." Maori also appeared as spirits at his seances.⁷³ These experiences led him to believe that "Spiritualism was known to the Maoris of New Zealand long before the Rochester knockings in America, and before the colony of New Zealand was settled by the English race." Expressing regret at the decline of Maori spiritualism with the advent of missionaries, Nation wrote that "I live in hopes of seeing this great truth taken up again by the native race."⁷⁴

Though spiritualists were often sympathetic toward Maori and indigenous spirituality, they also tended to embrace nineteenth-century evolutionary theory and racial science with enthusiasm. The eagerness of spiritualists to embrace 'progressive' scientific theories and the cause of colonial 'progress' gave impetus to ideas and mechanisms which adversely affected indigenes. Noting that "the fittest survives", J.M. Peebles wrote that "it seems an inflexible law of nature, that aboriginal races must, in every instance, either perish, or be amalgamated with the general population of the country."⁷⁵ Emma Hardinge Britten believed non-western races were more natural and closer to nature than Europeans. This made them good mediums and ardent believers in spirit communion, though such "children of nature" were still viewed as lacking the more refined, higher aspects of modern European spiritualism. While praising Polynesians, Britten referred to the "far lower and more degraded form" of religion among "the native negro" of the West Indies.

⁷²DNZB, vol.3, pp.355-6; *Message of Life*, vol.27, no.325, July 1930, pp.1-2,5-6; *Harbinger of Light*, July 1884, p.2753, Feb. 1885, p.2911; Nation, *The Unseen World*, p.13.

⁷³Nation, *The Unseen World*, pp.34-5,113-15; *New Zealand Times*, 29 May 1884, p.3.

⁷⁴*Harbinger of Light*, no.187, Sep. 1885, p.3039.

⁷⁵Peebles, *Around the World*, pp.72,75,80.

She also observed that European spiritualists residing in Melanesia "speak of the remarkable Mediumistic powers of the natives, and express hopes that *when they become civilised*, and can be made to act in concert with their white employers, through their finely adapted organisations, Spiritual phenomena of a very striking character can be unfolded amongst them."⁷⁶

Lobbying for the welfare and rights of Maori was not part of spiritualists' agenda for reform in New Zealand. In Parliament, William McLean had little sympathy for Maori landowners and was not concerned about the alienation of Maori land: "the sooner these Native lands pass into the hands of *bona fide* settlers the better." McLean felt that only land that was being improved by its owners should be exempt from taxation. "The Native race" he declared, "appear to me to be wasting their substance, and, morally and physically, to be on the wane." Though regretting this trend, McLean divorced the colonial government from fault: "I do not say that the present or any Governments are responsible for this state of affairs." He subsequently placed the responsibility for finding a remedy on the shoulders of Maori members of Parliament.⁷⁷ New Zealand's leading spiritualist was unashamedly hostile toward Chinese settlers, even though his spiritualist beliefs had much in common with Eastern religions. McLean's anti-Asian sentiment in his election pamphlets was malicious even by the xenophobic standards of the late-1880s. He maligned the "yellow agony" as immoral, anti-Christian, job-stealing interlopers. Noting that "John" had already "snuffed out" New Zealand's gardeners, McLean argued for "an Import Poll-tax of £40 per head, and an Export tax of £50 on all living Chinamen, but let the dead go duty-free."⁷⁸

In summary, the presence of Maori contributed to a colonial climate which was relatively receptive to the growth of spiritualism. Maori beliefs and practices demonstrated to spiritualists the universality of their religion, and constitute small points of overlap where Pakeha and Maori worlds interacted with mutual validation. Such overlap fostered spiritualistic beliefs in New Zealand and encouraged a mutual empathy between some Maori and Pakeha. However, spiritualists were not immune from wider cultural values, such as Social Darwinism and Eurocentric notions of 'progress', that tended to marginalise Maori and other non-European groups.

Before concluding, it is necessary to outline an area of scholarly debate which is directly relevant to spiritualism and settler societies. Discussing the dynamics of cult and sect activity, several scholars observe that New Zealand has an extraordinarily high rate of cult adherence in the late twentieth century. This is noted by two sociologists, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, who argue that both religious innovation and religious revival preponderate in relatively secular societies where mainstream churches are

⁷⁶Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, pp.267,278.

⁷⁷NZPD, vol.75, 24 June 1892, pp.10,12, vol.77, 19 Aug. 1892, p.227. Italics in original.

⁷⁸William McLean, *Thorndon Election, 1887*, [Wellington 1887]; William McLean, *To the electors of Thorndon*, [Wellington 1887], p.6.

weak. Wallis notes that high cult and sect activity occurs in Anglo-Saxon, Protestant-dominated, immigrant-based societies, and that New Zealand and Australia have the highest cult activity of all such countries.⁷⁹ Hill estimates that New Zealand's attendance level in the late 1980s was 16%, compared to 40% in the U.S.A., 20% in Australia and 10% in Britain. "In short," he writes, "New Zealand occupies a position of world prominence in current cultic geography."⁸⁰

Explanations for New Zealand's high rate of cult and sect activity centre on the nature of New Zealand settlement. Roy Wallis makes the obvious point that "people will be more inclined to participate in innovative religious forms when they are unconstrained by a demanding and community supported traditional religious faith." He also notes that "in a society where virtually every aspect of culture is imported or a recent innovation, less stigma generally attaches to adopting any particular innovation or import, than in a traditional, or a culturally homogenous society." Ellwood supports those sociologists who identify New Zealand as having a high level of cult and sect activity, arguing that the permissive, denominational colonial environment and its relatively footloose and irreligious settlers were causal factors.⁸¹ Though there is a risk of exaggerating irreligion among the working classes and the scattered settler population, primarily because of the prevalence of less formal modes of Christian belief,⁸² these arguments have considerable validity. Unfortunately, a discussion of cult and sect activity in the twentieth century lies outside the domain of this thesis. However, this study lends weight to scholars who link such activity to the nature of settler society. It emphasises the fluid and egalitarian nature of society, a climate of liberalism and experimentalism, and a high level of cult activity in the 1870s and '80s. These factors suggest that colonial society was in many respects a seed-bed for the growth of unconventional social and religious movements.

In conclusion, the broad structure and climate of settler society nurtured the growth of spiritualism. The movement was clearly aided by the restless and relatively unstructured nature of colonial life, which fostered an interest in alternative strategies for achieving personal happiness and social stability. Spiritualists themselves tended to be accepted, respected and often influential members of the community. Other features of society which encouraged its growth were the pluralistic and democratic nature of the colonial society and religion, the presence of Maori spirituality and an undercurrent of progressive utopianism among settlers. The following chapter expands on issues raised in this chapter about colonial religion. It surveys interactions between spiritualists and other religious groups in New Zealand and reveals a significant degree of overlap and co-operation.

⁷⁹Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, pp.1-3,482-93; Wallis, "Figuring Out Cult Receptivity", pp.494-8.

⁸⁰Hill, "The Cult of Humanity", pp.114-15.

⁸¹Wallis, "Figuring Out Cult Receptivity", p.500; Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.198-9.

⁸²Hugh McLeod writes that historians have "made exaggerated claims for the extent of working-class alienation from the churches or from religion in general." Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*, New York 1996, p.222.

CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIANS, FREETHINKERS AND SPIRITUALISTS

Evangelicals and freethinkers were among the most outspoken opponents of spiritualism in New Zealand. Yet despite regular and stormy altercations, these two groups shared much in common with spiritualists and were often willing co-operate in some fields of activity. A co-operative spirit was visibly evident in the area of politics, where all three groups actively promoted progressive reform. This chapter examines the points of friction and overlap between spiritualists and various Christian groups, dwelling on the parallels between spiritualism and evangelicalism. It concludes with an in-depth analysis of the alliance, detected by Ellwood, between freethinkers and spiritualists in the 1870s and '80s.¹

CHRISTIAN CONCERNS

Spiritualism caused considerable concern within the churches in New Zealand. Many professed Christians were genuinely fascinated with spiritualism and seriously entertained spiritualist beliefs. Some clerics spent years investigating the topic in search of answers for themselves and their congregations. These points are illustrated below by examining the prolonged wave of interest in spiritualism in Dunedin during the early-1870s.

In 1870, discussion took place in the Dunedin press over a perceived rise in 'infidelity'. Several correspondents echoed the sentiments of a "Scotch Presbyterian", who complained that "Infidelity stalks forth unblushingly in our churches, infidel publications lie in our reading rooms" and "on the Lord's day people hold *seances* instead of going to public worship."² Perceptions of escalating unbelief as a result of spiritualism were not entirely alarmist. At a meeting of office-bearers of Knox Church in 1872, "Mr Gillies" - probably Robert Gillies, a prominent member of the Otago Institute - declared that spiritualists had done "immense damage" in the church. He told his fellows that "one after another of our youth" had become "infidels" and "woe be to us if we do not take the stumbling block out of the way of our youth." His sentiments were greeted with cheers and applause. At this same meeting, the policy on the appointment of deacons was altered

¹Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.36-8.

²*Otago Witness*, 13 Aug. 1870, p.17.

after one of them, John Logan, developed an interest in spiritualism. This change in policy aimed to prevent ugly confrontations and facilitate the expulsion of wayward members.³

John Logan, J.P., (1819-1895) was eventually expelled from Knox Church in 1873, an event which received considerable attention, occurring as it did at a time of unprecedented agitation and unease over spiritualism in Otago. Logan was reputedly "one of the most prominent personages in the community, as well as one of the largest property holders in Dunedin."⁴ Arriving in Dunedin in 1854, he worked as clerk to the Superintendent from 1854 to 1876, which included duties as provincial storekeeper and immigration agent, and was a prominent member of the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute. In 1873, Logan occupied the stage of Queen's Theatre in support of the spiritualist lecturers, J.M. Peebles and E.C. Dunn. Though Logan had earlier displayed an interest in spiritualism (he was an officer of the Dunedin Society for Investigating Spiritualism), his wholehearted support of their doctrines was not tolerated by the Presbytery. His membership of Knox Church was terminated and he was deposed from his position of deacon in June, though subsequently lodged an appeal, which was heard by the Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland.⁵

Importantly, it was not Logan's deep interest in spiritualism that earned him expulsion, but his support of its anti-Christian doctrines. This point was made clear during his appeal. Rev. D. M. Stuart, a close friend of Logan's, explained how the "Session found not the least fault with Mr Logan for being associated with them [Peebles and Dunn] in so far as Spiritualism was concerned." However, Logan continued to support them, even though "they appeared as the exponents of the rankest infidelity". Unrepentant and combative, Logan described Peebles and Dunn as "eminent Christians" who were engaged in "great Christian work", and declared spiritualism to be "the very thing wanted in this age". Though Stuart remained reluctant to condemn his friend, Logan's expulsion was unanimously upheld by the Synod. His appeal was deemed dishonest, unmanly, evasive and inconsistent. Rev. Bannerman concluded by saying that there "was great difference among men as to what was truth, but it would be inconsistent for the Church, which was the ground and pillar of truth, to have within herself members who held doctrines adverse to hers". Logan and his wife Jessie (a medium) subsequently became prominent Dunedin spiritualists, and their daughter Anna married Robert Stout, a supporter of spiritualism, in 1875.⁶ According to the *Echo*, Logan aided the growth of freethought in these years "by circulating many tracts, books, and pamphlets at his own expense."⁷

³*Echo*, 25 May 1872, p.2. This change of policy within Knox church was noted by John Hislop, but no mention was made of either spiritualism or Logan. John Hislop, *History of Knox Church Dunedin*, Dunedin 1892, p.64.

⁴Obituary, *Otago Witness*, 14 Mar. 1895, p.20.

⁵*ODT*, 6 Mar. 1873, p.2, 5 June 1873, p.2, 14 June 1873, p.2(supplement); *Bruce Herald*, 11 Mar. 1873, p.5, 25 Mar. 1873, p.3.

⁶*ODT*, 21 Jan. 1874, pp.4-5; Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, p.270.

⁷*Echo*, 15 Oct. 1881, p.2.



MR. JOHN LOGAN.

This controversy earned Logan publicity and fame within the spiritualist movement. His crusades against orthodoxy were reported and supported by the *Harbinger of Light*, and he was eulogised by J.M. Peebles and Emma Hardinge Britten.⁸ Trained in law, Logan spent much of his time sitting on the bench at the police court after the abolition of the Provinces in 1876. Though a prominent citizen in these early years, his wealth diminished during the depressed 1880s and according to an obituary, by his death in 1895 he had lost both his landed property and a large personal library.⁹

Logan and spiritualism were also at the centre of controversies over the running of the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute during 1873-5. In 1874, Robert Stout launched a controversial motion to open the Athenaeum on Sundays in the face of opposition from the conservative Rev. Dr. James Copland and Rev. Thomas Roseby (a liberal Congregationalist). After much heated debate, Stout's motion was passed at a large meeting by 252 votes to 242.¹⁰ Concerns were also aired by some members that immoral and offensive spiritualistic literature saturated the shelves of the Athenaeum library, and that the Athenaeum committee had abused their position by fostering their own views. These accusations were directed primarily at John Logan, the treasurer, though several other spiritualists and sympathisers were active members of Institute, including C.R. Chapman, J.P. Armstrong, Robert Stout and Henderson Carrick, a fact which induced J.G.S. Grant to declare at one meeting that "on looking around anybody would really think it was a meeting of Spiritualists!"¹¹

The Athenaeum contained a 'free table' upon which anyone could place literature for general perusal. The *Spiritual Magazine*, a Christian spiritualist magazine from Britain, had been on the table since 1868. Many other spiritualistic publications were later added, including James Smith's *Spiritualism*, the *Harbinger of Light*, *Boston Investigator*, *Banner of Light*, *Progressive Spiritualist*, *Religio and Philosophical Journal* and the secularist *National Reformer*. Presbyterian members would have been affronted by one work in particular: *My Experience, or Footprints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism*. Amid protests from Logan, all were expunged from the Athenaeum when the free table was abolished in August 1874, though a few months later this decision was reversed.¹²

The attack on Christian orthodoxy by Dunedin spiritualists and their sympathisers was often launched through anti-clerical publications. Among them were *Spiritualism* (1869), *Spiritualism* (1870) and *Blasphemy* (1872).¹³ The *Echo*, edited by Robert Stout,

⁸*Harbinger of Light*, no.35, July 1873, p.456, no.43, Mar. 1874, p.589, no.49, Sep. 1874, p.696, no.55, Mar. 1875, p.791; Peebles, *Around the World*, pp.102-3; Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, pp.269-70.

⁹*Otago Witness*, 14 Mar. 1895, p.20.

¹⁰*ODT*, 31 Jan. 1874, p.2, 4 Feb. 1874, p.2, 12 Feb. 1874, pp.2-3.

¹¹*ODT*, 1 Feb. 1873, p.1(supplement).

¹²*ODT*, 1 Feb. 1873, p.1(supplement), 5 Aug. 1874, p.3, 30 Jan. 1875, p.1(supplement), 5 Feb. 1875, p.3, 9 Feb. 1875, p.3.

¹³Zepa [pseud.], *Blasphemy*, [Dunedin 1872]. *Blasphemy* contrasted "the testimony of the spirits" with Christian "dogma" to highlight the barbarity of Christianity. A Spiritualist, *Spiritualism*, 2nd ed., Dunedin 1870. Allegedly penned by Stout, this work was a comprehensive defence of the new faith

enthusiastically reported spiritualist activities and encouraged its investigation during 1869-1873. A spiritualist newspaper entitled the *Day Star* was also published in 1870. It survived for several months, was "decidedly spiritualistic in tone" and "devoted to 'politics, religion, and science'."¹⁴ In 1873-4 a short-lived monthly entitled *The Truthseeker* was inaugurated and aimed to discuss "all Religious, Political and Scientific questions." Its first issue contained articles on Spiritualism, Buddhism, Science and "Liberty and Blasphemy." It was distributed by spiritualist Henderson Carrick.¹⁵

Spiritualist attacks on Christianity induced strong reactions from Christian leaders in the city. In May 1872 Alfred Brunton, a Plymouth Brethren evangelist, warned fellow Christians against spiritualism through a small pamphlet entitled *Christ v. Spiritualism*. "As the terrible and seductive doctrines of spiritualism have at length been proclaimed in our midst", he wrote, "I have felt impelled to offer the following remarks, in order, with the divine blessing, to render some slight help to any of my fellow Christians who may have been troubled, or it may be even shaken, by the specious arguments which have been so sedulously used in its favour." Brunton expressed his amazement that many professing Christians had attended James Smith's lectures and failed to perceive the pernicious tendency of his teachings.¹⁶ He was not alone in his concerns. Churches in Dunedin began a series of "United Evangelical Services" in June 1872 as part of their response to spiritualism. A Wesleyan minister, Alexander Reid, told the Dunedin North Church how these services came about: "ministers had met and consulted in reference to the spiritualistic demonstrations to which they had been witnesses. They considered whether it would be wise or not to have counter demonstrations, and they resolved before they entered the arena of argument that they should seek the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit: hence these meetings." Discussing the purpose of these services, a writer in the *Evangelist* told readers that "a large proportion of professing Christians are by no means impressed as they should be with the reality and importance of the facts regarding God and their Saviour". The first service was held at Knox Church and was patronised by a variety of evangelical ministers.¹⁷ In addition to these services, over the following weeks sermons

which compared Biblical miracles to spiritualist phenomena and attacked the alleged myths and redundancy of Christianity. Hiram A. Stiles, *Spiritualism*, Dunedin 1869. Stiles was "a leading member of the Congregational Church" in Massachusetts who was excommunicated for his spiritualist beliefs.

¹⁴No issues appear to have survived. It was reputedly launched by Stout, though T.H. Snowden was printer and proprietor and W.D. Meers (alias "unsanctimonious") contributed articles. *Echo*, 9 July 1872, p.2, 16 July 1870, p.2, 30 July 1870, p.2, 27 Aug. 1870, p.2, 15 Oct. 1881, p.2.

¹⁵No issues appear to have survived. This periodical was also rumoured to be launched by Stout. *Otago Christian Record*, no.7, 1 Nov. 1873, p.10; *Harbinger of Light*, no.43, Mar. 1874, p.595; H.H. Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, Dec.-Jan. 1939-40, p.11.

¹⁶[Alfred Brunton], *Christ v. Spiritualism*, Dunedin 1872, p.1-3. This pamphlet was published anonymously. Brunton was stated to the author by the Dunedin correspondent of the *Bruce Herald*, 29 May 1872, p.8.

¹⁷Ministers included the Presbyterians, James Copland, D.M. Stuart, John Gow and William Blake, J. Williams (a Baptist), and the Reverends Thomas Roseby and Alexander Reid. *Oamaru Times*, 5 July 1872, p.3; *ODT*, 12 June 1872, p.1, 22 June 1872, p.11; *Evangelist*, vol.4, no.7, July, 1872, pp.193-5; C. Stuart Ross, *The Story of the Otago Church and Settlement*, Dunedin 1887, pp.220-1.

were preached against spiritualism in many parts of Otago. The following year, Copland responded to Peebles' and Dunn's orations through two lectures which were later published. Several clerics delivered orations and sermons on spiritualism, including Alexander Reid, John Gow and Bishop Nevill, the Anglican Bishop of Dunedin. In *The Story of the Otago Church and Settlement*, Rev. C. Stuart Ross wrote that during this time spiritualism was "sustained by eager discussions on its alleged phenomena which awed and bewildered too many simple and credulous souls."¹⁸ Clearly, spiritualism caused problems and was taken very seriously by Dunedin clerics in the early-1870s. Lectures, counter-lectures and press controversies between Christians and spiritualists became increasingly common throughout New Zealand from the late-1870s.

There is a danger, however, of exaggerating the threat of spiritualism to Christianity. Many spiritualists painted their movement as an advanced religion which was destined to demolish an ailing and outmoded Christianity, yet few converts were made during times of heightened activity. The press often sensationalised spiritualism. In 1871, James Copland observed that the *Otago Daily Times* often gave spiritualism as "bellicose and formidable appearance as possible." This was true of other organs. Criticising the reluctance of clerics to contest spiritualism publicly, a columnist in the *Otago Witness* wrote that ministers preferred "presiding over the consumption of tea and buns at soirees, to engaging in a fierce struggle with heresy."¹⁹

Nevertheless, many Christians were genuinely interested in spiritualism. Such interest stemmed from a number of factors. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, evolutionary theory, scientific naturalism and higher criticism caused considerable disquiet within the Church. Modern science and evolutionary theory appeared to cast doubt on orthodox understandings of Creation and Christian miracles. The plausibility of miracles received few favours from scientific naturalism, which reduced all phenomena to invariable laws of nature. Biblical scholarship uncovered discrepancies which, to many, cast doubt on the infallibility of the Bible. To some, the findings of modern scholarship demanded a thorough reinterpretation of scripture and threatened to negate orthodox belief altogether. Spiritualism flourished during this time of religious questioning and, as in England, "appealed mainly to those who wanted a middle path between Christian orthodoxy and atheism."²⁰

Spiritualist phenomena were welcomed by many Christians as a means of turning back the tide of materialism sweeping the globe. The scientific evidence of spiritualism and its revelations of a spiritual universe acted as a buffer to many people's faith at a time of widespread religious disquiet. This motivated the ex-United Free Methodist minister, John Tyerman, to embrace spiritualist belief: "Just as a self-sufficient science begins to

¹⁸Copland, *Spiritualism*; Ross, *Otago Church and Settlement*, p.218; *ODT*, 10 Mar. 1873, p.3, 11 Mar. 1873, p.2, 26 Mar. 1873, p.3.

¹⁹*Evangelist*, vol.4, no.10, Oct. 1872, p.291; *Otago Witness*, 1 June 1872, p.4

²⁰McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, p.52.

publicly ridicule the popular belief in Immortality as an antiquated superstition, and a ruthless materialism ventures to openly trample on humanity's dearest hopes, the angel-world develops a system that will inevitably humble the one and demolish the other."²¹

Christian interest in spiritualism was also fuelled by changing moral sensibilities. Influenced by the romantic movement, many Christians increasingly felt that current interpretations of scripture were unjust and unworthy of a loving God. A harsh Calvinism gave way to a romantic evangelicalism that stressed the ability of all humans to overcome sin, find salvation and transform society. Spiritualist philosophy was a radical and utopian expression of this evangelicalism, and therefore attracted the interest of more liberal and sentimental Christians.

A topic which provoked immense discussion among Christians was the nature of the afterlife. Uncertainty over this issue in the latter half of the nineteenth century created opportunities for spiritualism to enter the minds of many questioning Christians. Spiritualistic notions may have also been encouraged by the fact that in England "the Church of the day was opposed to prayers for the dead, and in the Burial Service seemed to place all the emphasis on the sorrow of parting, and to neglect the note of Christian joy."²² A writer for the *New Zealand Wesleyan* observed in 1871: "it is questionable whether any one subject in the entire range of theology has, within the last two or three years, been so generally discussed as that of a future state." The article noted the "various opinions held by Christian believers" and among the competing theories listed were Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, Unitarianism, Universalists/Restorationists (all souls will eventually be saved) and Annihilationists (both the body and soul of the unsaved will be destroyed).²³ Echoing spiritualist doctrines, the writer of a sermon published in the *Otago Christian Record* in 1873 insisted that "the spirits that come down to minister are the spirits that went up to worship". God's 'ministering spirits' were interpreted as the spirits of humans who had once toiled and worshipped on earth. On the same page of this sermon in the *Record* was an advertisement for a Dunedin spiritualistic periodical, the *Truthseeker*.²⁴

Debates over the issue of conditional immortality were not uncommon in New Zealand, and both Christians and spiritualists were involved in them. Conditional immortality was the doctrine that those not saved in this life will not suffer consciously in hell for eternity, but would be blotted out of existence. As Rowell notes, conditionalism was "one of the attempts to find a mediating position between the extremes of universalism and eternal punishment."²⁵ In 1883, a series of debates on the topic in Auckland between

²¹John Tyerman, *Spiritualism Vindicated: being a reply to the Revds. John Graham, A.W. Webb, and D. Allen, and The Christian Advocate*, Melbourne 1875, pp.15-16.

²²L.E. Elliott-Binns, *English Thought 1860-1900: The Theological Aspect*, London 1956, p.328.

²³*New Zealand Wesleyan*, vol.1, no.3, 28 Feb. 1871, p.23.

²⁴*Otago Christian Record*, no.7, 1 Nov. 1873, pp.9-10. This sermon was entitled "God's Perpetual Presence With His People", by Rev. W. Morley Punshon.

²⁵Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: a Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life*, Oxford 1974, p.181.

B. Hutson, a Presbyterian, and George A. Brown, a Baptist and conditional immortalist, attracted an average of 600 people over six nights. The following year, Brown discussed the merits of Christianity with spiritualist Charles Bright to a crowd of 900. In 1889, William McLean addressed the issue in Wellington in response to orations by Rev. J. Berry.²⁶ Central concerns addressed within these debates were the distasteful doctrines of hell, final judgement and eternal punishment. To many both within and outside the Church, the brutality of eternal suffering in a fiery Hell and the irrevocable condemnation of groups such as unsaved infants and ignorant 'heathen' painted an unflattering picture of the Creator. Indeed, much freethought and spiritualist polemic focussed on these issues.

Rejecting the duality of heaven and hell, good and evil - "a most artificial and unwarranted division of humanity into two parts"²⁷ - the spiritualist afterlife was one in which each individual shaped their own spiritual universe from familiar things in their earthly life and their general moral character. The internal was reflected externally. As trance lecturer Thomas Walker declared to an Auckland audience in 1877, "the soul is constantly building its home in the Spirit land."²⁸ An essentially universalist doctrine, spiritualists believed that all humans would eventually be saved and progress for eternity through ever-higher spiritual spheres.

The appeal of spiritualism among Christians also stemmed from its retention and appropriation of Christian traditions. Most spiritualists portrayed their religion as a thoroughly Christian belief. A popular view among believers was that spiritualism represented a return to an authentic, primitive form of Christianity since it rejected Christian 'dogma' and adhered solely to the universal fact of spirit communion. Many spiritualists believed that the Bible contained authentic accounts of spiritualist phenomena. Though tending to relegate Jesus to the status of an exceptionally virtuous and accomplished medium, many believers exalted him above all others and claimed to be inspired by his example. As chapter four will illustrate, spiritualist healers adopted techniques recorded in the New Testament and claimed to emulate the feats of the Apostles. Spiritualist lectures, meetings and social functions usually took place on Sundays and mirrored many orthodox practices. Sunday schools (Lyceums) were inaugurated. Spiritualist meetings opened with prayer and hymns, and appropriated numerous Biblical injunctions and exhortations.²⁹ Spiritualists commonly quoted

²⁶[Mr. Geo. A. Brown and Mr. B. Hutson], *Does the Bible Teach Conditional Immortality?* ["six nights public debate in the Theatre Royal, Auckland, during September, 1883, between Mr. Geo. A. Brown, Preacher of Conditional Immortality, and Mr. B. Hutson, Presbyterian Theological student"], Auckland 1883; *New Zealand Herald*, 31 May 1884, p.1, 4 June 1884, p.5; *Saturday Advertiser*, 22 Sep. 1883, p.24; Rev. J. Berry, *Conditional Immortality and the Intermediate State of the Dead*, Wellington 1889, preface; Wellington Association of Spiritualists, *The Pulpit Denouncing Spiritualism: A Reply to the Rev. Joseph Berry*, Wellington 1889. See also Allan W. Webb, *Does the Soul Live After Death?*, Auckland 1881.

²⁷Tyerman, *Spiritualism Vindicated*, p.12.

²⁸Thomas Walker, *Our Homes and Employments in the Spirit World*, [Auckland 1877], p.8.

²⁹See, for example, Napier spiritualist meetings, *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 4 May 1888, p.3, 12 May 1888, p.1, 24 May 1888, p.3 (advertisement), 28 May 1888, p.2, 3 Oct 1888, p.3 (advertisement for the Hawkes Bay Christian Spiritualist Association).

scripture to justify their beliefs and activities. Mediums, healers and clairvoyants claimed to receive the "spiritual gifts" mentioned in the New Testament, such as healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits and interpretation of tongues. Some passages suggested to Christians that they ought to actively investigate spiritualism.³⁰ The Bible was littered with injunctions against, and warnings about, spiritualistic practices,³¹ however, many spiritualists maintained that the Bible was of human origin and therefore flawed, and that true Christianity had been distorted through time and corrupted by priestly inventions.

By appropriating and re-interpreting Christianity, spiritualism challenged clerics on their own terms. Biblical miracles, for example, provided spiritualists with powerful evidence to dispute the scepticism of their many Christian critics. Spiritualists often dwelt on the point that if Christians disbelieved spiritualist phenomena, they undermined the authenticity of Christian miracles. On the other hand, if ministers claimed the manifestations were achieved through demonic agency - and many did - the charge could rebound on the spiritual manifestations of Christianity.

A widely discussed scriptural passage was the so-called 'Witch of Endor'. At a time of distress and indecision, Saul, the King of Israel, consulted a female medium and talked with the spirit of Samuel, who then foretold Israel's impending defeat and Saul's death.³² Spiritualists argued that this was a clear Biblical example of a seance in which a human spirit returned from beyond with prophetic messages at the bidding of humans.³³ Though there was a lack of scriptural clarity on the exact nature of spirit intercourse, most Christian ministers believed that the 'Witch of Endor' did not provide evidence of the ability of humans to summon the dead at will. Sceptical of spiritualist phenomena, A.R. Fitchett (a liberal Methodist minister) argued in 1873 that this incident was an exception and that "the circumstances of the case never were and never can be paralleled." He believed that God had allowed this one incident to occur since "there was a fitness in Samuel's return from the spirit world to ... consummate in one last solemn act the duties of his office by announcing the doom of the king whom he had himself crowned." An independent minister, Warlow Davies, lectured on "The Witch of Endor" to an Auckland audience in 1876. He argued that the appearance of spirits of the dead "was evident from the many records of such manifestations in the bible itself." However, Davies pointed out that in such records "it had never been revealed under what conditions spirits were allowed to appear to men", and he therefore denounced efforts to seek intercourse with the dead. In 1879, Auckland's Archdeacon Maunsell argued that the medium seemed surprised at Samuel's appearance, which was evidence that God had summoned him from beyond

³⁰1 Cor 12:1-11; 1 Thes 5:21; 1 John 4:1. See chapter seven.

³¹See for example, Deut 13:1-5, 18:9-14; Isaiah 8:19; Jer 27:9-10, Eph 6:12; 1 Tim 4:1-3; Lev 19:31, 20:27.

³²1 Sam 28:3-25.

³³A good spiritualist view on the topic appeared in William Nation's *Life Here and Hereafter*, Levin 1914, pp.78-81.

rather than the medium. Clearly, Christian ministers did not believe, and were loathe to concede, that this passage either justified spiritualist practices or corroborated spiritualist interpretations of their phenomena.³⁴

Most clerics upheld fundamental differences between spiritualist phenomena and Christian miracles. Fitchett compared the "inarticulate knockings and scratchings" of the spirits unfavourably with angelic messengers:

God's angels, when they spoke to men, always had something to say. They bore an intelligent and authoritative message. They never came on their own account, or condescended to gossip. The inane, purposeless, and undignified babblement of which we hear as going on now between men and spirits, is without a single analogy or precedent in the Bible.

The Dunedin Presbyterian minister, Michael Watt, compared the morally instructive, spiritually beneficent and superior miracles of Christ, who raised the dead and cured blindness from birth, with the pointless and puerile manifestations of spiritualism. He noted that Christ "never wrought a miracle to gratify empty curiosity". The conservative Catholic priest, Theophilus Le Menant Des Chesnais, held similar views.³⁵

Though clergymen interpreted scripture differently, most orthodox commentators made a clear distinction between spiritualist phenomena and spiritualist explanations of them. The former were usually accepted as being phenomena of some kind which merited investigation, while the latter were rejected as unsubstantiated and unscriptural. An article in the *Evangelist* in 1869 stressed the distinction:

The facts, then, are admitted; but the hypothesis on which spiritualists would explain them is distinctly denied. Spiritualists do not seem to understand this: they do not seem to see that their facts can be admitted as true, and their explanation set aside as absurd. Hence they are found appealing constantly to their facts, and taking little or no notice of the objections which lie at the roots of the whole system built up.³⁶

To reiterate, spiritualism evoked strong responses from church leaders in New Zealand. Though converts to spiritualism were few, clerics were concerned that many professed Christians were troubled and intrigued by the new faith. Christian interest in spiritualism stemmed from the religious uncertainties that pervaded Victorian society, and the inherent challenges posed by spiritualist doctrines and phenomena. Attention now

³⁴A.R. Fitchett, "Spirit Agency in Human Affairs", *New Zealand Wesleyan*, vol.3, no.28, 1 May 1873, pp.65-7; *New Zealand Herald*, 2 Oct. 1876, p.3; *Auckland Evening Star*, 15 Dec. 1879, p.3.

³⁵*Bruce Herald*, 18 Apr. 1873, pp.6-7; Fitchett, "Spirit Agency In Human Affairs", pp.66; Theophilus Le Menant Des Chesnais, *The Temuka Tournament, or, Presbyterianism and Catholicism Compared*, Dunedin 1896, p.142.

³⁶*Evangelist*, vol.1, no.10, Oct. 1869, p.9.

turns to the reactions and attitudes of various Christian denominations, focussing primarily on evangelicals.

EVANGELICALS AND SPIRITUALISTS

Christian opinions on spiritualism varied both within and between denominations. In general, only ultra-liberals on the fringes of Protestantism considered spiritualism to be an acceptable and desirable religious system. Before analysing such liberals, the attitudes and investigations of orthodox Christians, evangelicals in particular, are discussed in depth.

In England, the Anglican Church, which had a history of religious tolerance, adopted a conciliatory rather than hostile attitude toward spiritualism. Although Anglican leaders denounced it, many clerics were either sympathetic or believers. Anglicans were less perturbed by the possible agency of demonic spirits. Oppenheim notes that a peaceful co-existence predominated, in part, because of the need to "protect and nurture the increasingly vulnerable Church of England."³⁷ Though such a need was not so keenly felt in the colonial context, Anglicans did not appear overtly hostile to spiritualism in New Zealand. Spiritualistic individuals such as Joseph Braithwaite appeared to be openly tolerated within the Anglican Church.³⁸

Remaining somewhat aloof, Anglican ministers were rarely at the forefront of bitter attacks on spiritualism in New Zealand, though prominent leaders occasionally delivered sermons and lectures on the topic. Following the visit of Emma Hardinge Britten to Auckland in 1879, Archdeacon Maunsell gave a rather guarded synopsis of spiritualism in a lecture at St Mary's, Parnell. He asserted his belief in the existence of spirits, but declared his relative ignorance of spiritualist phenomena and preferred to withhold judgement on them. He then cited the unscriptural and contradictory utterances of the spirits, and concluded with an exhortation to his audience to "make God their familiar spirit."³⁹ In Dunedin, Bishop Nevill lectured on "What we know concerning the Angels" at Queen's Theatre in March 1873 following the visit of Peebles and Dunn. Nevill dwelt on the Biblical status of angels, then declared that there was "no shadow of evidence" in the Bible to validate the view that human spirits returned to communicate with mortals. The only exception, he asserted, was "when there was an exercise of Divine and miraculous power."⁴⁰ Both lectures were rather guarded and restrained in character. In Victoria, Smith notes that the Anglican Church was somewhat outspoken, due mainly to

³⁷Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.81.

³⁸Braithwaite is discussed later in the chapter and in chapter five.

³⁹*Auckland Evening Star*, 15 Dec. 1879, p.3.

⁴⁰*ODT*, 11 Mar. 1873, p.2.

publicity surrounding the conversion to spiritualism in 1871 of John Tyerman, at that time an Anglican lay-reader.⁴¹

Among Catholics, belief that satanic agencies were at work in the phenomena of spiritualism was widespread, both in New Zealand and England.⁴² A writer in the *New Zealand Tablet*, probably Bishop Moran, declined to analyse spiritualist manifestations in an article criticising Emma Hardinge Britten in 1879, but cautioned:

What is certain is - granting, as we have said, the reality of the phenomena - ... that we find ourselves in the presence of powers capable of producing them. But that these powers are what they represent themselves to be, that they tell the truth, that they are benevolent rather than malevolent - this is a step in the argument for which there is no possible reasonable justification...⁴³

Discussing the likelihood of supernatural agencies in spiritualist healing, a correspondent to the *Otago Daily Times* wrote: "I assure your readers that roman catholics do believe [in] them".⁴⁴ With the exception of Wellington's outspoken Des Chesnais, Catholic ministers tended to stay out of the arena of public debate during spiritualist outbreaks. Des Chesnais was particularly vocal in 1884, when he toured the country lecturing against spiritualism and publishing pamphlets. He placed spiritualism in a wider historical context of supernatural manifestations and argued that evil spirits were to blame for such phenomena throughout the ages. Des Chesnais once told a Napier audience that in "many instances the medium was undoubtedly assisted by confederates".⁴⁵

Evangelicals were the most visible and vitriolic opponents of spiritualism in New Zealand. Lineham notes that the "most vocal opponents of Freethought were not in the mainstream of the church life of colonial New Zealand" and that "In one way or another they were sectarians."⁴⁶ The same was true for opponents of spiritualism. Des Chesnais aside, evangelicals led the campaign against spiritualists in New Zealand. Prominent among them were Matthew W. Green, Allan W. Webb (a Baptist minister), A.R. Fitchett and James Copland.

Fitchett was one of many Methodist ministers who took a vocal stand against spiritualism. While editor of the *New Zealand Wesleyan*, Fitchett delivered lectures and sermons in Christchurch following orations by J.M. Peebles in 1873. His stance on spiritualist phenomena - an unusually sceptical one - was that supernatural intervention in

⁴¹Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.152-4.

⁴²Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.84.

⁴³*New Zealand Tablet*, 13 June 1879, pp.5-9.

⁴⁴ODT, 19 June 1880, (supplement).

⁴⁵*Daily Telegraph*, 15 Aug. 1888, p.3; *New Zealand Tablet*, 12 Sep. 1884, pp.2-3; Des Chesnais, *Animal Magnetism and Spirit Mediums*; Theophilus Le Menant Des Chesnais, *A Lecture on Spiritic and Magic Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, Wellington 1884; Des Chesnais, *The Temuka Tournament*, pp.138-9,142.

⁴⁶Lineham, "Christian Reaction to Freethought", p.240.

terrestrial affairs had not been in operation since apostolic times. Fitchett therefore believed that spiritualist phenomena, including clairvoyance, were unproven and unscientific. It was "a record of knavery and imposture on the one hand, and credulity and superstition on the other." Though Dunedin's Alexander Reid was similarly sceptical, other Wesleyan ministers held different opinions. Joseph Berry believed firmly in the agency of evil spirits, and according to a report in the *Freethought Review*, Nelson's R. Bavin "had no doubt whatsoever, it was possible to hold communion with departed spirits; otherwise why did God forbid the practice[?]." ⁴⁷

In 1884 two Methodist ministers, Reverends Leonard Isitt and Robert Young, investigated the phenomena at the home of William Nation in Greytown. Isitt, who later became a leading prohibitionist, claimed to have studied spiritualist phenomena for at least eight years prior to 1884 and found little evidence of "spirit force". ⁴⁸ However, he was obviously intrigued by reports emanating from the Wairarapa. Nation later recounted the bizarre spectacle of how the two ministers struggled on the floor of his house to keep a table still that was gyrating under the spirit influence of his two mediumistic daughters:

I put a small round table in the middle of the room, and when the girl's hand was put upon it it moved to and fro. "Now," said I to the rev. gentleman, "just give the table a good grip, and hold it still." He laid hold of it with both hands, but failed to keep it quiet. He got down upon his knees, and failed again. "Come and give a hand here," said he to his rev. brother, and the two "wrestled" with the table without being able to keep it still. ⁴⁹

Isitt subsequently conducted his own experiments and was satisfied that the girls' muscular force accounted for the incident. In response, Nation deemed it "strange that two full grown men, gripping the leg of a very small table with all their power, could not hold it still with the hands of two girls placed upon it." ⁵⁰ Isitt's scepticism was not shared by a fellow Wesleyan, Rev. W. Oliver, who attended seances and believed in thought transference, clairvoyance and a "psychic force" which "pervaded all living bodies". The events at Nation's house were so intriguing to many in the community that a Spiritualist Investigation Society was formed in August 1884. This evolved into the Greytown Psychological Association and attracted 50-70 people to its early meetings. ⁵¹

Allan W. Webb was probably the most vocal opponent of spiritualism among Baptists. His 1877 work *Spiritism Weighed in the Balances*, an oration delivered during Thomas Walker's stay in Auckland, denounced spiritualism as a deluded superstition, but by 1879 he had altered his opinion markedly. Lecturing in the wake of Emma Hardinge

⁴⁷Fitchett, "Spirit Agency In Human Affairs", pp.65-7; *Press*, 13 Mar. 1873, p.3; *ODT*, 10 Mar. 1873, p.3; *Colonist*, 22 Feb. 1884, p.3; *Freethought Review*, no.20, May 1885, p.4.

⁴⁸*New Zealand Times*, 31 May 1884, p.3.

⁴⁹*New Zealand Times*, 29 May 1884, p.3. See also Nation, *The Unseen World*, pp.35-6.

⁵⁰*New Zealand Times*, 31 May 1884, p.3, 2 June 1884, p.3.

⁵¹*Wairarapa Standard*, 9 July 1884, p.3, 27 Aug. 1884, p.2, 17 Sep. 1884, p.2, 19 Sep. 1884, p.2, 3 Nov. 1884, p.2.

Britten's visit to the city, he delivered a sermon on spiritualism to a Wellesley Street Baptist Church "crowded to excess". He revealed how a "Christian friend" had joined a seance circle and while possessed by a spirit began to "utter a torrent of filthy and blasphemous talk." His body became violently contorted and thrashed about under the spirit's influence. Such investigations led all concerned to invoke the influence of demonic agency. Webb believed that the authenticity of spiritualist manifestations made spiritualism a powerful and sinister influence in society: "it could appeal to tangible, audible and visible wonders in support of a system of teaching utterly subversive of Christian faith and morals. It could be said of it 'here are no weeping virgins with sponges in the sockets of their eyes, no moving statues with springs answering to the touch of the would-be thaumaturgus, no manufactured miracles, but here are real evidences of an occult spirit influence[']". Webb labelled spiritualism "the most dangerous form of misbelief that had ever arisen."⁵² Other Baptists were similarly outspoken. Conditional immortalist George A. Brown argued with William Denton in 1882 over his spiritualist views. At the conclusion of Denton's lecture on "The Scientific Evidences of Man's Future Existence", Brown took the stage to contest his theories and conclusions.⁵³ Rev. P.H. Cornford of Napier responded to spiritualism with sermons, one of which was published alongside rival spiritualist orations.⁵⁴

Presbyterian ministers commonly debated and investigated spiritualism in New Zealand, particularly in Otago, where James Copland led the campaign against local believers. Copland was sceptical of spiritualist phenomena as a result of many years of personal investigations. Lecturing in 1873, he argued that spiritualism was a "heterogeneous compound of silly superstition and crafty imposture". He cited the operation of the imagination and "latent mental modifications" (an idea similar to W.B. Carpenter's 'unconscious cerebration'). He also cited the effects of accumulated electricity which result when several people remain in a room for a long period of time. The intelligence displayed in various manifestations was explained by electrical surges from "the highly charged human body".⁵⁵

Copland's antagonism toward spiritualism threw him into a number of sharp altercations with local and overseas spiritualists. As editor of the *Evangelist*, he frequently criticised spiritualists in Dunedin in the early-1870s. In 1872, one article referred to James Smith's lectures as being "of such a character as might only be expected from the inmate of a lunatic asylum."⁵⁶ In the same year a group of local investigators raised funds

⁵²Allan W. Webb, *Spiritism Weighed in the Balances*, Auckland 1877; *Auckland Evening Star*, 8 Dec. 1879, p.3.

⁵³*Auckland Evening Star*, 26 July 1882, p.3.

⁵⁴[Mrs Attenborrow and Rev. P.H. Cornford], *Spiritualism From Two Points of View: Trance Addresses by Mrs Attenborrow and Sermon by the Rev. P.H. Cornford*, Napier 1888.

⁵⁵Copland, *Spiritualism*, pp.3-7,20; *Evangelist*, vol.4, no.10, Oct. 1872, pp.289-292. On Copland's life and philosophy, see John Stenhouse, "The Rev. Dr James Copland and the Mind of New Zealand 'Fundamentalism'", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.17, no.4, Dec. 1993, pp.475-97.

⁵⁶*Evangelist*, vol.4, no.10, Oct. 1872, pp.289-92.

to send Copland to Melbourne to witness the education of Smith's children, whom Smith claimed were taught via spirit communication. Copland declined the invitation, much to Smith's disappointment.⁵⁷ Copland also exchanged words with Robert Stout over spiritualism in the columns of the *Otago Daily Times* in 1873.⁵⁸ Later in the year he endeavoured to investigate the spiritualist manifestations which took place at the house of Thomas Allan: "I will feel greatly obliged if Mr Allan will kindly permit me and two or three other witnesses, whose names will be a guarantee to the public both for their competency and candour, to witness any of these phenomena under circumstances that may appear to us free from the opportunity of any kind of deception. If so, I shall undertake to publish the results faithfully". Allan declined, urging Copland to form his own circle: "this is the most satisfactory way for him to settle that there is no deception."⁵⁹

In common with other Evangelical denominations, Presbyterian leaders held widely differing views on the nature and seriousness of spiritualism. This was visibly the case in Dunedin. The Dunedin correspondent of the *Bruce Herald* summarised the views of many in Otago when writing that "Copland treats the whole subject in a way which seems to me inevitably to land us all in cold blank materialism, or to render us sceptical of all of which we have not personal experience."⁶⁰ The perceived danger was that Copland's views encouraged religious scepticism and cast doubt on the testimony of the gospels. In early 1873, the *Bruce Herald* printed a series of tracts on spiritualism written by Green Island's Rev. Michael Watt. Watt argued that the testimony of numerous eminent men was more than sufficient to assume the reality of the phenomena, and he invoked deceiving spirits to account for them. He declared that spiritualists "can afford to look down with something like a feeling of amusement on the efforts made by their critics to deny those facts or explain them away."⁶¹

Watt's views were equally contentious. In July 1872 he told the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Society, an organisation containing spiritualists and their sympathisers, that "there could be no doubt that with the validity of human testimony on which the reality of the marvels of Spiritualism depended, would also stand or fall the Christian miracles."⁶² J.G.S Grant later wrote that "the spiritualists openly boasted that they had secured the services of a clergyman 'who was almost, if not altogether, a spiritualist'." Grant himself believed Watt to be "wholly steeped in the Stygian fogs of a most loathsome superstition." By contrast, J.M. Peebles praised his "rare manliness".⁶³ To many Christians, however, Watt appeared to place Christianity on the same pedestal as spiritualism. It was rumoured

⁵⁷*ODT*, 18 May 1872, p.3, 21 May 1872, p.2; *Oamaru Times*, 12 July 1872, p.3.

⁵⁸*ODT*, 25 Mar. 1873, p.3, 27 Mar. 1873, p.3, 29 Mar. 1873, p.1, 31 Mar. 1873, p.2.

⁵⁹*ODT*, 2 Apr. 1873, p.2, 3 Apr. 1873, p.3.

⁶⁰*Bruce Herald*, 18 Mar. 1873, p.6

⁶¹*Bruce Herald*, 25 Feb. 1873, p.6.

⁶²*Otago Witness*, 27 July 1872, p.9.

⁶³*Bruce Herald*, 31 Dec. 1872, p.5; J.G.S. Grant, *Superstition, With Special Relation to the Spiritualistic Ribaldries of Peebles, Dunn, Watt & Co.*, [Dunedin 1873]; *Harbinger of Light*, no.33, May 1873, p.431.

that two officers of the Green Island Presbyterian Church had resigned because of his views. Copland criticised his arguments as absurd and hastily-formed.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, belief in the reality of spiritualist phenomena was common among Presbyterian ministers in New Zealand. In 1879, Rev. Alexander Carrick had a "personal and prolonged" meeting with Emma Hardinge Britten in Auckland, later writing that "the man who doubts the reality of spiritualism must not only doubt the decision of the most practiced and skilful scientific observers of the day; he must call into question the veracity of his own senses."⁶⁵

Despite evangelicals' dislike of spiritualism, there were many similarities and points of sympathy between the two. In England, all Protestant denominations contained clergymen who were "willing to approach the subject with an open mind and who hoped that spiritualism would prove an effective weapon against materialism."⁶⁶ In New Zealand, the independence, religious zeal and volatility which characterised many evangelicals often brought them into both hostile and sympathetic contact with spiritualism.

The links between revivalism and spiritualism are particularly striking. Spiritualism usually flourished in New Zealand during times of Christian revivalism (as it did in antebellum America⁶⁷), and despite rejecting evangelical Protestantism, it closely resembled a charismatic revivalist sect.

As noted in the previous chapter, the long depression catalysed the parallel growth of sects, cults and new social movements. During this time of economic uncertainty and heightened religious anxiety, spiritualists and revivalists competed for conversions. Discussing the religious ferment of New York State, Winthrop S. Hudson writes: "while revivals provided comforting reassurance to many, others were left distraught and torn by anxiety." Though they rejected the gospel, "they were in a receptive mood to listen to new prophets and prophetesses who offered a promise of spiritual security."⁶⁸ This was true of settler society in the 1880s, and helps explain how spiritualism and other new religious movements were able to gain recruits and prosper alongside conventional evangelical Protestantism.

Lineham notes that freethinkers and Evangelicals had much in common: they shared similar social backgrounds, utilised similar methods of revivalism and had similar ways of thinking.⁶⁹ Lineham's point holds true for spiritualists. Spiritualists, freethinkers and evangelicals thrived on conflict and to a significant extent relied on each other for recruits, publicity, unity and direction. Spiritualists usually came from Protestant

⁶⁴*Bruce Herald*, 11 Mar. 1873, p.5; *Evangelist*, vol.4, no.10, Oct. 1872, pp.289-92; Copland, *Spiritualism*, p.2

⁶⁵*New Zealand Herald*, 11 Dec. 1879, p.6, 12 Dec. 1879, p.6, 13 Dec. 1879, p.6, 16 Dec. 1879, p.6.

⁶⁶Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp.82-3.

⁶⁷R. Laurence Moore, "Spiritualism", in Edwin S. Gaustad, (ed.), *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, New York 1974, p.96.

⁶⁸Winthrop S. Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment", in Edwin S. Gaustad, (ed.), *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, New York 1974, p.8.

⁶⁹Lineham, "Christian Reaction to Freethought", pp.240-1; Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*, p.107.

backgrounds and many were ex-members of small evangelical groups. Spiritualism and evangelism were both popularised by itinerant personalities from abroad. A wave of evangelists hit New Zealand shores in the late-1870s. They included figures such as Rev. Dr. A. N. Somerville (in 1878), Henry Varley (in 1879) and Margaret Hampson (in 1881). By 1880 "there was a well-established 'sawdust trail' of congregations, halls, and settlements through New Zealand which many evangelists travelled."⁷⁰ In later years, evangelists fuelled the growth of the Salvation Army and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Though far less popular than Christian evangelists, spiritualist and freethought 'evangelists' prospered alongside their orthodox counterparts at this time. Charles Bright (from 1876) Thomas Walker (in 1877), Emma Hardinge Britten (in 1879), John Tyerman (in 1879), William Denton (in 1882) and George Milner Stephen (in 1883-5) were the major spiritualist figures in this period.

The concurrence of spiritualism and Christian revivalism was conspicuously evident in the lower North Island. Some of this revivalism is outlined by Lineham in his study of Brethren Christians.⁷¹ Towns such as Fielding, Palmerston North and Greytown formed spiritualistic associations during 1883-5, while several other towns had freethought organisations. Both spiritualists and revivalists used Moody and Sankey's hymns during meetings, revivalist hymns which were "very popular in many Nonconformist churches".⁷² In 1888, an upsurge of spiritualist activity in Napier was followed by a series of Evangelical "Tent Meetings" which responded to, and competed for attention with, the meetings of the Hawkes Bay Christian Spiritualist Association. These Evangelical gatherings discussed Biblical prophecy, salvation and the Millennium, and directly addressed spiritualistic topics. The title of one meeting was "The Angels - Are they the spirits of the dead? - Their number - What part do they act in the salvation of men?"⁷³

Both primitive Christianity and spiritualist activity were informal in character. They tended to be practiced and maintained through informal networks and were based largely in domestic settings. The family hearth was the site for both Christian fellowship and seances, clairvoyant consultations and prayer. Both movements also placed emphasis on phenomena and experience, stressing the need for a direct link with the spiritual world. Furthermore, the spread of both movements relied to a significant extent on personal testimony.

Spiritualism, freethought and revivalism rose and fell in tandem in the 1880s. The passion for winning converts rarely maintained vigour for more than a year or two, though informal networks and activities persisted. Once the initial enthusiasm waned or a charismatic leader departed the region, the wave of interest subsided. This was particularly

⁷⁰Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*, p.61; Evans, *Evangelical Revivals in New Zealand*, pp.56-8.

⁷¹Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*, ch.4.

⁷²Lineham, "How Institutionalised was Protestant Piety", p.377. Spiritualist use of Moody and Sankey: Fielding Lyceum meeting, *Fielding Star*, 4 Aug. 1885, p.2; Hawkes Bay Christian Spiritualist Association meetings, *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 4 May 1888, p.3, 12 May 1888, p.1, 24 May 1888, p.3, 28 May 1888, p.2, 3 Oct 1888, p.3.

⁷³*Hawkes Bay Herald*, 15 Nov. 1888, p.3.

true for Methodists.⁷⁴ The enthusiasm of adherents was often sustained by experiencing and witnessing spiritual phenomena, and once the phenomena waned or declined in novelty, so too did the enthusiasm of many devotees.

Significantly, spiritualists, freethinkers and evangelicals often relied on each other for support on a number of political and social issues in New Zealand. In 1925, Isaac Selby, an active freethinker in the 1880s who later returned to the church, wrote that in "a land where new doctrines arose even among the Maories, such as the Hau-Hau superstition, tolerance became essential to life, and liberty naturally entered into the constitution of the State." He added that all "ministers of the gospel seemed to have a larger conception of their mission."⁷⁵ Selby's comments reinforce Lineham's observations that "the co-operative principle was all-important in New Zealand society" and that there was "the strongest social pressure for everyone to work together."⁷⁶ This atmosphere created a climate where evangelicals could work alongside their infidel antagonists to stamp out Old World evils and usher in progressive legislation.

In Dunedin, many evangelicals and liberal Christians who wrote and lectured against spiritualism and freethought were involved in radical politics, supporting the very infidels they condemned on so many occasions. For example, the reverends M.W. Green, T. Roseby, A.R. Fitchett, J. Waters and R. Waddell occupied the same platform with freethinkers and spiritualists such as J. Braithwaite, J. Boyd, T.C. Farnie, R. Stout and W.M. Bolt to form the Land Nationalisation Association in 1883. Their first public meeting was chaired by the virulent anti-spiritualist M.W. Green and took place at Lyceum Hall.⁷⁷ Green was elected to Parliament in 1881 on a platform of progressive reform. Somewhat ironically, this feat was achieved in part through his fame in condemning spiritualism as immoral and socially subversive.⁷⁸ James Neil, an adherent of the Church of Christ in Dunedin, vehemently opposed spiritualism. Nevertheless, he worked with and publicly supported an outspoken spiritualist and fierce enemy of orthodox Christianity, Robert Rutherford. Neil was one of a number of men who nominated Rutherford to contest the Caversham seat in 1887, and in 1892 he spoke after Rutherford and echoed his liberal sentiment at a meeting organised to form the National Liberal Association.⁷⁹ In Wellington, William McLean electioneered for Parliament in 1887 as a working man's candidate at the same time that Rev. Leonard Isitt organised a series of "Working Men's Free Concerts". Isitt's concerts were immensely popular events designed to educate and cultivate working class sections of the populace through music, and to promote temperance, a subject on which he lectured after each event.⁸⁰ Here, a spiritualist and

⁷⁴Lineham, "New Zealanders and the Methodist Evangel", pp.7-8.

⁷⁵Isaac Selby, *Memories of Maoriland*, Melbourne 1925, p.78.

⁷⁶Lineham, "New Zealanders and the Methodist Evangel", p.9.

⁷⁷ODT, 20 Apr. 1883, p.2(supplement); *Echo*, 22 Oct. 1881, p.3, 9 June 1883, p.2.

⁷⁸See chapter five.

⁷⁹*Evening Herald*, 16 July 1887, p.5; *The Globe*, 10 Aug. 1892, p.2.

⁸⁰For reports of these meetings, see, for example, *New Zealand Times*, 8 Aug. 1887, p.4, 1 Aug. 1887, p.5. McLean's political activities are discussed in chapter five.

Methodist leader lobbied in tandem for the uplift of society and the amelioration of the working classes.

Adherents of ultra-liberal denominations such as Unitarianism and Swedenborgianism were notoriously amenable to spiritualistic doctrines. Oppenheim observes that in England "some of the most fervent Christian spiritualists served as clergy in sects that occupied the outskirts of Nonconformity."⁸¹ In fact, there is merit in viewing liberal Christianity, freethought and spiritualism as a single, fluid category of religious belief within which adherents amalgamated ideas and moved from one belief to the other.

Ultra-liberal Protestants embraced spiritualism with ease in New Zealand. Two examples were the Presbyterian, Rev. S.J. Neil, and the non-denominational minister, Rev. Samuel Edger. Neil was the minister at Thames during 1877-93 who replaced the first Presbyterian permanently to minister there, James Hill. Hill published a pamphlet in 1873 condemning spiritualism as fraudulent and superstitious.⁸² In contrast, Neil was deeply interested in spiritualism and theosophy. In 1894 he wrote that "about 10 years ago, I did a little in the way of investigating the phenomena that are called spiritualistic", and though refraining from giving his conclusions, described spiritualism as "one of the most notable phases of thought in this century." He was closely associated with the Thames spiritualist community. In 1881, Samuel Edger conducted services at Neil's church while he was on holiday. Neil became a member of the Theosophical Society and in 1893 was convicted of heresy, later forming an independent ministry in Auckland. Writing in *The History of a Heresy Hunt*, Neil claimed that he remained an orthodox minister "to broaden and liberalise the church from within, rather than without."⁸³

Rev. Samuel Edger (1822/3-1882) was similarly sympathetic toward spiritualism. From a Baptist and Congregationalist background, Edger founded a Nonconformist settlement in Albertland, north of Auckland, before establishing a liberal, non-sectarian independent ministry in Auckland in 1866.⁸⁴ In the last decade of his life, Edger investigated spiritualism extensively and rarely missed an opportunity to promote its social and religious beneficence. He was often at the forefront of spiritualist controversies in Auckland, stoutly defending visiting spiritualists such as Thomas Walker, Dr Henry Slade and Emma Hardinge Britten in the late-1870s. During Britten's stay in Auckland in 1879, Edger attended her lectures and declared: "I have not heard from her a single sentence from which I could dissent." At the end of 1879 he proclaimed that some "months ago the editor of the HERALD charged all believers in Spiritualistic phenomena with being

⁸¹Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.83.

⁸²John Rawson Elder, *The History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1840-1940*, Christchurch 1940, p.407; Hill, *Spiritualism*.

⁸³S.J. Neil, *The History of a Heresy Hunt*, Thames 1894, pp.1,63-4,73-5; *Thames Advertiser and Miners News*, 9 Apr. 1881, p.3; Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.114,121-2,205-7.

⁸⁴For biographical information, see Edger, *Autobiographical Notes and Lectures*, and Lineham's synopsis of Edger in *DNZB*, vol.2, pp.129-30.

something like fools, idiots, or deceivers" when in fact "many of the most intelligent and esteemed of the citizens of Auckland were among such believers."⁸⁵

Edger wrote extensively on spiritualism.⁸⁶ According to Ellwood, he favoured spiritualism "for its moral values (it had no association with war and eschewed materialism) and its sense of nearness of the unseen world, but he granted that much nonsense was mixed up with it."⁸⁷ This understates Edger's regard for the subject. Edger believed that spiritualist phenomena put the reality of a spiritual existence "beyond the possibility of a question". In his view, spiritualism swept back the tide of materialism and laid the basis for a more purified, truthful religion of the future.⁸⁸ As he wrote in his autobiographical notes, "Can there be a single doubt in the mind of any genuine student of our Christian Scriptures, that a more earnest life-religion must come to us through an intenser realisation of the powers of the unseen world? If it is not to be left to Spiritualism to bring this about, then it must be by some form of Christianity that shall adopt this great element of Spiritualism."⁸⁹ Unsurprisingly, Edger's "unconservative and Spiritualistic doctrines" tended to "draw around him, the Spiritualists and liberal thinkers of the town."⁹⁰

To summarise the key points, spiritualists and evangelicals shared much in common. Though regularly at the forefront of bitter attacks on spiritualism, evangelicals were often intrigued by the movement and were a major source of recruits for the new faith. Spiritualist outbreaks often accompanied and in many respects mirrored Christian revivalism, and many evangelical ministers were willing publicly to support spiritualists and freethinkers on issues of liberal political reform. Ultra-liberal Christians embraced spiritualism with ease. Considered broadly, a liberal and interactive spirit was a prominent feature of relations between spiritualists and Christian groups in New Zealand.

⁸⁵*New Zealand Herald*, 6 Dec. 1879, p.6; *Auckland Evening Star*, 2 Dec. 1879, p.3. Edger's involvement with Thomas Walker is discussed in chapter five.

⁸⁶Extensive discussions on spiritualism can be found in Edger, *Autobiographical Notes and Lectures*, pp.103-7,213-26. See also *Echo*, 15 May 1880, p.3, 26 Mar. 1881, p.3, 2 Apr. 1881, p.3, 9 Apr. 1881, p.3, 16 Apr. 1881, p.3.

⁸⁷Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.262.

⁸⁸Edger, *Autobiographical Notes and Lectures*, pp.213,218-9,225-6; *Echo*, 2 Apr. 1881, p.3.

⁸⁹Edger, *Autobiographical Notes and Lectures*, p.105.

⁹⁰Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, p.271.

SPIRITUALISM AND FREETHOUGHT

The affinities and antipathies between spiritualists and freethinkers are discussed below. Spiritualist-freethought relations were never smooth. Adherents of both groups were volatile in character and formed ill-conceived and short-lived alliances in the 1870s and '80s. Nevertheless, these two rather fractious camps shared optimistic visions about the future of humanity and society, and often worked together in liberal associations to promote their political and socio-intellectual views. Many of Australasia's leading freethought orators were ardent spiritualists who sought to synthesise the two groups and foster liberalism, co-operation and religious tolerance in wider society.

Bill Cooke describes how rationalists of the 1920s "felt themselves to be different." They felt they were "part of a vanguard, a leading, cutting edge", or "a vulnerable and disadvantaged minority on the edge of a hostile Christian world."⁹¹ Painting in a less flattering light, F.B. Smith describes freethinkers in the 1870s and '80s as "excitable, dogmatic, lonely, faith-ridden men" whose "independence and argumentative devotion" fostered bitterness and division.⁹² These constructions capture important aspects of freethinkers' mentality and are applicable to both freethinkers and spiritualists in nineteenth-century New Zealand. Many adherents of both camps had an evangelical religious upbringing, or were raised in the anti-clerical secularist, Chartist and Owenite traditions of earlier decades. Both groups identified themselves with radical and progressive social change, and often conceived of themselves as martyrs for the cause of truth, freedom and humanity. These traits formed the social glue among individuals who often had very little else in common, but also bred frustration and division.

It is likely that spiritualism infiltrated freethought to a much greater extent in New Zealand than in Britain. In 1882, a correspondent of the *Echo* observed that "Spiritualism, in its modern form, is more frequently mixed up in Freethought literature in the colonies than in that of the old country."⁹³ Unlike Australia, Britain and America, New Zealand struggled to sustain separate spiritualist and freethought organs. Publications such as the *Echo* and the *Freethought Review* became a voice for both. Booksellers such as Joseph Braithwaite (Dunedin), William H. Terry (Melbourne) and Archibald Campbell (Auckland) advertised spiritualist works in their columns.⁹⁴ With such small numbers of active followers scattered around a sparsely populated colony, freethinkers and spiritualists often banded together in liberal organisations.

Many freethinkers were drawn to spiritualism by its scientific rhetoric. Spiritualist phenomena challenged their powers of reasoning and skills in observation, traits which they valued highly. This trait among freethinkers was identified and deprecated by their

⁹¹Bill Cooke, *Heathen in Godzone: Seventy Years of Rationalism in New Zealand*, Auckland 1998, p.47.

⁹²Smith, "Religion and Freethought", p.216.

⁹³*Echo*, 11 Mar. 1882, p.3.

⁹⁴See, for example, *Echo*, 30 July 1881, p.3, Oct. 22 1881, p.1; *Freethought Review*, no.8, May 1884, pp.8-9, no.19, Apr. 1885, p.9.

opponents. In 1877, a writer in the *New Zealand Herald* claimed that spiritualism "flatters the intellectual pride" of freethinkers "by submitting its evidence to them" and "professing to enable them to test the proofs." Rev. Michael Watt made similar statements: "All who have great confidence in their own reasoning power jump at the offer [to test spiritualism] and set themselves with great zeal to investigate the chaos of conflicting opinions presented to them."⁹⁵ Materialistic freethinkers were often drawn into spiritualist belief by the scientific language used by propagandists. The spiritualist God, for example, was on many occasions equated with 'nature', 'electricity', 'magnetism' or 'truth'. T.R. Walton, president of the Palmerston North Psychological Association, explained to an audience that 'mind' and 'spirit' were matter, "and that what was not matter was nothing." He believed that electricity was "the grand moving cause of all things".⁹⁶

Many freethinkers saw room for spiritualist belief when viewed as part of some imperfectly understood law of nature. A writer in the *Freethought Review* expressed the view of many when stating that "science is far from having exhausted the secrets of Nature, and the manifestations may be in accordance with some hidden law."⁹⁷ Even Joseph Evison ('Ivo'), the virulently sceptical freethought lecturer and editor of the *Rationalist*, was forced to speculate on new laws of nature when assessing spiritualism. Evison traversed New Zealand in 1884 delivering orations such as "Spiritualism, the Latest Superstition" and "Spiritualism, the Modern Delusion; its Phenomena Naturally Accounted For".⁹⁸ He grudgingly admitted that spiritualist phenomena were occasionally difficult to explain, and postulated the existence of a latent force within humans, generated by the natural and constant decomposition of flesh. He contended that this force accumulated over time and was released in the seance chamber, particularly when brought into contact with wood, such as a seance-table. Evison's theories evidently satisfied members of the Canterbury Freethought Association. The secretary, F.C. Hall, remarked that his lectures "gave great satisfaction", later adding that "I have not heard of so many seances here lately."⁹⁹

At the very least, freethinkers appreciated the fact that spiritualism contradicted orthodox Christianity and helped vindicate their rejection of it. As a columnist for the *Freethought Review* put it, whether spiritualism was true or not, "its growth cannot be

⁹⁵*New Zealand Herald*, 25 Apr. 1877, p.2; *Bruce Herald*, 7 Mar. 1873, p.6.

⁹⁶*Fielding Star*, 11 May 1885, p.2; *Manawatu Standard*, 15 Oct. 1885, p.4. Walton was a leading draper in Palmerston North and surrounding districts. He was also an agent for the Mutual Assurance Society of Victoria and the Phoenix Fire Insurance Company. *Harbinger of Light*, no.182, Apr. 1885, p.2944; *Rationalist*, no.17, 18 Oct. 1885, p.4, no.20, 8 Nov. 1885, p.2; *Freethought Review*, no.11, Aug. 1884, p.6; *Manawatu Standard*, 7 Sep. 1885, p.2, 8 Sep. 1885, p.2, 15 Sep. 1885, p.2; *Fielding Star*, 2 Apr. 1885, p.2, 30 May 1885, p.4.

⁹⁷*Freethought Review*, no.3, Dec. 1883, p.3. The writer was probably A.D. Willis, though John Ballance and Robert Pharazyn also wrote editorials. Timothy McIvor, *The Rainmaker: a Biography of John Ballance, Journalist and Politician 1839-1893*, Auckland 1989, p.116.

⁹⁸*Freethought Review*, no.13, Oct. 1884, p.7; *New Zealand Times*, 4 Oct. 1884, p.3.

⁹⁹*Wairarapa Standard*, 19 Nov. 1884, p.2, 24 Nov. 1884, p.2; *Freethought Review*, no.13, Oct. 1884, p.7, no.14, Nov. 1884, p.6.

favourable to orthodoxy."¹⁰⁰ More than any other factor, a shared dislike of orthodoxy underpinned co-operation between the two groups in New Zealand.

The rationalist writer, H.H. Pearce, observed that "Freethought and Spiritualism were closely associated in these early days [the 1870s] throughout New Zealand and Australia."¹⁰¹ In fact, many freethought organisations were formed and sustained by spiritualists, many of whom were pioneers of the freethought movement in New Zealand. In Auckland, spiritualist J.C. Wilkes was chairman of a group of radicals in 1881 who sought to establish the first Freethought organisation in Auckland.¹⁰² W.D. Campbell was one of two vice-presidents of the Auckland Rationalist Association in 1884. Its Lyceum, which attracted 60-70 children in 1886, was declared "purely secular, and free to all shades of opinion" and spiritualist Samuel Coombes outfitted the school "with a full set of flags, rosettes, regalia, etc., sufficient for superintendents, class conductors, and 144 pupils." Another spiritualist, W. A. Ellis, spoke occasionally at rationalist meetings in Auckland on "the necessity for unity between Spiritualists and Freethinkers," urging the amalgamation of two competing Lyceums in the city.¹⁰³ Similar co-operation existed in other centres.

At a meeting in the Dunedin Council Chambers in 1884, an attempt was made to form a New Zealand Freethought Federal Union. Significantly, spiritualists and their sympathisers were at the forefront of proceedings. Robert Rutherford and Charles Bright were present and spoke in support of the new association. The president of the new Union, Robert Stout, had consistently defended spiritualism since 1869, while the secretary, T.C. Farnie, was an earnest spiritualist investigator.¹⁰⁴

Many freethought lecturers working in New Zealand in the 1870s and '80s were spiritualists. Yorkshireman Joseph Dinsdale (1846-98) was active in Woodville and Palmerston North during 1883-5. A teacher and later town clerk at Devonport, Dinsdale was a prominent member of the Woodville Freethought Association and reputedly "one of the oldest and most earnest members" of the Theosophical Society in New Zealand.¹⁰⁵ Joseph Evison acknowledged that T.R. Walton, "a noble worker in the cause of

¹⁰⁰*Freethought Review*, no.5, Feb. 1884, p.1, no.19, Apr. 1885, p.1. See also no.21, June 1885, p.4.

¹⁰¹H.H. Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *Truthseeker*, Dec.-Jan. 1938-9, p.13.

¹⁰²Spiritualist J.H. Drabble was also involved. *New Zealand Herald*, 21 May 1881, p.5; *New Zealand Christian Record*, 10 June 1881, p.6.

¹⁰³*Freethought Review*, no.4, Jan. 1884, p.8, no.14, Nov. 1884, p.6, no.18, Mar. 1885, p.5; *Rationalist*, no.18, 13 June 1886, p.6.

¹⁰⁴*Freethought Review*, no.7, Apr. 1884, pp.6-7. Farnie once delivered a lecture at the Dunedin Freethought Association on "Thought Reading and Occult phenomena". *ODT*, 20 Sep. 1884, p.1. Stout is discussed in chapter five.

¹⁰⁵The son of a public weighmaster, Dinsdale appeared to be miner before being employed by the government as a teacher at Bunnythorpe in 1881. During 1886-98 he was town clerk at Devonport. A popular figure on the North Shore, the mayor and the local Council attended his funeral, which was conducted by Mrs Draffin of the Waitemata branch of the Theosophical Society. According to Draffin, he died believing "in the probability of the resumption of duties in a future incarnation." *Freethought Review*, no.11, Aug. 1884, p.6, no.12, Sep. 1884, p.5, no.14, Dec. 1884, p.7, no.18, Mar. 1885, p.6; Probate, Joseph Dinsdale, National Archives, Auckland; *Return of Freeholders*, 1884; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 Aug. 1898, p.5, 25 Aug. 1898, p.4; *AJHR*, 1881, E-1, p.17.

Freethought, is to be credited with much of the favour with which Rational tenets have been received in Palmerston."¹⁰⁶ Other spiritualists who frequented freethought platforms include M.S. Ettie Moore¹⁰⁷ and W. A. Ellis.¹⁰⁸

The most striking examples of freethought lecturers who embraced spiritualism were Charles Bright and John Tyerman. Though based in Australia, these influential orators did much to cement the two philosophies in New Zealand, and they epitomise the affinities between freethought and spiritualism in the period.

Born in Yorkshire, the son of a goldsmith and watchmaker, Charles Bright (1832-1903) was of Jewish extraction, a fact which his Christian opponents occasionally taunted him for.¹⁰⁹ Travelling to Victoria in 1853, Bright forged a successful career as a journalist and insurance agent. Radical in politics, in 1871 he was nominated as a "Protectionist radical candidate" for East Melbourne in the Legislative Assembly, though he finished third of five candidates. In 1869 Bright was commissioned to investigate spiritualism by the Melbourne *Argus*, investigations which convinced him of its veracity. Bright was later employed as a lecturer for the VAPS and, until 1886, traversed the Australasian lecture circuit as a freethought lecturer. In 1883, having divorced his first wife, Bright married a well-known spiritualist and women's rights advocate, Annie Pillars, the widow of Sydney's Unitarian minister James Pillars.¹¹⁰

Bright first toured New Zealand in 1876, a move precipitated by dwindling returns from his Melbourne lectures.¹¹¹ In December of that year he settled in Dunedin, where until early-1879 he regularly filled the Princess Theatre with lectures on freethought and spiritualist topics. These weekly Sunday lectures - 'sermons' would be more apt - were patronised by "all classes and all sexes". He acted as a pastor to a large number of families, "visiting them in cases of sickness, trouble, or death."¹¹² Though based in Sydney from 1880, Bright made return visits to New Zealand in the 1880s.

Annie Bright's autobiographical novel, *A Soul's Pilgrimage*, reveals that Charles Bright believed his orations were directly inspired by the spirits. A medium ("Mary")

¹⁰⁶*Rationalist*, no.17, 18 Oct. 1885, p.4.

¹⁰⁷Moore was active in Wanganui, Fielding and Palmerston North, and was president of the Fielding Lyceum and Rationalistic Association in 1885. *Fielding Star*, 24 Sep. 1885, p.3, 29 Sep. 1885, p.3, 24 Oct. 1885, p.2; *Rationalist*, vol.1, no.20, 8 Nov. 1885, p.2; *New Zealand Times*, 8 Oct. 1885, p.3, 19 Nov. 1885, p.2; *Freethought Review*, no.4, Jan. 1884, pp.7,13, Mar. 1884, p.6; *Manawatu Standard*, 3 Sep. 1885, p.3, 8 Sep. 1885, p.2, 9 Sep. 1885, p.3.

¹⁰⁸Ellis was president of the New Zealand Psychological Society. He expounded spiritualism in his oft-repeated lecture, "The Religion of the Future", gave public demonstrations of phrenology, physiognomy, clairvoyance and psychometry, and worked as a professional healer, though he appeared to leave the country in 1885, possibly headed for Melbourne. *Taranaki Herald*, 20 Apr. 1885, p.2; *New Zealand Times*, 26 Feb. 1885, p.2, 4 Mar. 1885, p.2; *Freethought Review*, no.20, May 1885, p.6; *Fielding Star*, 24 Mar. 1885, p.2; *Harbinger of Light*, no.182, Apr. 1885, p.2944.

¹⁰⁹See, for example, *New Zealand Wesleyan*, 1 May 1879, p.104.

¹¹⁰After 1886 Bright was predominantly employed as a writer for the *Age* and spoke regularly at the Sydney Unitarian Church. He became a Unitarian minister in 1902. Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.65-7; Douglas Pike (ed), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol.3, Melbourne 1969, pp.231-32.

¹¹¹Smith, "Religion and Freethought", p.121.

¹¹²*Bruce Herald*, 16 July 1878, p.5; H.H. Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *Truthseeker*, Apr.-May 1939, p.7.

once told Bright ("Mr Mason") that he was "always surrounded on the platform ... with a galaxy of bright spirits, while one who was the leader of the rest stood above the speaker and directed his thoughts and speech." Mr Mason acknowledged this: "I seem to be taken possession of a few hours before the time of the lecture." He described how "in the morning the lecture 'comes', as it were, and I am then satisfied that it will be all right, and I need give no more thought to it until I walk on to the platform."¹¹³

Bright went to great lengths to tailor his spiritualist world-view for freethought audiences. He tended subtly to introduce spiritualism into his lectures rather than constantly and explicitly expound it. Bright challenged clergymen to debate Christianity on a number of occasions while in New Zealand, though he avoided spiritualistic topics. A debate on the origins of Christianity took place in Dunedin in 1879 between Bright and Rev. M.W. Green. Spiritualists and investigators such as Robert Rutherford, John Logan, W.M. Bolt and Robert Stout administered the debates on behalf of Bright, though few spiritualistic issues were raised.¹¹⁴ *A Soul's Pilgrimage* suggests that Bright disliked pandering toward freethinkers in his lectures, but found it necessary to do so. As Mr Mason explained, "it always seems necessary to explain, when you avow yourself a believer in the genuineness of the phenomena, that you are not also an errant fool". Mason strove "to turn people's thoughts towards the future life", but found this difficult, because "most rationalists are such stubborn dense materialists, just as I was myself."¹¹⁵

In common with Bright, John Tyerman strove to synthesise freethought and spiritualism and encourage co-operation between the two communities. However, he was a troubled individual who often alienated himself from his supporters. Tyerman (1838-80) was born in the north of England. Self-educated, he began as a farmer though later he became a United Free Methodist Church minister.¹¹⁶ In 1864 he was sent to New Zealand as the first United Free Methodist minister of the Canterbury province.

Though he initially took an active part in evangelical activities in Christchurch,¹¹⁷ in 1868 Tyerman shocked his congregation and the city by announcing not only that he had embraced Swedenborgianism, but that he had sold the United Free Methodist Church

¹¹³Annie Bright, *A Soul's Pilgrimage*, Melbourne 1907, pp.213,215.

¹¹⁴*New Zealand Times*, 28 Apr. 1884, p.2, 5 May 1884, p.2; *New Zealand Wesleyan*, vol.9, no.5, 1 May 1879, p.104; [M.W. Green and Charles Bright], *The Divine Origin of Christianity*, Dunedin 1879, preface.

¹¹⁵Bright, *A Soul's Pilgrimage*, pp.211-12.

¹¹⁶According to Smith, Tyerman was born in Hartlepool, Durham, though his memorial stone stated that he was born in Upton, Yorkshire. Smith, "Religion and Freethought", p.65; Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", p.25; *Harbinger of Light*, no.167, Jan 1884, p.2627; Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", p.199; Phillips, *Defending "A Christian country"*, pp.113,174.

¹¹⁷Arriving in Christchurch in February 1865, Tyerman became involved in the Canterbury Auxilliary Bible Society, the Benevolent Aid Society and the Literary Society. He was also active in a local Temperance Society, seconding a motion to establish a Southern Union of Temperance Societies in 1865. During 1865-6 he presided over efforts to build a new chapel, which was completed in October 1866. *Press*, 18 Feb. 1865, p.2, 10 May 1865, pp.3-4, 25 May 1865, p.3, 8 July 1865, p.2, 22 July 1865, p.2, 21 July 1865, p.2, 26 Aug. 1865, p.2, 16 Sep. 1865, p.2, 2 Nov. 1865, p.2, 22 Mar. 1866, p.2, 2 May 1866, p.2.

chapel to his new brethren.¹¹⁸ In a public statement, Tyerman confessed that he had shared company with Swedenborgians for several years and been swayed by their arguments. The New Church appealed to him because of "the fine spirit of charity and tolerance it breathes, its exceedingly practical tendency, its harmony with the laws of nature, and with the Word of God."¹¹⁹ This transition played a significant role in his later conversion to spiritualism. "I willingly acknowledge", he later conceded, "that I was greatly indebted to Swedenborg for help on several theological questions; and his writings, no doubt, paved my way for the reception of Spiritualism."¹²⁰

Tyerman later moved to Australia where he joined the Anglican church and became a lay-reader at Kangaroo Flat, outside Bendigo.¹²¹ In 1871 he was expelled from the church for holding seances at his parish and professing his belief in spirit communion. "Sustained and guided by a higher than human power", Tyerman henceforth published pamphlets and delivered lectures in Australia, New Zealand and around the world on spiritualism and freethought. He also developed mediumistic abilities.¹²² Spiritualism, he believed, "is better adapted than any existing religious system to counteract the materialistic spirit of the age, to solve theological difficulties which distract all sections of the Christian Church, and to meet the profound wants and lofty aspirations of man's better nature."¹²³ Tyerman was well-known in New Zealand, particularly in Dunedin, where his Melbourne activities were occasionally reported by the press. He toured the country in 1879 and his work *Freethought Vindicated* was enthusiastically received by the *Echo* and sold by Joseph Braithwaite.¹²⁴

In 1880 Tyerman succumbed to a history of mental instability and was admitted to an asylum in Darlinghurst, Sydney, intoxicated, suicidal and "uncontrollably restless". He died two days later, aged 42. His death instigated a debate common in the history of freethought, as freethinkers tried to vindicate his life and actions amid clerical warnings about the shortcomings of unbelief. As Nash observes in Britain, death and burial was

¹¹⁸According to his own account, Tyerman attempted to amalgamate the United Free Methodist Church with the New Church, a move which divided his congregation. He offered his resignation and it was agreed to sell the chapel by tender. Both the New Church and the Wesleyan Church put in offers, the former offering more. The UFM Church council accepted the highest bidder. However, the council appeared to be stacked with Tyerman supporters, his opponents having resigned earlier. Uproar ensued once it became known that he allowed the chapel, built with Methodist funds and labour, to be sold to the Swedenborgians. *Press*, 2 June 1866, p.2, 3 Oct 1866, p.2, 15 Oct. 1866, p.2, 6 Oct. 1868, p.1, 10 Oct. 1868, p.2, 15 Oct 1868, p.1, 20 Oct. 1868, p.2, 22 Oct. 1868, pp.1-2.

¹¹⁹*Press*, 10 Oct. 1868, p.2.

¹²⁰John Tyerman, *Guide to Spiritualism; or Reasons For Investigating the Subject and an Exposition and Defence of its Phenomena and Teachings*, Melbourne 1874, p.24.

¹²¹F.B. Smith claims Tyerman was an ordained minister, but he was in fact "appointed to a lay-readership while qualifying for the position of an ordained clergymen." Smith, "Religion and Freethought", p.65; *Otago Witness*, 30 Dec. 1871, p.8; *New Zealand Christian Record*, 31 Dec. 1880, p.5.

¹²²Tyerman, *Guide to Spiritualism*, pp.5,17,23,26,28-41,78-85; Smith, "Religion and Freethought", p.65; *Harbinger of Light*, no.15, Nov. 1871, p.177.

¹²³*Harbinger of Light*, no.15, Nov. 1871, p.177.

¹²⁴*ODT*, 7 Aug. 1879, p.2, 15 Oct. 1879, p.2, 12 Nov. 1879, p.2; *New Zealand Christian Record*, 21 Dec. 1879, pp.6-7; *Echo*, 18 Nov. 1871, p.3, 21 Aug. 1880, p.3.

often "an important ideological event", an "arena of social struggle" for unbelievers.¹²⁵ The appearance of dying in comfort and dignity symbolised an irrevocable rejection of traditional religious belief and a vindication of their own philosophical system. The *New Zealand Christian Record*, quoting the *Protestant Standard* of Sydney, gave a damning and unsanitised account of his death:

The life of Mr Tyerman was exactly such as might have been predicted of a Bible hater. His loose and drunken life was manifest. About twelve months ago he was confined because of *delirium tremens*. A few weeks ago he went to Melbourne to lecture, and his loose life was well known. And, when he came back, so bad was he that even publicans refused to serve him; and at length he died in Darlinghurst Receiving-house, of *delirium tremens*.

Tyerman began drinking soon after his conversion to spiritualism, but his followers adamantly denied that either spiritualism or alcohol were responsible for his condition.¹²⁶ In New Zealand, the *Echo* dismissed the "gross and libellous charges" of Christians against him. A long-promised memorial to Tyerman was finally erected in Sydney in December 1884. He was proclaimed a "true-hearted but overwhelmed man."¹²⁷

Though Tyerman's demise was a poor advertisement for spiritualism and freethought, both he and Bright were two of many activists who merged the two systems into a single philosophy and encouraged co-operation between the two groups in New Zealand.

THE DUNEDIN FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATION

The liberal and co-operative sentiment expounded by the above propagandists was enshrined in several freethought organisations in New Zealand, most conspicuously, the Dunedin Freethought Association (DFA). The DFA was active from 1878 to 1888 and is analysed below as a case study to examine the nature and dynamics of spiritualist-freethought relations. The DFA is chosen because, with the possible exception of Christchurch, it was New Zealand's most prominent and successful freethought organisation in the period.¹²⁸ It was led by New Zealand's most prominent freethinker, Robert Stout, and was allied to a relatively strong spiritualist movement in Dunedin.

¹²⁵Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", p.258; David S. Nash, "'Look in Her Face and Lose Thy Dread of Dying': The Ideological Importance of Death to the Secularist Community in Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.19, no.2, Dec. 1995, p.158; *Harbinger of Light*, no.130, Apr. 1881, p.1968.

¹²⁶*New Zealand Christian Record*, 31 Dec. 1880, p.5; *Harbinger of Light*, no.130, Apr. 1881, p.1968, no.167, Jan. 1884, p.2628.

¹²⁷*Harbinger of Light*, no.167, Jan. 1884, pp.2627-8.

¹²⁸Though smaller and formed later than the DFA, the Canterbury Freethought Association survived and prospered after other associations collapsed, primarily through the efforts of W.W. Collins. Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", pp.66-7,78.

Because of its prominence, it has attracted interest from researchers in the twentieth century.¹²⁹ There was a deep irony in the history of the DFA. In the 1870s, spiritualists were at the forefront of moves to inaugurate the DFA and were among its leaders throughout its existence. However, the presence and influence of spiritualists became the most divisive factor within the Association as the 1880s progressed. Spiritualism catalysed the collapse of institutionalised freethought in Dunedin, as it did in other parts of the country.

Before discussing the DFA, it is necessary to outline the role of spiritualism in generating momentum for its creation in the 1870s. In this decade, spiritualism was a vehicle for a wide range of anti-clerical interests to attack Christianity. Debates over spiritualism and other religious issues brought spiritualists and anti-clerical radicals together into an open partnership and laid the foundations for co-operation in the DFA.

In 1881, the *Echo* published an article which recalled the history of freethought in the city. Significantly, the writer cited several early pioneers of the movement, and all were, or later became, ardent spiritualists: John Logan, H.H. Moody, W.D. Meers, Thomas Redmayne and Robert Wilson. The writer also claimed that a lecture on spiritualism at the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Society (DMIS) by W.D. Meers in June 1870 was "the first freethought lecture ever given in Dunedin." The DMIS, formed in 1865, contained numerous spiritualists, and many members became affiliated to a spiritualist association formed in 1872, the Society for Investigating Spiritualism (SIS). Relations between spiritualists and non-spiritualists were reputedly harmonious: "the Spiritualists entered the ground just vacated by the Mutual Improvement Association, and many members of the latter joined the new society, which was known as the Society for Investigating Spiritualism, and it is from this amalgamation of parties that arose the amicable feeling that has always prevailed between Spiritualists and non-Spiritualists in Dunedin."¹³⁰ Both the DMIS and the SIS lapsed after 1873, probably due to apathy, schisms and bad publicity following James Smith's prophecies about the imminent destruction of the World.¹³¹

Despite divisions, spiritualists and anti-clerical interests in Dunedin continued to band together as the decade advanced, facilitated by the arrival of Charles Bright in January 1876. His visit was organised by a committee of spiritualists and freethinkers led by J.P. Armstrong,¹³² and through Bright's instigation the New Zealand Eclectic Association was inaugurated in April 1876. This organisation was professedly "open to new light, and prepared to adopt that form of thought, be it either of religious or secular

¹²⁹Prominent among them are: Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", pp.64-6; J. Trower, "The Beginning and End of the 'Dunedin Freethought Association'", *New Zealand Rationalist and Humanist*, Nov. 1977, pp.8-9; Patrick Campbell, "Early New Zealand Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, Jan.-Feb. 1963, pp.7-8,14; Harry H. Pearce ("Profanum Vulgus"), "Early Dunedin Freethought", a series of articles which ran from 1938 until 1941, beginning in *The Truthseeker*, Dec.-Jan. 1938-9, pp.12-13, concluding in the *New Zealand Rationalist*, Oct. 1941, p.11.

¹³⁰*Echo*, 15 Oct. 1881, p.2.

¹³¹The SIS is discussed further in chapter seven.

¹³²*ODT*, 28 Jan. 1876, p.1, 7 Feb. 1876, p.1, 25 Feb. 1876, p.1, 18 Mar. 1876, p.3, 29 Mar. 1876, p.2; Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *Truthseeker*, Feb.-Mar. 1939, pp.9-11.

topics, which most commends itself to the reason and the understanding." Modelled on the Eclectic Association of Victoria, of which Bright was a founding member in 1867, its Dunedin counterpart was rather exclusive. They resolved to keep their activities strictly private and held meetings in the relatively expensive confines of the Dunedin Athenaeum.¹³³

The New Zealand Eclectic Association appeared to change its general format and evolve into the DFA in 1878. Part of the reason for this change was the desire for an organisation with more popular appeal. Spiritualists such as Carrick, Wilson, Logan, Bright and Rutherford were actively involved in its formation. The influence and activity of Charles Bright in these years was crucial.¹³⁴ The DFA experienced considerable growth from about 1881, reached its zenith in 1883-4 and maintained reasonable numbers through until 1888 despite its fading vigour. Exact membership numbers are difficult to ascertain, but by April 1882, between 150-300 attended regular weekly meetings, compared with only 20-30 the previous year. The Lyceum retained an average attendance of around 80 children from 1882 until 1887.¹³⁵

The DFA not only embraced spiritualists, it claimed to enshrine religious and intellectual diversity. As Robert Stout triumphantly declared in a speech to celebrate laying the foundation stone of the Dunedin Lyceum Hall, "we have amongst us Agnostics, Theists, Spiritualists, Pantheists, and Atheists."¹³⁶ As chapter five will reveal, the Lyceum itself was a deliberate compromise between spiritualist and secular Sunday schools, and the *Lyceum Guide* contained extracts from diverse religions and cultures. Significantly, spiritualist medium Jessie Logan was given the honour of laying the foundation stone of the Hall, celebrated as the first freethought hall erected in Australasia. The *Echo*, which had resumed publication in 1880 under the editorship of Stout, was bought and published by spiritualist Joseph Braithwaite and became an organ for the Association, opening its columns to a range of spiritualist topics. Several spiritualists were prominent office-bearers of the DFA, including Robert Rutherford, J.N. Merry, Joseph Braithwaite and John Parker, the DFA band conductor.¹³⁷ Clearly, spiritualists were welcome in the DFA and were driving forces within it.

Despite this union, the Association was plagued by disharmony, conflict and declension, troubles exacerbated by disagreements over spiritualism. These problems worsened as the 1880s progressed and attitudes toward spiritualism hardened among non-believers.

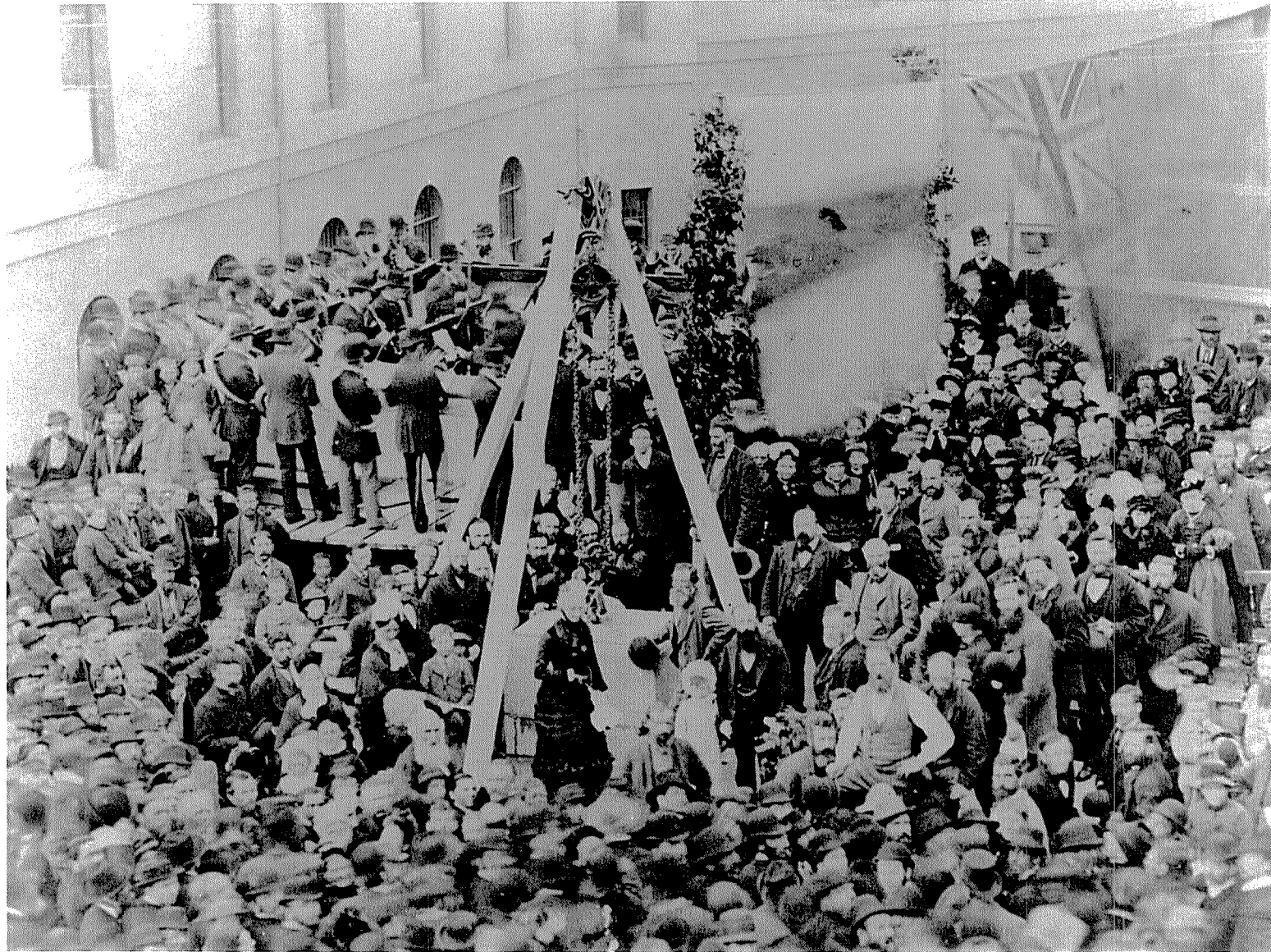
¹³³New Zealand Eclectic Association, *Introductory Address*, Dunedin 1876; *ODT*, 29 Mar. 1876, p.2, 18 Mar. 1876, p.3, 3 Apr. 1876, p.2; Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.160-9.

¹³⁴Thirty-one names were listed in the *Saturday Advertiser* in connection with the establishment of a new association in 1878. It is likely that a sizeable percentage were spiritualists. *Saturday Advertiser*, 18 May 1878, p.9; Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *Truthseeker*, Apr.-May 1939, pp.7-8, June-July 1939, p.6-7; Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", pp.65-6.

¹³⁵*Echo*, 29 Apr. 1882, p.2; *ODT*, 10 May 1887, p.3. The Lyceum is discussed further in chapter five.

¹³⁶*Echo*, 22 Oct. 1881, p.3.

¹³⁷*Echo*, 3 Oct. 1881, p.3, 6 May 1882, p.3; Trower, "The Beginning and End of the 'Dunedin Freethought Association'", pp.8-9; Campbell, "Early New Zealand Freethought", p.7.



Mrs Jessie Logan laying the foundation stone of Lyceum Hall in 1881. Prominent members of the DFA are grouped to the right of Logan. Robert Stout is not pictured here but was standing next to the wooden chair partly visible on the extreme right

Spiritualist phenomena provoked heated debate within the DFA. A lecture by Joseph Braithwaite in 1881 entitled "A Scientific Basis for Spiritualism" created considerable excitement and controversy. Citing a wide range of evidence, Braithwaite declared to a packed audience that "there is a substratum of facts unexplainable by any other theory than the spiritual one." The core component of his evidence in favour of spiritualism was clairvoyance. He cited examples from scientific experiments abroad as well as phenomena witnessed in Dunedin, contending that clairvoyance demonstrates that man "is a dual being, that he can think, act, hear, and see apart from his physical organism." This fact, he claimed, "presupposes man's survival after death, and if this is granted, then I claim to have presented a basis for spiritualism, whose special mission is the advocate of immortality". His lecture was published in full in the *Saturday Advertiser* and five consecutive weeks of debate ensued at the Lyceum.¹³⁸

Such controversy reflected and reinforced divisions within the Association between believers and sceptics. Conflicts of interest came to a head in January 1884 when Joseph Braithwaite left the DFA because he felt that his opinions were ignored and avoided for the sake of harmony. He returned to the Anglican Church and began attending St John's in Roslyn. As vice-president of the DFA and a publisher of freethought tracts, his defection was a major blow to the Association. Braithwaite believed that extreme diversity of opinion had made the DFA a failure in a constructive religious sense: "I see clearly that no association can accomplish anything positively beneficial unless its members are animated by one common aim and aspiration." As he wrote in a letter to the *Freethought Review*, "those who firmly believe in God and a future state cannot work effectively in religious matters with those who do not." Braithwaite also complained that he published the *Echo* for three and a half years at considerable financial cost, yet it "never contained a single editorial embodying my religious views." The compromise between freethinkers and spiritualists, he claimed, inhibited the progress of the children's Lyceum.¹³⁹ Though men such as Robert Stout, Charles Bright, A.D. Willis (publisher and writer of the *Freethought Review*) and William Pratt (president of the Canterbury Freethought Association) criticised Braithwaite's actions, H.H. Pearce later concurred with his criticisms: "Braithwaite's attitude to the diversity of opinion hampering positive work because of too much compromise on issues that were really fundamental ... was, I think, fundamentally sound from both the Religious and the Secular point of view. And only time seemed to prove Braithwaite right."¹⁴⁰

Spiritualist phenomena continued to cause controversy after Braithwaite's defection. In 1884, two prominent members of the DFA, William Dickson (a jeweller) and J.N. Merry (an accountant), took opposite sides in lectures on spiritualism at the

¹³⁸*Saturday Advertiser*, 27 Aug. 1881, p.8, 3 Sep. 1881, p.7; *Echo*, 16 July 1881, p.3, 23 July 1881, p.2, 30 July 1881, p.2, 6 Aug. 1881, p.2.

¹³⁹*ODT* 16 Jan. 1884, p.3, 21 Jan. 1884, p.3, 23 Jan. 1884, p.3; *Freethought Review*, no.6, Mar. 1884, p.9.

¹⁴⁰Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, Aug.-Sep. 1940, p.5.

Lyceum Hall. Dickson held a dim view of spiritualism, arguing that "spiritualistic circles were composed of true believers, inquirers, and practical jokers." His views were contested by Merry, who acknowledged that trickery took place, but maintained this was not the case during his eight years of investigation.¹⁴¹ The debate dragged on for several more weeks, with William Bolt and T.C. Farnie delivering lectures on spiritualism in later meetings.¹⁴² Squabbles between sceptics and spiritualists worsened in later years. In 1885, the DFA committee prohibited the sale of the atheistic *Rationalist* at the Lyceum Hall in an effort to placate the spiritualistic element. According to Pearce, this led to a number of militant secularists leaving the Association in disgust.¹⁴³

The ailing state of the DFA was exacerbated by, and reflected in, its precarious financial position. The Lyceum Hall was an imposing and elaborately ornamented structure with room for 1000 people in its main hall, and was erected with much pomp and ceremony in 1881-2 on the site of the old First Church. The DFA never cleared its debt from the Hall, and as the 1880s depression deepened, the burden increased. In 1889, C.J. Rae described the Hall as a "white elephant" that "hung like a mill-stone around the necks of a few earnest friends."¹⁴⁴ The Association committee finally agreed to sell the Hall in January 1888. It was sold to D.C. Cameron, "a true-blue presbyterian", a "pillar of the temperance cause" and a keen supporter of Rev. M.W. Green in his political campaign against Stout in 1881. Cameron changed its name to the City Hall and it became the arena for more popular activities such as 'rinking' (roller skating), and evangelical preaching. As one journalist put it in November 1888: "The Lyceum Hall, having been thoroughly disinfected of freethought by the purifying influences of six months rinking, is now available for Protestant and Evangelical lectures."¹⁴⁵ The DFA itself was effectively defunct by June 1888.¹⁴⁶

As noted in the first chapter, scientific-minded investigators and ardent spiritualists tended to part company in the late-1880s, and their organisations became more exclusive and sect-like. This was the case in Dunedin. As the DFA disintegrated, spiritualists increased in number and vigour, eventually forming their own more exclusive associations. Census returns indicate that between 1886 and 1891 spiritualists almost doubled in

¹⁴¹*Saturday Advertiser*, 6 Sep. 1884, p.13.

¹⁴²*ODT*, 6 Sep. 1884, p.1, 20 Sep. 1884, p.1.

¹⁴³Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, Apr.-May 1941, p.7.

¹⁴⁴Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, Aug.-Sep. 1941, p.7. According to Isaac Selby, over £4000 pounds was raised for the project, including a donation of £1000 pounds from William Thompson, the proprietor of the Criterion Hotel, 1876-81. Selby, *Memories of Maoriland*, p.77. See also Trower, "The Beginning and End of the 'Dunedin Freethought Association'", pp.8-9; Campbell, "Early New Zealand Freethought", pp.7-8; *Illustrated New Zealand Herald*, 8 Sep. 1881, p.6.

¹⁴⁵Cameron, Green and Stout are discussed in chapter five. *Otago Witness*, 9 Nov. 1888, p.21, 30 Nov. 1888, p.21; *Otago Workman*, 21 Jan. 1888, p.6; *ODT*, 8 Dec. 1888, p.3, 10 Dec. 1888, pp.2,4. The Disciples of Christ used the City Hall for meetings in the 1890s (see *Stone's Otago and Southland Directory for 1893*, ecclesiastical section).

¹⁴⁶The very infrequent freethought lectures delivered in Dunedin after this date - all poorly attended - were not advertised under the auspices of the Association. *Evening Herald*, 16 June 1888, p.5; *ODT*, 8 Dec. 1888, p.3, 10 Dec. 1888, p.2, 31 Dec. 1888, p.2; *Otago Workman*, 14 Dec. 1888, p.4.

number in Otago (see table i). A new spiritualist organisation was formed in 1886 embracing around sixty members. Led by medium William Rough, this organisation evolved into the Dunedin Psychological Society. In 1889, another spiritualist organisation called the Society for Psychic Culture was inaugurated. It began with a membership of "nearly sixty" and was exclusively spiritualistic.¹⁴⁷ According to D.H. Cameron, a grocer and spiritualist, older spiritualists of Dunedin were not involved in this "young movement" but they gave it "their best wishes."¹⁴⁸ Despite these new initiatives, spiritualists still attended and delivered lectures on the DFA platform in its final years. Two American spiritualists, George Chainey and Anna Kimball-Chainey, lectured in 1887, as did Wellington spiritualist R. Donaldson in 1888. Spiritualists such as Robert Rutherford and J.N. Merry remained loyal until its demise and were elected office-bearers for 1887-8.¹⁴⁹

A range of factors contributed to the demise of the DFA. Clearly, the spiritualist/non-spiritualist cleavage generated division and declension. Lineham is largely correct in saying that the DFA "was eventually destroyed by wrangling over" spiritualism.¹⁵⁰ At root, freethought associations were a volatile mix of independent thinkers of varying shades and persuasions with few common goals outside their anti-clericalism. This factor, more than any other, prevented the DFA achieving lasting popularity and cohesion. Despite sentiments of tolerance and co-operation among spiritualists and non-believers, the DFA could not contain the inherent diversity and volatility within its ranks.

However, there is a danger of overstating the centrality of spiritualism in the decline of the DFA, and of freethought in general. Increasing debt during the depression was a key factor in the demise of the DFA, an organisation with a large working class following. Another influential development was Robert Stout's knighthood in 1887. Stout was a cohesive influence within the DFA, maintaining peace between the two factions, but he lost prestige within the freethought movement by accepting this title. This, together with his increasing focus on politics after 1884, deprived the DFA of its most charismatic figure. When he returned to Dunedin in 1887 having lost his seat in Parliament, he failed to resuscitate the Association.

Importantly, an increasing mood of tolerance among both Christians and freethinkers was a significant factor behind the collapse of the DFA. Freethought's

¹⁴⁷The association formed in 1886 also involved W.M. Bolt, Robert Rutherford and D.H. Cameron. *Harbinger of Light*, no.197, July 1886, p.3249; *The Messenger*, no.2, Feb. 1898, p.10; *This World and the Next*, no.18, 14 Dec. 1895, pp.91-2; Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, Apr.-May 1941, p.7; William Rough, *Forty Years' Experiences of Occult Research*, Pahiatua [1920?]. I have been unable to locate a copy of Rough's book, but its contents are noted by Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.255. The Dunedin Psychological Society was first listed in *Stone's Otago Southland Directories* from 1895, and ceased being listed in 1904.

¹⁴⁸*Harbinger of Light*, no.197, July 1886, p.3249.

¹⁴⁹*ODT*, 21 Nov. 1885, p.1, 12 June 1886, p.1, 29 Oct. 1886, p.1, 3 Sep. 1887, p.4, 5 Sep. 1887, p.4, 21 Jan. 1888, p.5; *Stone's Otago and Southland Directory for 1887*.

¹⁵⁰Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", p.77

vigorous anti-clerical polemic had become a little redundant by the late-1880s. As Lineham points out: "the crisis experienced by many churchmen in the seventies and eighties over the conclusions reached by the German biblical critics, and over the Darwinian view of natural origins, slowly subsided, and the view became widespread that Christianity did not need to be strictly defined according to the letter of Scripture."¹⁵¹ In essence, clergymen relaxed their opinions and took less notice of freethought. This was a fatal development for institutions such as the DFA which thrived on conflict and controversy. In 1888, "Civis" of the *Otago Witness* accurately observed that the Lyceum "dies from being let too severely alone."¹⁵² Freethinkers also relaxed their views. Many of them drifted toward Unitarianism, including Robert Stout. Religious sermons were increasingly common at the DFA in the late-1880s. One sermon by Robert Stout was entitled "The Future Life and the New Theology", and another by C.J. Rae entitled "Night Thoughts, or the Evidences of a Personal Deity." Isaac Selby observed that "most of the men and women in ... [the Auckland freethought] movement passed into the Unitarian Church."¹⁵³ In Sydney, Charles Bright became a Unitarian minister. Even Joseph Evison admitted that "on calm reflection, the views expressed in the *Rationalist* were an utter mistake." Having relaxed his anti-clerical opinions, in 1889 he became editor and manager of the *Catholic Times* in Wellington, an appointment approved by Archbishop Redwood.¹⁵⁴ In essence, the sect-like freethought movement was the first victim of its own campaign to eradicate sectarianism and elevate religious tolerance.

To reiterate, spiritualists were a major driving force behind the rise of freethought in New Zealand. Believers and non-believers forged unstable alliances in the 1870s and '80s, forming liberal associations which embraced an eclectic philosophy predicated on tolerance and co-operation. Tense and unstable affinities also characterised relations between spiritualists and evangelicals, and in some respects, spiritualism, freethought and evangelical Christianity can be viewed as a single, fluid category of religious belief. Their many altercations serve to illustrate their close proximity and their deep interest in each other. These groups' interests dove-tailed conspicuously in the area of progressive social reform. The above observations are not intended to trivialise their differences, but to demonstrate that striking points of overlap existed which often led to interaction and co-operation.

¹⁵¹Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", p.78.

¹⁵²*Otago Witness*, 30 Nov. 1888, p.21.

¹⁵³*Evening Star*, 14 Jan. 1888, p.3, 28 Apr. 1888, p.5; Selby, *Memories of Maoriland*, p.78.

¹⁵⁴Evison was granted this position under the proviso that he supported the central aims of the *Catholic Times*: Home Rule for Ireland and state aid to Catholic schools. [Joseph Spence Evison, plaintiff], *The Pope, the Prelate and the Printer* ["being a full report of an action tried in the Supreme Court, Wellington, on the 14th, 15th and 16th, Dec., 1891, between J.S. Evison, Manager of the Catholic Times, and E. Thornton and J.W. Henrichs, President and Secretary of the Wellington Branch New Zealand Typographical Association], Wellington 1892, pp.12-13.

CHAPTER FOUR

A HEALING DIMENSION

Healing was a central part of spiritualist practice. Professional spiritualist healers were among the most visible and controversial spiritualists in settler society, and healing was a common feature of private seances. This chapter investigates several spiritualist practitioners working in New Zealand, outlines their *modus operandi*, delineates their clientele and places them in the wider context of the colonial medical market. Due to a lack of sources on private practice and female healers, attention will focus primarily on male professionals. As a visible component of the health industry, these professionals commonly came into contact with Christian ministers and qualified medical doctors. Their relationships are discussed in depth to demonstrate that boundaries between these groups were fluid and public authority in health and healing was unsettled. A willingness to experiment with spiritualistic techniques was common, and tolerance, acceptance and open assistance often prevailed.

TRADITIONS, CONCEPTS AND CLIENTELE

Most techniques and theories adopted by spiritualist healers were not exclusively spiritualist ones. What made spiritualist healers unique was their claim to be guided by the spirits or to utilise spirit power, and their identification with the spiritualist movement as a whole. As Owen observes, spiritualist healing was "a polyglot affair, a mixture of traditional remedies or techniques, the 'pseudo sciences', and spirit intervention."¹ Spirit force, vital force, magnetism, odic force and electricity were commonly invoked as causal explanations and supplementary agencies. H.W.H. Stephen, the son of George Milner Stephen (the magnetic healer who is discussed later in the chapter), believed humans were "enveloped in a certain subtle emanation, which, under favourable circumstances, spirits are able to employ for the purpose of influencing a medium to perform any of the abnormal acts of mediumship." He told readers that all healers, whether they invoked spirit agency or not, were probably unaware of how "spirit friends would always be anxious, for his sake, to help him cure."² William Rough and William McLean, both of whom practiced spiritual healing, gave advice to the Quackery Prevention Bill Committee in 1907. They informed the Committee that spirits could and often did operate through

¹Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.107

²H.W.H. Stephen, *George Milner Stephen and His Marvellous Cures*, Sydney 1880, p.31.

clairvoyants and magnetic practitioners of various kinds. In McLean's mind, 'spiritual' healers were synonymous with 'mental and magnetic' healers.³

Declaring belief in the agency of spirits could turn patrons away, and there is little doubt that some healers deliberately omitted any reference to them. Otto Hüg was a spiritualist, but in his promotional pamphlet he claimed to possess "a power which he himself cannot explain and does not understand."⁴ John Jenkins, a Dunedin medical electrician, was thoroughly naturalistic in his explanations, yet he was clearly influenced by spiritualist healing traditions. In his *Treatise on Medical Electricity* he expounded the virtues of magnetism and healing by 'laying-on of hands', citing Dr E.D. Babbit on the efficacy of "Psycho-magnetic" healing in which "fine spiritual and vital forces are communicated by the touch, or sometimes without the touch, of a human being who is highly charged with ... psychic potencies."⁵ George Milner Stephen rarely mentioned the efficacy of the spirits while working in public in New Zealand, yet in *George Milner Stephen and His Marvellous Cures* the reader was told that he cured solely by spirit power.⁶

Spiritualist healers' *modus operandi* typically consisted of clairvoyant diagnosis, often while entranced, coupled with herbal remedies. Another common method was the use of 'laying on of hands'. A striking example of the former was that of Otto Bernardo Hüg, an itinerant "medical clairvoyant herbalist" and "psychopathist". Arriving from Australia in 1882, he and his wife toured the country for three years. They returned to Australia in late-1885 and worked in Sydney, but made at least one return trip in later years to treat his New Zealand clients. According to his own account, Hüg was born in Switzerland of Swiss and Italian parents. He spent considerable time in Hungary, and as a child was prone to cataleptic fits in which he discovered and developed the clairvoyant ability to diagnose illness. Coming under the tutelage of an itinerant doctor, he toured the globe before establishing his own practice based on homeopathic remedies.⁷ A writer for the *Echo* reported his method of diagnosis: "Mr Hüg clasps his patients [sic] right hand with his right hand, then passes into a trance, so-called, eyes firmly closed, placing left hand on patients [sic] head. In this position he claims to see the internal organs, as one views the mechanism of a clock; then describes the parts affected right off, without looking at tongue, feeling pulse or asking questions."⁸ Herbal remedies, written in Hungarian shorthand, were always prescribed before coming out of a trance, since Hüg

³"Quackery Prevention Committee (Report of), Together With Minutes Of Evidence", *AJHR*, 1907, I-14, pp.1-5,55-9.

⁴[Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, p.2.

⁵J. Jenkins, *A Treatise On Medical Electricity; or How to Become Healthy together with Testimonials of Cures Effected*, 2nd ed., Dunedin 1893, pp.10-11(second part).

⁶Stephen, *George Milner Stephen*, p.32.

⁷*Manawatu Standard*, 2 Oct. 1885, p.2; *Taiari Advocate*, 13 May 1882, p.2; Otto Bernardo Hüg, Letters of Naturalisation, National Archives, Wellington; *New Zealand Times*, 1 Jan. 1887, p.3; [Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, pp.1-3; *Echo*, 1 Apr. 1882, p.2; Ludwig Bruck, *The Australasian Medical Directory and Hand Book*, Sydney 1886, 'List of Unregistered Medical Practitioners', Sydney and suburbs, transcribed in *Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History* (www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/home.htm).

⁸*Echo*, 22 Apr. 1882, p.3.

had no recollection of what had occurred on re-entering the normal state. He also diagnosed patients psychometrically by mail using locks of hair and other personal items.⁹

Such methods were not uncommon in New Zealand. James Cox of Auckland, one of the first Theosophists in New Zealand, had psychometric gifts which he used for healing. Ellwood notes that he occasionally travelled to Sydney to work. Another Aucklander, William A. Ellis, worked as an itinerant medical psychometrist during 1884-5. An employee of the *Taranaki Herald* came away "fairly astounded" after being invited to submit himself for diagnosis: "by simply placing the left hand to his forehead, Mr Ellis was able to read his whole system, telling him what wounds he had received, locating them, and detected and minutely described the various ills the subjects [sic] flesh may have been heir to." In 1884, the *New Zealand Times* reported that the 16 year-old daughter of "Mr Quick" had similar powers to those of Hüg. A reporter sent to investigate witnessed the entranced girl diagnose and prescribe for a female patient.¹⁰

Magnetic therapies, which utilised laying-on of hands, were a distinctly different mode of healing. Though many magnetists were not spiritualists, the two shared similar views about curative techniques. Mesmer's notion of a universal magnetic fluid and a 'sixth sense' were eagerly incorporated into spiritualist world-views alongside 'electricity' and Reichenbach's 'odic' force.¹¹ George Milner Stephen, a former Australian Magistrate, was the best known magnetic healer in Australasia during the period under study.¹² He spent much of 1882-5 touring New Zealand, alleviating the poor in free public healing sessions while maintaining a professional practice at local hotels and through visiting patients in their homes. His public healing sessions were highly publicised, controversial and heavily patronised. In Wellington in 1883 he attracted a crowd of over 1500 people and received generous coverage in the *New Zealand Times*.¹³

Stephen's techniques were not dissimilar to those of Christian faith healers. These similarities were not coincidental, and are discussed later in the chapter. Advertising "wonderful cures!" in local newspapers, he began his public appearances with strategies

⁹[Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, pp.1-3.

¹⁰Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.261; *Taranaki Herald*, 18 Apr. 1885, p.2; *New Zealand Times*, 10 Oct. 1884, p.8. 'Mr Quick' was probably Edwin Quick, a Tarpaulin maker, formerly of Wairarapa.

¹¹Baron K. Von Reichenbach (1786-1869) was an Austrian chemist who experimented with female magnetic 'sensitives' and postulated the existence of an unknown force (which he called "Od") which radiates from all substances. English translations of his theories were published in 1850-1 by mesmerist and chemist W. Gregory. Winter, *Mesmerised*, pp.276-81; Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, pp.228-31.

¹²Stephen came from an influential and well-to-do family. He was a cousin of Sir Alfred Stephen, a well-known New South Wales pioneer and member of the New South Wales Legislative Council. Stephen's brother Sidney was appointed a Judge of the Supreme Court of New Zealand in 1849 and died while Acting Chief Justice in 1858. G.M. Stephen claimed he was once offered the position of Colonial Secretary of New Zealand, which he declined. He and his family became spiritualists in the late 1870s. Soon after this he developed his repertoire of curative magnetic techniques. A brief biography appears in Stephen, *George Milner Stephen*, pp.10-14. See also Fred Johns, *An Australian Biographical Dictionary*, Melbourne 1934, pp.331-3; Sidney Stephen, G. Scholefield Collection, MS-papers-212, ATL.

¹³*New Zealand Times*, 8 Jan. 1883, pp.2-3, 15 Jan. 1883, p.3, 5 Feb. 1883, p.2.

calculated to convince others of his efficacy. Charismatic and commanding, he often spent half an hour discussing his healing powers, reading testimonials of miraculous cures from estimable sources, expounding the scientific virtues of magnetism and assuring people of their capacity to improve their health. On display were a number of items which provided visible testament to the invisible power of magnetism: jars containing preserved cancer roots (Stephen believed cancer was a fungus) which had been extracted through magnetic power, and bottles of magnetised water, oil, and magnetised flannels which were distributed following treatment. Following prayer Stephen invited the sick on to the stage where he cured by techniques such as 'laying-on of hands', breathing on the afflicted area through a silver tube ('insufflation'), or by simply commanding pain and disease to leave the patient. He asked bystanders to keep clear, because his magnetic power radiated out fourteen feet and could be absorbed by others in the vicinity.¹⁴

Stephen's fame in the early-1880s appeared to generate enthusiasm among New Zealand practitioners. Following Stephen's success in Dunedin during April-May 1883, a German, Louis Julius Weidner (a Government Life Insurance agent), advertised his magnetic healing which utilised 'laying on of hands'. Weidner was practicing in Dunedin as early as 1879.¹⁵ At the same time, John Jenkins (1832?-1902) advertised his Magnetic and Galvanic Healing Institute (later re-named Jenkins' Institute for Medical Electricity) in Rattray Street, Dunedin. Like Weidner, Jenkins was in practice from at least 1879. His business was a successful one. Messrs J. Jenkins & Co. were "importers of all kinds of Magnetic and Electric Curative Appliances" and his business appeared healthy prior to his death in 1902. Jenkins fully endorsed the type of healing practised by Weidner and Stephen. Both Jenkins and Weidner were described by the *Echo* in 1883 as "gentlemen well known in Dunedin".¹⁶

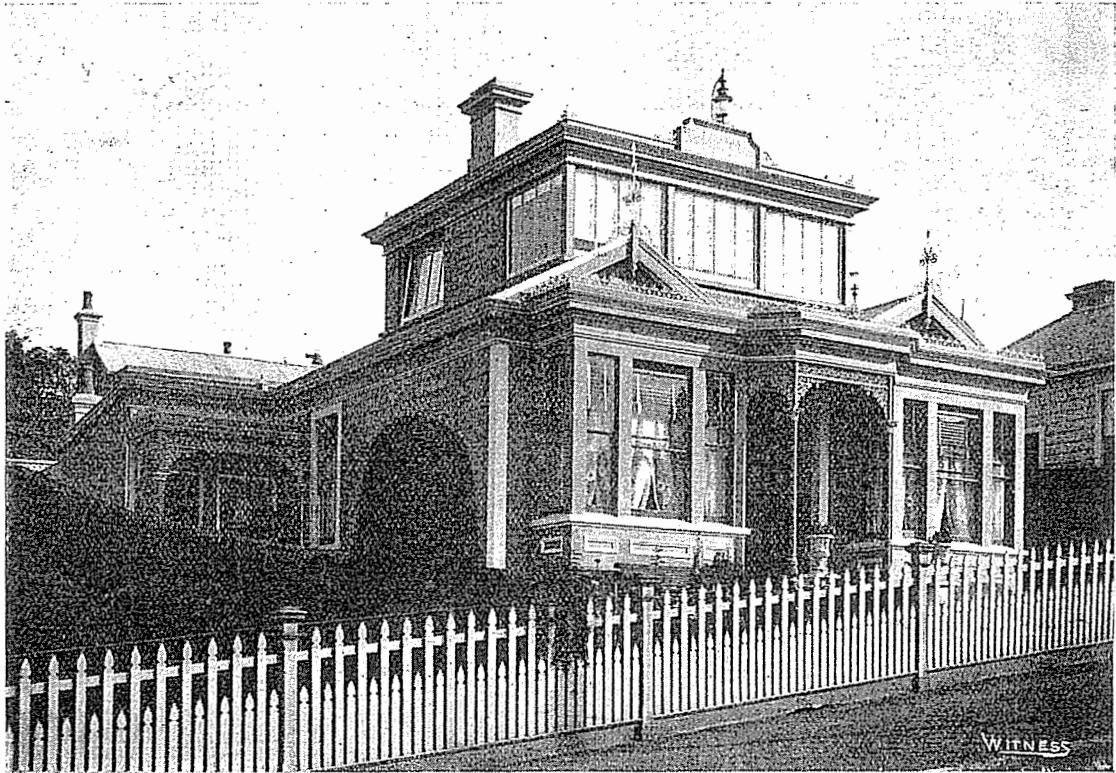
Electric and galvanic treatments flourished in New Zealand from the early-1880s. Jenkins' Institute was advertised as "the Most Completely Furnished Electro-Medical Establishment in the Australasian Colonies", and may have been the first of its kind in Australasia.¹⁷ While sharing spiritualists' belief in the efficacy of universal fluids such as magnetism and electricity, these treatments were a more respectable form of therapy which Belgrave notes, "exploited an image of scientific treatment and up-to-the-minute

¹⁴See for example, *ODT*, 2 Apr. 1883, p.3, 31 Mar 1884, p.3; *New Zealand Times*, 2 Jan. 1883, p.2, 8 Jan. 1883, pp.2-3; *Colonist*, 10 Jan. 1884, p.2. A discussion of such practices in Britain can be found in Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.127-30.

¹⁵Weidner was born in Brunswick (North Germany) in 1833 and arrived in Dunedin from Victoria in 1863. He "was for a long time stationed at Tokomairiro in charge of the police camp there" before being appointed Clerk to the Bench in 1870. Directories indicate that he left New Zealand with his family around 1887. *Echo*, 5 Nov. 1870, p.3; L.J. Weidner, Letters of Naturalisation, National Archives, Wellington. See his advertisements in the *Echo*, for example, 19 May 1883, p.2.

¹⁶*Echo*, 12 July 1883, pp.2,4; advertisement in Thomas Bracken, *Paddy Murphy's Annual: a Record of Political and Social Events in New Zealand*, Dunedin 1886. *Echo*, 12 May 1883, p.2; Jenkins, *Treatise on Medical Electricity*, pp.1-16(second part).

¹⁷*Otago Daily Times and Witness Christmas Annual for 1899*, p.39; P.J. Martyr, "From Quackery to Qualification: Massage and Electrotherapy in Australia, 1870-1914", *Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History* (www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/home.htm).



Jenkins' Institute for Medical Electricity.

ESTABLISHED 24 YEARS.

MR. J. JENKINS has pleasure in announcing that he has the **Most Completely Furnished Electro Medical Establishment in the Australasian Colonies**, and is prepared to treat patients by the following Latest and Approved Electro-Medical Scientific Methods, viz. :—

Galvanism, Faradism, Franklinism, Magnetism, Electric Massage, Hot Air, Vapour, Galvanic and Coloured Sunlight Baths, &c.

During a period of over twenty years MR. JENKINS has met with the most gratifying results in the treatment of the following afflictions:—**Brain and Nerve Exhaustion, Muscular Contractions, Rheumatism (acute and chronic), Asthma, Deafness, General Debility, Neuralgia, Sciatica, Partial Paralysis, St. Vitus' Dance, Synovitis, Whitlow, Goitre, Injured Spine, &c.** Powerful Rontgen X Rays in use in the Establishment.

Superfluous Hair removed without pain or disfigurement by Electrolysis. Lady Assistants in attendance upon Lady Patients. Electric Light throughout the Establishment.

PLEASE NOTE THE ADDRESS:—

JENKINS' INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL ELECTRICITY, UPPER RATTRAJ-ST., DUNEDIN.

A 1901 advertisement for Jenkins' Institute for Medical Electricity, from the
Otago Witness

technology."¹⁸ The evangelist, Alfred Brunton, and Joseph Braithwaite (at that time an Anglican vestryman) were among those who wrote testimonials to recommend Jenkins' appliances in the 1880s.¹⁹ Spiritualist, magnetic and galvanic curatives also shared ground with massage. The line between spiritual healing, laying-on of hands and massage remained a fuzzy one into the twentieth century.²⁰ Mesmeric practitioners were also present in New Zealand. A well-known "practical curative mesmerist", Captain G.H. Wilson, maintained a practice in Christchurch in the 1860s, occasionally lecturing on clairvoyance, mesmerism and electro-biology. In 1865 he organised classes on curative mesmerism to instruct students in its efficacy.²¹

Homeopathy and medical botany were common in settler society. Auckland's Carl Fischer published a periodical as early as the 1850s entitled the *Homeopathic Echo*. These curatives shared common ground with spiritualist healing. Both appropriated similar concepts about vital forces and innate healing capacities. Fischer believed human physiology was permeated by "delicate, chemical, electric, mesmeric" and "odic" forces.²² As Joseph Giles and F.W. Irvine illustrate (see below), homeopathic practitioners were often sympathetic toward spiritualism. Homeopathy appealed to spiritualist sentiment. It was cheap, accessible and sometimes more humane than orthodox techniques. Like spiritualism, homeopathy and medical botany were preoccupied with moral and physical purity, and were often allied to vegetarianism, prohibition and anti-vaccination. Spiritualists favoured herbal prescriptions. As Barrow notes, these groups all shared a "return to nature" approach which stressed the need for balance and harmony.²³

Spiritualist healing and allied practices were distinctively holistic. They aimed to cure the 'whole' person and focussed on enhancing the natural balance of forces within the body and increasing the harmony of the individual in relation to both their internal and external environment. Spiritualists believed that all humans were capable of developing mediumistic abilities, including the power to heal. Healing, therefore, aimed to stimulate the body's internal restorative properties rather than resorting to surgery and drugs. Jenkins' discussion of human magnetism in his *Treatise on Medical Electricity* captured the warm sentimentalism and holistic ethic of magnetic and spiritualist healing:

¹⁸Belgrave, "Medicine and the Rise of Health Professions", p.15.

¹⁹Stephen, *Essay on Magnetic Healing*, pp.25-7; Jenkins, *A Treatise On Medical Electricity*, pp.1-28 (second part).

²⁰In 1907, William Rough, a spiritualist medium, assumed the title of "metaphysician and masseur", *AJHR*, vol.5, 1907, I-14, p.55. Belgrave observes that "In 1910 the Australasian Massage Association, attempting to advance the professional prestige of masseurs, excluded anyone 'who has followed, or is following the calling of spiritualist or medical medium, clairvoyant, hypnotist, or fortune teller'". Belgrave, "Medicine and the Rise of Health Professions", pp.13-14.

²¹*Lyttelton Times*, 24 Nov. 1864, p.5, *Press*, 20 May 1863, p.3, 4 June 1863, p.2, 2 Nov. 1863, p.1, 23 Sep. 1863, p.4; 12 Aug. 1865, p.2.

²²*Homeopathic Echo*, vol.1, no.1, Mar. 1855, p.1; L.K. Gluckman, "Dr Carl Fischer MD and the History of Homoeopathy in Auckland in the 19th Century", *New Zealand Medical Journal*, vol.90, 1979, pp.66-9.

²³Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, p.163.

Human Magnetism, sent by will or desire, is an ever dutiful messenger, who noiselessly and freely enters life's domain through the gentle sympathetic gates of touch, to link soul with soul, unite heart with heart, soothe the weary and downtrodden, strengthen the feeble, relieve, restore the sick in mind and body, increase the powers of the healthy - to blend, to feel, to be a harmonious unit in the All-in-All.²⁴

Empathy was fundamentally important in spiritualist healing. Adam Crabtree writes that "the mutual influence of the magnetist and patient involved a kind of sympathy" and that "Cures wrought by animal magnetism always had this empathic component strongly at the forefront."²⁵

Spiritualism's holistic approach to health gave impetus to a range of healing movements that became popular in the 1880s and flourished at the turn of the century in the western world. Founded by Mary Baker Eddy, Christian Science is perhaps the most conspicuous example. Eddy herself was a product of the spiritualist movement in America before founding Christian Science. In 1875, she published *Science and Health* and launched a movement which denied the physical reality of disease and traced illness to unhealthy mental conditions. Like 'New Thought', Christian Science popularised 'mind-cure' and 'mental healing' techniques. Dispensing with the puerile vulgarity of spiritualist phenomena, it sought to improve health through healthy-mindedness and, in the words of Gabay, "the affirmation of the Divine nature within."²⁶

While an analysis of mental healing movements in New Zealand is beyond the scope of this thesis, the visit to New Zealand in 1887 of an American couple, Professor George Chainey and Anna Kimball-Chainey, provides a good example of how spiritualists increasingly adopted and popularised more eclectic healing practices. An ex-Methodist minister, George Chainey embraced spiritualism in 1884 after a stint as a Unitarian minister and agnostic lecturer. In New Zealand he and his wife advocated "the Gnostic system of psychic and physical culture", a holistic system which attempted to cultivate the "trinity of body, mind and soul, or physical, mental and moral powers" of the individual. They delivered lectures on literary and spiritualist topics and gave classes on dramatic expression, elocution, breathing techniques, psychometry, mental healing and psychic culture. They also advocated vegetarianism. As Gabay notes, meat eating and alcohol were associated by many spiritualists with worldliness and a desire for material possessions, desires which "caused a 'heaviness' both material and spiritual, not conducive to spiritual progression generally, and to psychic mediumship specifically." Their system attempted to combine a range of progressive educational and physical activities with

²⁴Jenkins, *Treatise On Medical Electricity*, p.1(second part).

²⁵Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, p.73.

²⁶Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health*, Boston 1875; Braude, *Radical Spirits*, pp.182-91; Gabay, *Alfred Deakin*, pp.117-18.

"hitherto unrecognised powers in man" called "psychic, the neglect of which is the cause of much disease and insanity."²⁷

Turning to a brief discussion of clientele, spiritualist healers were patronised by settlers of all classes and ages of both sexes. Writing in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* in 1887, Dr I. de Zouche made observations about 'quacks' in general. He wrote with dismay that their clientele were extracted from "the lesser educated portion of the community" as well as from "persons of education and refinement" who "have faith enough in their mysterious medical powers to consult them and be guided by their advice." Indeed, the clairvoyant, Dr. E.C. Dunn, boasted in 1873 that his Dunedin patients were from "the wealthiest classes" of the city as well as from "the asylums." Stephen's *Essay on Magnetic Healing* and Jenkins' *Treatise* contained letters and testimonials from New Zealand patients of varying classes and ages. His public healing sessions for the poor were attended by "representatives of all classes of the community."²⁸ However, it is likely that poorer sections of society could not afford private fees and relied on healers' generosity. Hüg's basic consultation fee in Dunedin in 1885 was, during office hours, 10s 6d, and a visiting fee of £1 1s for treatment at home.²⁹ Though numerically small, spiritualist patrons were among their most regular supporters. Testimonials from thankful patients of George Milner Stephen reveal that spiritualists supported and patronised him. Robert Rutherford, J.C. Harris and W.D. Campbell were among those who affixed their signatures to his cures, while Joseph Braithwaite published a work advertising his practice.³⁰

Female ailments were specifically catered for by some healers. In common with G.M. Stephen, Otto Hüg treated the poor free of charge and claimed to be patronised by a "large proportion" of women from "the labouring or mechanic class". Hüg specialised in female afflictions. His promotional pamphlet revealed that "he makes a specialty of blood and female diseases, in his treatment of which he has marked and unvarying success." The pamphlet also informed the reader that "Mrs Hüg, who accompanies her husband in his travels, is present at a consultation if so desired, and during a consultation with married ladies their husband or a female relative is expected to remain in the room."³¹ At Jenkins' Institute of Medical Electricity, women were assured that "Lady Assistants" were "in attendance upon Lady Patients".³² Spiritualist healing and related therapies were undoubtedly more 'feminised' than allopathic medical techniques. They were not

²⁷Interview with Professor George Chainey, *New Zealand Times*, 8 Nov. 1887, p.3; Chainey, *How and Why I Became a Spiritualist*, pp.1-2,4-8. In Wellington, see for example, *New Zealand Times*, 15 Oct. 1887, pp.4-5, 17 Oct. 1887, p.2, 29 Oct. 1887, p.5. In Dunedin, *ODT*, 9 July 1887, p.1, 23 July 1887, p.1, 30 July 1887, p.1; Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", p.211.

²⁸*New Zealand Medical Journal*, vol.1, Dec. 1887, pp.104,106; *ODT*, 8 Mar. 1873, p.1(supplement); Stephen, *Essay on Magnetic Healing*, pp.10-32; Jenkins, *Treatise On Medical Electricity*, (second part); *New Zealand Times*, 8 Jan. 1883, pp.2-3.

²⁹*ODT*, 25 May 1885, p.1.

³⁰Stephen, *Essay on Magnetic Healing*, pp.25-7; *New Zealand Herald*, 7 Mar. 1885, p.6.

³¹[Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, p.2

³²Advertisement, *Otago Daily Times and Witness Christmas Annual for 1899*, p.39.

monopolised by men. Gently nurturing one's innate spiritual capacities of healing, they utilised passive, physically humane and non-intrusive methods of diagnosis and cure.

To understand the significance of spiritualist healing practices more fully, they must be viewed in the broader context of the colonial medical market. Spiritualist healers thrived alongside numerous other heterodox medical practices in a relatively diverse, unstructured and permissive health industry in New Zealand.

A PERMISSIVE MEDICAL MARKET

Heterodox medical practitioners were conspicuous in colonial New Zealand and the relatively unstructured nature of society encouraged their presence. In medicine as in religion, the established authorities of the Old World were attenuated in the New, allowing heterodox practitioners increased power and freedom. The entrenched guild-like institutions that governed medical practice in England were absent, as were medical schools and powerful professional organisations. Otago's Medical School, founded in 1875, produced few graduates and did not provide a full medical education until 1882. Medical bodies were few, weak and devoid of national organisation until 1887 when the New Zealand Medical Association was established. Doctors themselves were renowned for their competitiveness and bickering.³³

The Medical Practitioners Act of 1869 was intended to create advantages for orthodox practitioners but was considerably watered down. As Belgrave notes, efforts to permit only orthodox doctors on the Register of Medical Practitioners reeked of monopoly. Doctors faced "growing opposition from consumers fearful that medical monopoly would lead to high fees as well as the elimination of alternative and cheaper treatments for their ailments." This objection was also raised against legislation proposed in 1881, as it was again in 1889.³⁴ Dr de Zouche defended medical doctors from such accusations in the columns of the *New Zealand Medical Journal* in 1887:

A certain section of the public look with suspicion on any attempt to narrow the entry to the profession or to the legal register. They seem to fear that the profession wish to form a close corporation for their own benefit. To judge by the support given to itinerant 'professors' of the healing art and to local unqualified practitioners, one might suppose them to be entitled to equal rights with those who have pursued the toilsome path of study in hospitals and schools of medicine, and who are building up experience through honest work.

De Zouche went on to advocate legislation against such "quacks".³⁵

³³Belgrave, "'Medical Men' and 'Lady Doctors'", pp.44,60,90-1,109-10.

³⁴Belgrave, "'Medical Men' and 'Lady Doctors'", pp.62,47-62

³⁵*New Zealand Medical Journal*, vol.1, Dec. 1887, p.104.

Arguments were also raised about the right of the individual to earn a living unencumbered by restrictive legislation. Heterodox practitioners, who stood to lose the most through such measures, were in the minority. Many however, were highly respected and amply qualified, and their patients included many of the colony's wealthy and powerful. Some, such as F.W. Irvine, a Nelson homeopath and surgeon, were at the forefront of opposition to restrictive legislation. An open market in medicine prevailed.³⁶ Professional spiritualist healers invariably found New Zealand a comparatively lucrative market. In Dunedin, Dr E.C. Dunn claimed that in 1873 he "did a larger medical practice even than in Melbourne," a city of 200,000 people. George Milner Stephen claimed in September 1884 to have healed 700 people in Dunedin, most of whom medical doctors had failed to cure, while in 1882 Otto Hüg was having "increasing success as a medical clairvoyant in New Zealand" and had a "very extensive practice in Dunedin."³⁷

The relatively accessible and democratic nature of spiritualist healing was probably a significant factor behind its popularity in New Zealand. Practitioners did not require degrees and registration, nor lengthy and expensive training. Magnetism and innate healing powers were accessible and universal properties, and could be harnessed by anyone through faith, empathy and the simple touch of a hand. Such forms of healing were well-suited to an isolated and relatively unstructured society.

The impotence and barbarity of many orthodox medical practices probably contributed as much as any other factor to the popularity of heterodox healers. Like other healers, medical practitioners' rhetoric often outstripped their actual ability to cure. Belgrave argues that doctors were distinguished less by their ability to heal than their aspirations toward social position.³⁸ Discussing the popularity of G.M. Stephen, the writer of an editorial column in the *New Zealand Presbyterian* believed a lack of scientific rigour in medicine accounted for the resounding success of quackery: "It is pretty clear that medicine has scarcely transcended the stage of empiricism; for if its knowledge were scientific, it could scarcely be crossed at all points as it is by quackery and imposture, and beaten hollow by it."³⁹

In 1887 Dr de Zouche wrote that the relative youth of Australia and New Zealand seemed to "favour adventurers in medicine as in other walks of life." In New Zealand cities "quacks - male and female - flourish and thrive", he lamented.⁴⁰ De Zouche's comments reflected a grim reality for those who hoped to extinguish 'quackery' and assert the authority of allopathic medicine. Census data failed to reflect this reality. Belgrave compiled a list of "Irregular healers" from census data for the period 1881-1941. This list renders most heterodox medical practices invisible. Neither the 1881 nor the 1886 census

³⁶Belgrave, "'Medical Men' and 'Lady Doctors'", pp.49-52,298-300.

³⁷*Harbinger of Light*, no.37, Sep. 1873, p.494; *ODT*, 8 Mar. 1873, p.1(supplement), 6 Sep. 1884, p.3; W.D.C. Denovan, *The Evidences of Spiritualism*, Melbourne 1882, p.465-6.

³⁸Belgrave, "'Medical Men' and 'Lady Doctors'", pp.i,298.

³⁹*New Zealand Presbyterian*, 1 July 1884, p.2.

⁴⁰*New Zealand Medical Journal*, vol.1, Dec. 1887, pp.104,106.

listed any mesmerists, faith healers, magnetists, clairvoyants or spiritual healers.⁴¹ Ludwig Bruck's list of unregistered medical practitioners in the 1886 edition of the *Australasian Medical Directory and Hand Book* recorded only fifteen unregistered practitioners for the whole of New Zealand.⁴² It is clear, however, that such practitioners were very popular among settlers, particularly from the 1880s, and claimed a sizeable segment of the medical market. Healers of all varieties encountered few barriers in the pursuit of their profession in the 1870s and '80s, a fact illustrated further below.

CLERICAL CO-OPERATION

Many clergymen co-operated with professional spiritualist healers in New Zealand. There were several reasons for this. The line between spiritualist healing and Christian faith healing was often imperceptible. Spiritualist healers appropriated Christian traditions and mirrored the practices of Christian faith healers. This widened their market, assuaged Christian opposition and increased their ability to cure through investing greater hope and faith among their predominantly Christian clientele. Clerics also co-operated with healers in the interests of patients. Though often suspicious of their motives and efficacy, clergymen acknowledged that heterodox healers had some success in diagnosing and curing illness. Furthermore, the liberal undercurrents of wider society fostered tolerance toward novel healing practices and moderated the proclivity to denounce healers' 'quackery'.

By the 1850s, "mesmeric and spiritualist healing alike were widely equated in the public mind with the faith healing celebrated in the New Testament, whether mesmerists welcomed that equation or not." A well-known faith healer celebrated by many spiritualists in Europe and America was the American, Dr James Newton, who claimed to derive his powers from a strong faith in Jesus Christ.⁴³ Newton's activities were occasionally reported in colonial newspapers, and healers working in New Zealand commonly invoked both Newton and Christianity in defence of their practices. In court seeking payment from one of his wealthy Dunedin patients (Alexander Inglis), G.M. Stephen "believed he possessed not merely natural magnetism, but that the power was given to him as the result of special request through prayer, and he could give authority from Scripture to show that such a thing was possible."⁴⁴ He often compared his abilities to those of Newton and the apostles. Indeed, some of his public healing sessions thronged with the anxious and clamouring sick and poor, evoking scenes from apostolic

⁴¹Belgrave, "'Medical Men' and 'Lady Doctors'", p.307.

⁴²Ludwig Bruck, *The Australasian Medical Directory and Hand Book*, Sydney 1886, 'List of Unregistered Medical Practitioners', New Zealand, transcribed in *Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History* (www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/home.htm).

⁴³Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp.222-3.

⁴⁴ODT, 20 Sep. 1884, p.4. The Judge could not reach a verdict and therefore ruled in favour of the defendant, Inglis.

times. In Wellington, "crowds were pressing in at the open doors and even the stage was invaded" during a healing session at the local Athenaeum. Sudden and apparently miraculous cures were reported in the *New Zealand Times*.⁴⁵ His techniques mirrored Christian tradition: 'laying-on of hands', 'insufflation', commanding disease away and the use of flannels all had precedent in the New Testament, and he invariably began public healing sessions with Biblical prayer. Spiritualists claimed to cure many patients, particularly women, who received little help from orthodox practitioners. This trend also had a Biblical precedent: "And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse". After touching Jesus' garments, the woman was healed. Her cure was attributed by Jesus to her faith.⁴⁶

Three years after Stephen's departure, the evangelist and faith healer, J. Alexander Dowie, began a tour of New Zealand which mirrored Stephen's in many respects. Claiming scriptural authority, Dowie treated numerous patients through prayer and 'laying-on of hands' in public healing sessions. Like Stephen, Dowie began with lengthy orations designed to evoke faith in his listeners. His advertisements in Wellington promised lectures on "The Beautiful Gate of Divine Healing" and "Some Miracles I Have Seen", as well as daily "Healing Room Addresses", after which the afflicted were seen privately. Christians were divided over the source and effectiveness of Dowie's cures, but he attracted large crowds around the country.⁴⁷ He was regarded by some sections of the press with as much disdain as 'quacks' such as G.M. Stephen. "Is there positively no way known to the police of suppressing this unctuous and disgusting species of quack?" quipped a writer in the *Otago Witness*.⁴⁸

The events surrounding Wilhelmina Ross, the 'Taieri fasting girl', provide insights into the ways in which spiritualist and Christian healing intersected. Ross formed part of a wider tradition of Christian women who abstained from food in order to serve God. Bynum notes that medieval people "saw gluttony as the major form of lust, fasting as the most painful renunciation, and eating as the most basic and literal way of encountering God." Self-starvation was to many "the most basic asceticism, requiring the kind of courage and holy foolishness that marked the saints."⁴⁹ Out of this context emerged 'fasting saints', usually female adolescents, who abstained from food for seemingly impossible lengths of time. Their feats were deemed miraculous by many Christians, hence the phenomenon's medical term 'anorexia miribalis'. By the seventeenth and

⁴⁵*New Zealand Times*, 8 Jan. 1883, p.2-3; *ODT*, 2 Apr. 1883, p.3, 9 Apr. 1883, p.3, 16 Apr. 1883, p.2, 23 Apr. 1883, p.3, 31 Mar. 1884, p.3, 5 May, 1884, p.2-3, 5 June 1884, p.4; *Echo*, 14 Apr. 1883, p.3.

⁴⁶Mark 5:25-34.

⁴⁷*New Zealand Times*, 19 Mar. 1887, p.3, 26 Mar. 1887, p.3; *Protestant Ensign*, 20 Jan. 1887, pp.3,12, 27 Jan. 1887, p.20, 26 May 1887, p.163, 2 June 1887, pp.170-1; J.E. Worsfold, *A History of the Charismatic Movements in New Zealand*, Bradford 1974, pp.86-7, 115-116.

⁴⁸*Otago Witness*, 25 May 1888, p.21.

⁴⁹Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley 1987, p.2.

eighteenth centuries, these practices were increasingly cast as demoniacal, heretical and insane, particularly by doctors. 'Anorexia miribalis' was questioned by male practitioners, and by the late nineteenth century such women tended to be designated 'fasting girls', a term which, Brumberg argues, "mocked rather than honoured" the tradition of miraculous fasting saints.⁵⁰

Wilhelmina Ross was the Scottish daughter of Neil and Barbara Ross of Maungatua, who farmed on the Taieri plain south of Dunedin. Like many mediums, Ross was a sickly child. From the age of five she was subject to fits, neuralgia and catalepsy. In 1869 at the age of nineteen she became permanently bedridden after suffering a paralytic stroke, remaining in a trance state for long periods and abstaining from food. She lay in bed for over sixteen years before being treated by "Miss Shepphard", a Christchurch healer who cured her through 'laying-on of hands' in 1886. She died in 1923 at the age of 73.

Around August 1870 Wilhelmina's condition temporarily improved. She woke from her trance and recounted vivid experiences in other spiritual worlds to anxious listeners who flocked to visit her. Otago newspapers detailed the rumours in circulation:

she lays claim to having experienced a temporary separation of the soul and body; that during that time she in spirit visited the celestial gates; that she was engaged in a personal conflict with the arch enemy; and that, now that body and soul are once more wedded, she speaks with the tongue of an angel, and sings seraph songs taught her in the realms of the blest.

Her case was deemed miraculous by many local Christians. A Presbyterian minister and "a lay preacher of another denomination" were among those who held prayer meetings at her home and at a local schoolhouse. Groups gathered daily to hear her experiences and exhortations.⁵¹ Her predicament was publicised widely and attracted considerable interest, particularly since it followed on the heels of a similar high-profile case in Wales in the late-1860s. Sarah Jacob, the "Welsh fasting girl", was the subject of considerable medical and scientific scrutiny. She became a mecca for hundreds of religious pilgrims. However, Jacobs did not survive her condition. Medical opinion held that her death was the result of starvation provoked by girlhood hysteria, religious enthusiasm and an addiction to reading religious literature. Her death in December 1869 took place the very month Ross became bedridden and began her own ordeal in Maungatua.⁵²

The two cases were similar in many respects, though unlike the Welsh case which came under intense medical scrutiny for being fraudulent, Ross appeared to encounter

⁵⁰Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease*, Harvard 1988, pp.41-2,45,47,61-2; Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp.74-5.

⁵¹*Cromwell Argus*, 17 Aug. 1870, p.6, 21 Sep. 1870, p.6 (reprinted from the *Echo*).

⁵²Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, pp.64-73.

little hostile scepticism. A reporter for the *Cromwell Argus* noted that the case was "creating a great deal of interest in scientific circles" in Dunedin. A number of doctors diagnosed and prescribed remedies, with little apparent success. Dr. Weber of Milton prescribed "croton oil", applied to the head, to create blisters and rouse her from her trance state. This appeared to increase her misery.⁵³ In cases of anorexia, doctors in England often assumed the girl was shamming and painful shocks were administered to help induce a 'cure'. Those sceptical of the mesmeric trance were known to inflict pain on the entranced subject, with the view of revealing fraud.⁵⁴ Perhaps Weber's painful prescription reflected his sceptical attitude. A reporter in Dunedin's anti-clerical *Echo* believed the case had all the appearances of a miracle, but could be reduced to natural causes: "There can be no doubt that since the beginning of the year the girl has partaken of not a single pound of solid food", yet she remained animated and strong, though paralysed on the left side, and received all who wished to see her. Unlike other invalids, her countenance was "one of peace rather than resignation". She sang "seraph songs" in a "weak, but rather sweet voice." However, the reporter concluded that Ross's condition was a thoroughly natural incident that combined a predisposition for religious fervour with an unusual medical condition.⁵⁵

Spiritualists took an interest in her predicament. Dr E.C. Dunn visited Ross in 1873 with a group of spiritualists. Given that spiritualism and Ross were the subject of media attention at the time, it is likely that Dunn visited her in the hope of effecting a cure in the face of medical and clerical scepticism. However, as Dunn became entranced to clairvoyantly examine her, she evidently objected, not wishing to be treated through means "contrary to the will of God." Debate over this incident ensued in the columns of the *Otago Daily Times* between spiritualists, the Ross family and Dr Dunn.⁵⁶

The Ross case highlights significant points of overlap between spiritualist healing and Christian practices and beliefs. The fact that a frail adolescent girl could become a centre of religious authority echoed the centrality of sickly young female mediums in spiritualist practice. The validity of mystical visions received while entranced is a particularly striking point of overlap, given the negative perceptions surrounding trance in wider society. Many Christians found identifying the differences between spiritualist phenomena and 'authentic' Christian phenomena (the work of the Holy Spirit) immensely difficult. Some may have believed that even if spiritualist phenomena appeared puerile and unusual and was of the spirits, they served a Christian purpose of some kind. Such points help explain why evangelical clergymen tolerated and sometimes openly co-operated with spiritualist healers in New Zealand.

⁵³*Cromwell Argus*, 20 July 1870, p.5; *Bruce Herald*, 20 July 1870, p.6; 27 July 1870, p.5.

⁵⁴Showalter, *The Female Malady*, pp.137-8; Winter, *Mesmerised*, p.128.

⁵⁵*Cromwell Argus*; 21 Sep. 1870, p.6 (reprinted from the *Echo*).

⁵⁶Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, p.63; *ODT*, 2 Apr. 1873, p.3, 3 Apr. 1873, p.3, 5 Apr. 1873, p.3, 12 Apr. 1873, p.1(supplement).

It was a common practice for many itinerant healers to demand that the afflicted poor receive a written recommendation from a clergyman before undergoing treatment. This was the case at Stephen's public healing sessions. This practice aimed "to prevent imposition"⁵⁷: it was a safeguard against tricksters trying to entrap him in front of an audience by feigning illness, and provided patients who were likely to be genuinely ill. Otto Hüg also received patients through recommendations from clergymen. Protestant ministers appeared willing to supply healers with patients. Significantly, Dunedin's amiable Presbyterian minister of Knox Church, D.M. Stuart, allowed Stephen to use Old Knox Church as a venue for his healing sessions in 1884. Stuart and the Methodist minister, Joseph Berry, attended sessions, occasionally overseeing proceedings. Stuart witnessed persons known to him being treated and sometimes noted the names of patients, doubtless with the aim of checking their authenticity. In Christchurch, Stephen ministered to Rev. J. Buller and other clergymen and their wives.⁵⁸

In something of a coup for Stephen, he managed to procure a testimonial from his old antagonist, Rev. M.W. Green, M.H.R., following the cure of a man named John Byfield whom Green reluctantly recommended for treatment, expecting no improvement. Byfield was paralysed in his left arm for three months following the dislocation of his shoulder. The *Otago Daily Times* reported that Stephen restored movement to his arm in front of a crowd of around 100-200 people after a few minutes treatment. Byfield "appeared to be astonished, and at length shook Mr Stephen warmly by the hand and left the stage." Green checked Byfield's arm the following night and "as an act of simple justice", wrote to the *Morning Herald* to declare that he now believed that Stephen could cure. A week later Byfield ascended the stage during a public healing session to declare and demonstrate that his cure was authentic.⁵⁹

The assistance given to Stephen by clergymen did not necessarily represent belief in his claims and efficacy as a healer. A writer in the *New Zealand Presbyterian* probably echoed the thoughts of many when stating that most ailments were not deep-seated and would either disappear by themselves or be 'cured' by emotional excitement. The writer believed there was "something in Milner Stephen, Herr Hüg, Bethshan and the whole tribe, but it does not seem to be very much, nor very unaccountable. There does not exist a well-authenticated case of permanent cure of an organic disease; and while we won't grudge any help they give to minor ills, we must deplore the tendency of the whole affair

⁵⁷*New Zealand Times*, 4 Jan. 1883, p.3.

⁵⁸Presbyterian ministers Greig, Waddell and Stuart, Anglicans Platt and Knowles, Congregationalist Thomas Roseby, Wesleyan J. Berry and Church of Christ minister M.W. Green were among those willing to provide testimonials for Stephen's patients in Dunedin. Archdeacon Stock, Reverends Gauld and Redstone and a 'city missionary', D.M. Hall, obliged in Wellington. *ODT*, 31 Mar. 1884, p.3, 25 Apr. 1884, p.2, 5 May 1884, p.3, 5 June 1884, p.4; *Morning Herald*, 9 Apr. 1883, p.3; *Press*, 9 Apr. 1883, p.3; Stephen, *Essay on Magnetic Healing*, pp.25-6,31-2; *New Zealand Times*, 8 Jan. 1883, pp.2-3, 5 Feb. 1883, p.2. Hug cited the helpful assistance in Wellington of Archdeacon Stock, Rev. R.J. Thorpe and Presbyterian Rev. C.S. Ogg, [Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, p.1.

⁵⁹*ODT*, 16 Apr. 1883, p.2, *Morning Herald*, 19 Apr. 1883, p.3; *Echo*, 28 Apr. 1883, p.3.

to produce intellectual and religious imbecility and superstition."⁶⁰ In the case of Stephen, clerical co-operation was probably motivated more by benevolence, tolerance and an acceptance of his success with certain ailments and persons, than by a belief in Stephen's own ambitious claims and explanations. Interestingly, Otto Hüg's promotional pamphlet contained the observation - tendered with disapproval - that "some people would rather remain uncured all their lives than become whole by the exercise of satanic potions." This was probably true for a greater proportion of Catholics than Protestants. Catholic clergy did not openly assist G.M. Stephen, though Wellington's Father Kerrigan, who recommended patients to Stephen in 1883, was one exception. Des Chesnais encapsulated much Catholic opinion when he lumped magnetism, clairvoyance and spiritualist healing alongside other spiritualist phenomena, branding them devilish.⁶¹

DOCTORS, HEALERS AND CURATIVE EFFICACY

Medical opinions on spiritualist healers varied considerably. Some doctors were tolerant in their attitude, willing to co-operate with them and eager to investigate their efficacy. Others were openly hostile and bluntly incredulous. This incredulity stemmed, in part, from professional rivalry and ideological objections to healers' methods and theories, and from doubts over their efficacy. Despite occasional hostilities, healers thrived in New Zealand alongside other 'quacks' and occasionally eclipsed doctors as the preferred experts on health and disease.

An interest in spiritualism was not incompatible with being a qualified medical practitioner. A number of prominent spiritualists in Melbourne were qualified doctors,⁶² and there are several examples of doctors' interest in spiritualism in New Zealand. Prominent among them was Francis Weymuss Irvine (1821-1883), one of Nelson's leading citizens. Born in Sydney, he was a grandson of Alexander Irvine of Drum Castle in Aberdeenshire, and returned there to study at Marechal College before obtaining his M.D. at Edinburgh and furthering his study in Paris. Arriving in Nelson in 1860, he practiced as a homeopathic doctor and medical surgeon and occupied a number of prominent public positions, including a seat on the Provincial Council. As President of the Nelson Institute and Free Library, he assumed an active and sympathetic role during Emma Hardinge Britten's Nelson lectures in October 1879. He was also deeply interested in pyramidology. In 1880, the *Echo* - a paper which usually had its finger on the pulse of spiritualism - claimed he was a spiritualist, though whether he remained a convinced and thoroughgoing believer is debatable. Irvine was a member of the Presbyterian Church,

⁶⁰*New Zealand Presbyterian*, 1 July 1884, p.2.

⁶¹Des Chesnais, *Animal Magnetism and Spirit Mediums*; pp.8-9,13,17; [Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, p.2.

⁶²Examples include J.B. Motherwell, C.W. Rohner, C. Reimers and W. Lindsay Richardson. Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.56-60.

though a writer in the *Colonist* noted at his death that "his assistance to other churches had been so well known that many were ignorant of the fact."⁶³ At his funeral the Bishop of Nelson claimed that Irvine was "one of those earnest seekers after truth who are not afraid to think for themselves and to weigh the evidence on both sides". Irvine "had done all this" and "found the proofs of Christianity convincing, and believing them to be so himself he had been most desirous of aiding others to arrive at a similar conclusion."⁶⁴ Other doctors were also interested in spiritualism. Christchurch surgeon Augustus Florance attended and chaired lectures by J.M. Peebles in 1873.⁶⁵ Westland homeopath and M.D., Dr Joseph Giles, held a keen scientific interest in spiritualism. Dunedin's Dr F.H. Richardson once chaired a lecture on the subject, and was a good friend of Thomas Redmayne, president of the Dunedin SIS.⁶⁶

Otto Hüg claimed to receive co-operation from some New Zealand doctors who sent patients to him for diagnosis. His promotional pamphlet revealed that in Wellington, "Dr Kemp and other well known practitioners repeatedly brought difficult cases for him to diagnose, and that he had been very successful in describing tumours and other internal disorders." Dr Hutchison also assisted him in Wellington, as did Dr Baird and Dr Schmidt in Wairarapa. William Rough cited similar co-operation between Wellington doctors and clairvoyants in 1907.⁶⁷ Hüg rarely encountered open animosity from doctors in New Zealand, even though many went to great lengths to investigate his abilities. On one occasion "a medical man of high standing" in Christchurch selected a patient for Hüg to examine clairvoyantly. The patient was himself a doctor on a visit to Christchurch, and "though apparently in very tolerable health, was yet the unhappy possessor of a small and unmistakable collection of specific diseases". He arrived at Hüg's house without an appointment, accompanied by a reporter. The reporter later wrote that Hüg "entered into a deliberate, full, correct, and detailed account of my friend's ailments. Not only were those set down on the paper gone into, but others were mentioned of which I had not been made aware by the careful medico". Internal organs were described "with the minuteness that would be expected if the body were laid out upon a dissecting table." The doctor who diagnosed the patient "declared the diagnosis beyond all doubt correct".⁶⁸

Despite such co-operation and interaction, opposition from medical practitioners was common. There were numerous public altercations between spiritualist healers and registered doctors in the 1870s and '80s. Two examples were the debates in Dunedin surrounding Dr E.C. Dunn in 1873 and George Milner Stephen during 1883-4. In both

⁶³*Echo*, 3 Apr. 1880, p.3; *Colonist*, 3 Nov. 1879, p.2, 6 Dec. 1879, p.2, 7 May 1883, p.3; *Nelson Evening Mail*, 5 May 1883, p.2, 7 May 1883, p.2.

⁶⁴*Nelson Evening Mail*, 7 May 1883, p.2.

⁶⁵*Press*, 24 Feb. 1873, p.3, 3 Mar. 1873, p.3.

⁶⁶*ODT*, 5 Oct. 1874, p.2; *Otago Witness*, 25 June 1870, p.17

⁶⁷[Hüg], *Otto Hüg*, pp.2-3; *AJHR*, vol.5, 1907, I-14, pp.56-7.

⁶⁸This incident was reported in the *Lyttelton Times* and reprinted in the *Taiari Advocate*, 21 Feb. 1883, p.3.

instances, medical doctors struggled to discredit their spiritualist opponents. Dunn and Stephen appeared to welcome the publicity and claimed an increase in clientele as a result.

As noted earlier, Dr E.C. Dunn was an American clairvoyant who diagnosed illness while entranced and prescribed herbal remedies, and in 1873 he accompanied J.M. Peebles to Dunedin where he enjoyed considerable patronage. A vocal antagonist during his stay was Professor Duncan MacGregor, a qualified medical practitioner and the first professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at the University of Otago. A religious sceptic who incurred the displeasure of his Presbyterian employers on a number of occasions, MacGregor was ideologically opposed to the sort of explanations invoked by spiritualists to account for spiritualist phenomena. Nevertheless, he evinced some interest in investigating the subject. Thomas Allan claimed that MacGregor had "quietly asked" if he could witness the phenomena taking place at his home in Cumberland Street in 1873. "I sent Professor MacGregor an invitation to attend two different sittings, or when he pleased; but, through force of circumstance, he was unable to do so."⁶⁹

MacGregor went to great lengths to debunk Dr Dunn, on one occasion attempting to entrap him in public by drawing attention to a misdiagnosis of his friend, Allan S. McLeod. MacGregor contrasted the correct diagnosis of himself and three other members of the medical profession with that of Dunn's incorrect clairvoyant examination. McLeod later wrote to the press in support of MacGregor. In response, Dunn proposed a test whereby MacGregor would occupy his rooms for a week, diagnosing patients through orthodox means while Dunn clairvoyantly examined them, with results to be published. MacGregor instead proposed a test of his own, but neither eventuated. MacGregor's actions were motivated by a desire to debunk a practice that was "mischievously agitating the minds of men." Dunn claimed to embrace both systems. "I have no war to make upon the faculty" he declared. "There is room enough for us all." Despite MacGregor's efforts, Dunn claimed an increase in patrons as a result of the publicity.⁷⁰

George Milner Stephen had several confrontations with medical practitioners in New Zealand. In 1883 he was taken to court in Christchurch by the father of a young girl whom Stephen failed to cure. Doctors Blakewell, Stewart and Wilkin gave evidence for the prosecution, but the judge ruled in favour of Stephen.⁷¹ In 1884, Dr Wardale confronted Stephen in Invercargill and offered him ten guineas if he could cure a patient that he and other doctors could not. Stephen did not take up the challenge. He was poorly patronised in Invercargill, claiming that because of their Scottish character the inhabitants "were over 'canny'".⁷²

⁶⁹*Harbinger of Light*, no.39, Nov. 1873, pp.528-9.

⁷⁰*ODT*, 25 Feb. 1873, p.3, 26 Feb. 1873, p.3, 28 Feb. 1873, p.3, 6 Mar. 1873, p.3, 7 Mar. 1873, p.2, 8 Mar. 1873, p.1(supplement).

⁷¹*Press*, 16 Mar. 1883, p.3, 21 Mar. 1883 (supplement).

⁷²*Southland Times*, 21 Mar. 1884, p.2

A highly publicised confrontation occurred at Dunedin in 1884 when Stephen clashed with doctors over an alleged cure of cancer. The case involved 55 year-old Margaret Farquhar, the wife of George Farquhar, a Broad Bay farmer. Stephen claimed to cure her cancer of the womb through 'laying on of hands' and the application of magnetised oil and water, and was supported by the mayor, W.P. Street (the former Otago Registrar of Medical Practitioners), who counter-signed a testimonial authenticating her cure. As was the case with many of his patients, Farquhar came to Stephen after orthodox medicine had proved impotent. Stephen trumpeted his apparent success with Farquhar and the failure of local doctors. Soon after, a meeting took place between the two parties to re-examine her and confirm the cure in the presence of W.P. Street and Rev. D.M. Stuart. Events were reported in detail in the *Otago Daily Times*. Doctors present were Millen Coughtrey, F.C. Batchelor and William Brown, all prominent members of the Otago Medical Association, and the first a Professor of Medicine at the University of Otago. After delicate negotiations, Farquhar grudgingly allowed herself to be re-examined despite her insistence that she was cured. Though Stephen's treatment had reduced pain and swelling, Dr Brown insisted that the cancer remained and was growing, a verdict which Stephen denied. Margaret Farquhar died from "Carcinoma Uteri" nineteen months later.⁷³

Stephen claimed that his practice increased following this confrontation and a few weeks later he sent other cures for publication in the *Morning Herald*. One cure involved a man sick with consumption named Adam Waugh who was previously under the treatment of the president of the Otago Medical Association, Dr. W.D. Stenhouse. Stenhouse held a dim view of mesmeric and magnetic therapies. A year earlier he rejected the curative abilities of Anton Mesmer, J.P.F. Deleuze, J. Elliotson and G.M. Stephen, flatly denying that any cures had ever been effected through mesmeric practices. J. Elliotson and mesmerism, he declared, "stood and fell together" in the 1830s.⁷⁴ In the case of Adam Waugh, Stenhouse was outraged that Stephen claimed to cure a person that he believed was healed through "medical skill, careful nursing, a close observance of all hygienic rules and precautions, extending over a period of five weeks, during which time I paid 34 visits." Waugh himself claimed that "up until the day that Mr Milner-Stephen paid his first visit I felt that I was sinking fast" and that Stephen's treatment was instrumental in bringing about a cure. Waugh, a Scottish-born cordial manufacturer, died in 1920 at the age of 66.⁷⁵

Like many of his colleagues, Stenhouse was anxious to portray Stephen and allied healers as deluded imposters motivated by financial gain. Stephen's "quackery and

⁷³ODT, 28 July 1884, p.3, 1 Aug. 1884, pp.1-2, 9 Aug. 1884, p.2; I.J. Farquhar, *Highcliff Pioneers: George and Isabella Farquhar*, [Dunedin 1974]; death certificate (kindly provided by I.J. Farquhar), Margaret Farquhar, died 3 Mar. 1886 of Carcinoma Uteri.

⁷⁴*Morning Herald*, 14 Apr. 1883, p.3, 16 Apr. 1883, p.3, 23 Apr. 1883, p.3, 24 Apr. 1883, p.3.

⁷⁵ODT, 6 Sep. 1884, p.3, 8 Sep. 1884, p.3, 10 Sep. 1884, p.4; "Anderson's Bay Cemetery Dunedin: Burial Register Transcript", vol.2, 1917-1923, p.369, Hocken Library.

imposition" deserved to be "severely put down." Magnetic techniques were deemed dangerous. They "should not be performed by ignorant empirics for the sake of gain." Labelling Stephen "the victim of a strong hallucination", Stenhouse advised him to "submit to a course of self-introspection, and seclude himself for a season from the public gaze". Reinforcing such sentiment, an editorial column in the *New Zealand Presbyterian* noted how bottles of magnetised oil were sold at £5 5s, a magnetised flannel "at such a price the square yard as might tempt drapers to envy", and magnetised water "at prices which beat hollow the publicans." The *Otago Witness* also published a lecture during Stephen's stay in Dunedin by Henry Gibbons, M.D., read before the California State Medical Society and entitled "Illustrations of the Literature of Quackery". It portrayed heterodox practitioners as financially motivated charlatans who preyed on the gullibility of the public, and advocated the intervention of law to rid them from society.⁷⁶ The editorial columns of the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, first issued in 1887, echoed this attitude. The folly of the public and the indifference of the press and those in power were blamed for the perpetuation of quackery. Many itinerant healers and lecturers were Americans, and this contributed to a sense of distrust. "It cannot be too well known", one article read, "that many American diplomas are not worth the parchment they are written on." In 1873, Dr Dunn was criticised by one for possessing a flimsy diploma from the Cincinnati Eclectic College.⁷⁷ In 1901, James Neil, the Dunedin herbalist, branded America "the Paradise of quacks" and condemned spiritualism on the basis of its American origins, even though he himself possessed and paraded American qualifications.⁷⁸

At this juncture, it is helpful to assess the alleged curative abilities possessed by healers such as G.M. Stephen. A major point of contention in debates over spiritualist healers in New Zealand, particularly magnetists, was the longevity of cures. Cures were often ephemeral and were commonly attributed to temporary euphoria and self-delusion. In the cases of Farquhar and Waugh, it was hardly surprising that doctors questioned the 'cure' of two intractable and commonly fatal ailments. Arguably, it was irresponsible of Stephen to parade his apparent successes so quickly and loudly. Discussing the early nineteenth century, Alan Gauld notes that in cases of consumption and cancer "most responsible magnetists were very cautious." The well-known French magnetist, J.P.F. Deleuze (1753-1835), believed that "magnetism may for a while produce the appearance of great benefit by relieving accessory conditions, but the hopes thus raised will prove empty."⁷⁹ However, there were numerous other instances of permanent cures of long-

⁷⁶ODT, Sep. 6 1884, p.3, 8 Sep. 1884, p.3, 10 Sep. 1884, p.4; *The New Zealand Presbyterian*, 1 July 1884, p.2; *Otago Witness*, 7 Apr. 1883, p.18, 14 Apr. 1883, p.25, 21 Apr. 1883, p.26.

⁷⁷*New Zealand Medical Journal*, vol.1, Dec. 1887, pp.103-6, vol.1, Mar. 1888, p.209-11, ODT, 13 Feb. 1873, p.5.

⁷⁸Neil was a "Graduate of the Bennet Eclectic College of Medicine and Surgery, Chicago, and the Polyclinic Post Graduate College of New York." In 1886 his application to become a registered medical practitioner was turned down. Neil, *Spiritualism and Theosophy*, p.4; James F. Neil, *The New Zealand Family Herb Doctor*, Dunedin 1889, cover page; *New Zealand Gazette*, 1886, vol.2, p.171.

⁷⁹Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, p.249.

standing afflictions which some doctors grudgingly acknowledged or, by their silence, corroborated. Magnetic healers usually stressed that patients must take due care and return for repeated treatment to effect a cure and prevent a relapse. J.R. Newton wrote:

I do not claim to effect a cure in all cases thus presented to me, nor are all cures completed in *one* treatment. *The causes of failure, however, rest oftener with the patient than with myself.* The power is strong with me; I impart it to the patient. If he from lack of *faith* or other causes is *unreceptive*, the efforts may in a measure be lost, but if he puts himself in an attitude mentally and spiritually, to receive it, physical benefit *must* result.⁸⁰

Doctors were acutely aware of the utility of what are now called placebos and the force of positive visualisation. Rev. Dr Copland believed healing was often aided by "a strong belief and expectation of cure", though like most other sceptics he claimed spiritualist healers usually cured imaginary afflictions, or afflictions caused primarily by mental troubles. "Cures, I am prepared to admit, may sometimes be performed by such pretenders". These charlatans were "well suited to impress powerfully the imaginations of hysterical or hypochondriacal patients, whose disease is mainly due to their own fancy."⁸¹ MacGregor held similar views. In 1884 he delivered two "popular" scientific lectures under the auspices of the Otago Institute entitled "The Psychology of the Senses". Discussing the illusions of sensation, he claimed that in the domain of medicine the senses were notoriously apt to deceive: "the most truthful and upright persons will make positive declarations as to effects produced, which are only a trick of the imagination."⁸²

It is fruitful to note the conclusions of Alan Gauld in his *History of Hypnotism* regarding the nature of cures. With respect to mesmerists, Gauld insists that hysteria, hypochondria and insanity characterised only a small minority of their patients, and that "those writers who have presented the mesmerists as ancestral psychiatrists, specialising in the treatment of mental disturbances, are egregiously wrong." Most mesmeric patients "undoubtedly had something wrong with them, and the mesmerists claimed successes with a wide variety of ailments."⁸³ Gauld observes that complaints most amenable to magnetic methods included rheumatism, dropsy, menstrual complaints, digestive troubles, epilepsy, catalepsy, headaches, neuralgia, paralyses, and ophthalmia. Many of these complaints were "notoriously amenable to the ministrations of 'fringe' healers." There were also cures of ailments such as deafness, blindness, spinal curvature, accelerated healing of wounds and fractures, and tic douloureux. Cases treated by magnetists and mesmerists were often long-standing burdensome ailments which conventional medicine had failed to remedy, yet in many instances patients began to improve as soon as treatment

⁸⁰Quoted in Stephen, *Essay on Magnetic Healing*, pp.9-10.

⁸¹Copland, *Spiritualism*, p.20.

⁸²ODT, 14 July 1873, p.2.

⁸³Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, p.247.

began. Taking into account the many problems involved in assessing the efficacy of treatment (discussion of which lies beyond the parameters of this thesis), Gauld concludes that it "is quite difficult to avoid believing that in an appreciable proportion of cases there was not some direct relationship between regular magnetisation and an improvement in the patient's condition."⁸⁴

Stephen's success as a healer appeared to rival that of the mesmerists described by Gauld. He received considerable press coverage. Both startling successes and complete failures were noted. He appeared to be successful with common pains and ailments such as rheumatism and neuralgia, as well as many cases of deafness, blindness, spinal curvature and malformed joints. Cures were occasionally checked by ministers, doctors and journalists for their longevity and authenticity. A well documented public healing session took place on the fourteenth of April 1883 at the Dunedin Lyceum in the presence of 100 people. Of the 31 treated (fourteen female and seventeen male, including three children), seven claimed to receive no benefit, the remainder being "either partially relieved or completely cured." Many patients were labelled by the press as "incurables" from the Benevolent Institution who failed to benefit from orthodox treatment. Documented fully by a sympathetic reporter of the *Echo*, each case was corroborated by the patients themselves.⁸⁵ No disapprobation was registered by more conservative organs such the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Morning Herald*, which reported proceedings with less glee, but still acknowledged "remarkable and startling instances of immediate relief."⁸⁶ Similar results were achieved at a public healing session chaired by Thomas Dick, M.P., in Wellington amid a "densely crowded" Athenaeum Hall. Most of the 24 patients treated (eleven female and thirteen male, including seven children) claimed partial or complete cures.⁸⁷ Taking into account the unreliable nature of reports such as these, it is reasonable to conclude that, whether ailments were psychologically-induced or not, Stephen did alleviate afflictions of some nature.

There were good reasons to be suspicious of heterodox healers. Many claimed extraordinary powers, offered cures they had little hope of effecting and charged prices which evoked a prudent suspicion among onlookers. Arguably, some played on the credulity and desperation of their patrons. However, it is apparent that objections to spiritualist healing often had little to do with empirical science and healing ability. Several factors help explain doctors' antipathies.

Professional rivalry was clearly a factor behind medical hostility. Along with other heterodox practitioners, spiritualist healers claimed a sizeable stake in the medical market and showed few signs of diminishing in popularity during the period, much to the dismay of the medical fraternity. Spiritualist healing was a relatively democratic practice, open to

⁸⁴Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, p.251.

⁸⁵*Echo*, 14 Apr. 1883, p.3.

⁸⁶*Echo*, 14 Apr. 1883, p.3; *ODT*, 9 Apr. 1883, p.3, 28 Aug. 1884, p.4; *Morning Herald*, 9 Apr. 1883, p.3.

⁸⁷*New Zealand Times*, 8 Jan. 1883, pp.2-3.

anyone wishing to cultivate their innate abilities. No exams, degrees or official scientific training were required. The success of such healers not only affected doctors' income, but threatened their aspirations toward social prestige and the hope of cementing themselves as society's truthful, scientific arbiters of health and disease.

Professional rivalry fuelled ideological objections to spiritualist healing. Doctors commonly claimed that itinerant and heterodox practitioners, by virtue of their unregistered status and lack of formal scientific training, were deluded impostors motivated by pecuniary gain. Many doctors were suspicious of their non-allopathic methods, which were deemed unproven, dangerous and pernicious. The credibility of healers was eroded further by the fact that women - viewed as the more irrational, pathological and mentally unstable sex by many doctors - were enthusiastic patrons and supporters.

There was a tendency among doctors, and sceptics in general, to discredit diagnoses and cures by spiritualist healers on the basis of the unorthodox explanations put forward to explain them. Mesmerism, magnetism, clairvoyance, psychic forces, spiritual fluids and spirits were not widely accepted scientific agencies. Such forces were not usually amenable to material elucidation in public tests and experiments. Spiritualist palliatives were deemed illusory by sceptics because no accepted theory based on material causation was invoked or elucidated. The pre-occupation with naturalism and material causation in allopathic medical science led to a dismissive attitude toward important agents in spiritualist healing: faith, empathy and the imagination. This naturalistic paradigm carried considerable power. Its significance was illustrated well by a columnist for the *Otago Daily Times*:

We are sure there is an explanation somewhere, though we don't know what it is. Probably mesmerism, and the influence of the imagination over nervous disorders, explain all that is real in Mr Stephen's cures - which he himself does not represent as miracles. To earlier ages, however, they would have been miracles and nothing else. Nowadays religious faith would not be much helped by miracles, even though we saw them done. If, for example, some dark night Knox [Presbyterian] Church and St Paul's [Anglican Cathedral] exchanged steeples (which would be a very great and very distressing miracle), Mr [Arthur] Beverly and the University professors would infallibly find some way of fathering the phenomenon upon natural causes.⁸⁸

In short, the success of spiritualist healers threatened the authority of allopathic methods, the authority of scientific laws and the ambitions of an emerging medical profession.

The medical hostility described above should not detract from the point that many settlers, including doctors and clergymen, tolerated, accepted, investigated and sometimes

⁸⁸*ODT*, 10 May 1884, p.2(supplement).

openly assisted spiritualist healers. Settlers evinced an eager willingness to experiment with novel systems of healing and to test and clarify for themselves the efficacy of different diagnoses and palliatives.

In summary, spiritualist healers were a small but conspicuous part of New Zealand's nineteenth-century health industry. They formed part of a much larger set of overlapping practices ranging from medical botany and faith healing to galvanism and massage which thrived in the relatively permissive and unstructured colonial environment. Despite some hostility from a weak, nascent medical establishment, spiritualist healers enjoyed popularity among a wide variety of settlers. A general willingness prevailed among settlers to tolerate, investigate and experiment with spiritualist therapies. The liberal temper which pervaded medical relations in nineteenth-century New Zealand echoed the liberal political aspirations of settlers in wider society. As in the medical arena, spiritualistic influences were visible in the political arena, a subject to which this study now turns.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPIRITUALISM AND REFORM

Spiritualism fanned political liberalism and gave impetus to a variety of reformist endeavours in settler society. Though spiritualism was not influential as a distinct reform movement, its diffuse presence in society urged many settlers toward a more liberal and utopian vision of New Zealand's future. This chapter outlines spiritualist undercurrents in liberal political thought and discusses the Lyceum movement, an alternative system of Sunday schooling instituted by spiritualists and freethinkers in the 1880s. Lyceum advocates believed that fundamental social change must begin with the child. Lyceums, therefore, constituted an important arm of spiritualist reform activity. Several vignettes follow, detailing the lives and activities of several leading spiritualist reformers, including their most prominent sympathiser, Robert Stout. These illustrations demonstrate how spiritualism influenced the world-views of a small but significant number of reform-minded settlers.

SPIRITUALIST UNDERCURRENTS

Political radicals in New Zealand were familiar with several European and American figures who injected spiritualism into a liberal political ideology. Some of these authorities had a high profile in society, and their spirit-inspired beliefs formed a small but visible strand within a widely accepted body of liberal political thought.

Robert Owen was an inspirational figure for many reformers in New Zealand, and for spiritualists in particular. Since the 1820s, many working class political radicals saw in Owenism and socialism a potential solution to the evils of a competitive society. Though Owenism faltered as an institutional and communitarian movement in the 1840s, the reformist energies of its followers were injected into a variety of later social movements such as trade unionism, secularism, the women's movement and spiritualism. Owen himself converted to spiritualism in 1853, followed by his eldest son, Robert Dale Owen. Owen believed that spiritualism and socialism were symbiotic. "Socialism, until united with Spiritualism," he declared, was "a body without a soul - the true physical machine of society, devoid of its motive power."¹ The overlap between spiritualists and Owenites was considerable. As Harrison writes, "past and continuing associations with

¹Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, p.26.

Swedenborgians, Shakers, Universalists, Transcendentalists and mystics brought them into the orbit from which many Spiritualists came."² For Owen and many other radicals, spiritualism not only fuelled and legitimated their desire for reform, but offered a utopia in the hereafter when earthly efforts floundered.

Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), the British scientist, social reformer and co-founder of the theory of natural selection, was another European authority who openly fused spiritualism with progressive reform. Wallace was a devout follower of Robert Owen and from 1865, a convinced spiritualist.³ His support of socialism, progressive schools, phrenology, industrial co-operatives and land nationalisation appealed to many reformers in New Zealand, and his scientific tracts defending spiritualism were an important part of the spiritualist campaign for scientific acceptance. An article from the *Fortnightly Review* by Wallace was published in Dunedin in 1874. Entitled *Rise, Progress, and Defence of Modern Spiritualism*, the pamphlet was a comprehensive survey of the scientific, religious and moral virtues of spiritualism.⁴ This publication excited "considerable interest" in Dunedin in late-1874.⁵

Several itinerant orators toured New Zealand in the 1870s and '80s, fusing spiritualism with radical reform. Two charismatic figures were Professor William Denton and Gerald Massey. Denton was born in Darlington, Durham, England, and attended a Methodist Church before reading Combe's *Constitution of Man* and launching a career as a lecturer in Britain and America on topics such as temperance, feminism, mesmerism, anti-slavery and spiritualism.⁶ In 1882, Denton toured New Zealand to popularise geology, evolution and spiritualism. His lectures fused evolutionary science with liberal social reform, prophesying the arrival of a world of immense material and spiritual advancement.⁷ He predicted advance and progress in nature, claiming that volcanoes and earthquakes would decrease and come under the control and use of humanity, whose ingenuity and capacity for progress was limitless. Sickness would disappear, wild beasts and snakes would become extinct, weeds would die out, and the land surface area of the globe would increase to a more advanced ratio: "Mars had reached that stage of advancement already." He also told audiences that land speculation would cease and that the land would be owned by the people.⁸ This visionary mixture of science, evolution and

²J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World*, London 1969, p.251.

³Amabel Williams-Ellis, *Darwin's Moon: a Biography of Alfred Russel Wallace*, London 1966, pp.11-12, 183-7; Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp.302-25.

⁴Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: the Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England*, London 1974, pp.70-84. Alfred R. Wallace and Henry M. Dunphy, *Rise, Progress, and Defence of Modern Spiritualism*, Dunedin 1874.

⁵*Bruce Herald*, 10 Nov. 1874, p.5.

⁶Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, p.94; Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", pp.254-5.

⁷In his lecture "The Future of This Planet and of Man", Denton presented what he described as "prophecies - not altogether conjectural, but based on the facts of Geology." *Southland Times*, 28 Jan. 1882, p.2.

⁸*ODT*, 17 Feb. 1882, p.2, 10 Feb. 1882, p.2; *Lyttelton Times*, 25 Mar. 1882, p.3; *Southland Times*, 28 Jan. 1882, p.2, 25 Jan. 1882. pp.2-3. Denton is discussed in depth in chapter six.

progressive reform had considerable currency in the 1880s, a time when economic uncertainty threatened settlers' hopes of an advanced New World society. A lecture tour in 1885 by Gerald Massey, the British poet, also evoked considerable interest. Massey was an ardent Chartist, and by the 1860s had embraced Christian Socialism and spiritualism, establishing himself as "a leading poet of the people". While in New Zealand he lectured on literature, spiritualism, freethought and aspects of his life, and men such as Robert Stout and Thomas Bracken were among the dignitaries who chaired his lectures.⁹ While Premier, Stout gave Massey a free pass on all New Zealand railways during his 1885 tour, funded by the Government.¹⁰

Utopian literature was an important avenue through which spiritualism infused and encouraged radical reform in colonial culture. Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (first published in January 1888), proved influential among radicals in both Australia and New Zealand.¹¹ In America, Bellamy's writings became the vehicle for a wide range of socialist and feminist reformers. He inspired a 'Nationalist' movement which attracted the active involvement of spiritualists, Christian Scientists and Theosophists. Bellamy himself was a Christian, albeit a liberal and heterodox one.¹² In *Looking Backward*, Bellamy told of a man who came under the influence of a "professor of animal magnetism" and fell into a deep trance, waking up in Boston - a well-known centre of spiritualism - in the year 2000, to a beautiful world devoid of crime, war, poverty, competition and private property. This utopia had been brought about by a simple piece of social machinery: a vast industrial army in which all citizens participated, each employed in areas suited to their abilities and proclivities. *Looking Backward* was part of a rich tradition of nineteenth-century utopian novels, exemplified by those of Bulwer-Lytton, that employed mystical devices and spiritualistic themes as part of the story. In *Zealandia*, a reviewer felt so enthusiastic about Bellamy's novel that he declared it "a positive moral duty for all who profess to be thinking beings, or to have the slightest regard for their fellow creatures, to read."¹³

⁹Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.41; *Evening Star*, 2 Feb. 1885; *New Zealand Times*, 9 Mar. 1885, p.2.

¹⁰*New Zealand Tablet*, 23 Jan. 1885, p.15; *ODT*, 21 Jan. 1885, p.4; *Saturday Advertiser*, 31 Jan. 1885, p.31; *New Zealand Times*, 24 Feb. 1885, p.3, 2 Mar. 1885, p.3, 9 Mar. 1885, p.2.

¹¹Colin A. Hughes, "Looking Backward Revisited: the Ideas and Influence of Edward Bellamy", in Geoff Stokes (ed.), *Australian Political Ideas*, Kensington [N.S.W.] 1994, pp.77-8,81.

¹²Bellamy had a strict Baptist upbringing ("His mother was a Calvinist zealot, his father a Baptist Minister"), but eventually rejected Calvinism for the doctrine of Immanence. He was an avid Bible reader throughout his life, but located salvation in his philosophy of 'Solidarity' rather than in Jesus. Michael J. Turner, "For God and America: The Religious and Moral Premises of Edward Bellamy's Socialism", *Journal of Religious History*, vol.20, no.2, Dec. 1996, pp.192,196-7, 201-2. See also Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920*, University of Illinois 1981, pp.77-8.

¹³Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, reprint, Harvard 1967, pp.105-10,115; J.M. Boyd, "Urban Radicals: A Study of the Radical Movement in Dunedin, 1887-93", dissertation, University of Otago 1984, p.99; F.A. Walker, *Mr Bellamy and the New Nationalist Party: a Criticism of the Views Contained in "Looking Backward"*, Auckland 1890; *Zealandia*, 1 Nov. 1889, pp.296-7.

A large number of utopian works relating to New Zealand were published in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Many of them employed spiritualistic themes in portrayals of progressive and technologically advanced societies. One example is the pre-Wellsian space adventure novelette *The Great Romance* (published in two volumes in 1881). Though primarily a romantic adventure story, this novelette depicted a utopian future which had been brought about through telepathy, and had strong reformist undercurrents. Alessio notes that it "appears to be an example of a sub-genre of literature designed either to attract emigrants to the supposedly Arcadian lands to be found in the Antipodes or to advance the benefits of political or social legislation." Sexual relations in the novelette tended toward free-love, and extra-terrestrials were given relatively sympathetic treatment, echoing spiritualist sympathies for other-worldly entities. What is more, *The Great Romance* was quite probably the principal source for the frame story of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.¹⁵ A pamphlet entitled *The Electric Universe* (1883) was similarly utopian and science-fictional. It speculated on latent psychic and electrical forces in nature, space travel, life on other worlds and the progress of humanity.¹⁶ A similar work published in Edinburgh in 1871 entitled *The Very Latest News* presented a copy of a newspaper from the 29th century entitled *The Hourly News, and New Otago Literary Chronicle*. This paper depicted an advanced future through news transmitted "by Mesmeric Spirit Medium" from across the solar system.¹⁷

Several New Zealand spiritualists published spirit-inspired works on politics, philosophy and the future of humanity. Significant examples are Jane Elizabeth Harris, W.D. Meers, Robert Cunningham,¹⁸ and Thomas Theodore King.¹⁹ In later years, works such as *A Trip to Mars* (1901)²⁰ and J. Macmillan Brown's *Limanora: the Island of*

¹⁴Lyman Tower Sargent, "New Zealand Utopian Literature" (supplementary to "British and American Utopian Literature"), draft, June 1996, MS-papers-5547-1, ATL. Sargent's work is a list of utopian works published in or about New Zealand, but it is by no means exhaustive.

¹⁵The Inhabitant [pseud.], *The Great Romance*, 2 vols, Dunedin and Ashburton 1881. The author is not presently known, and it is possible that a third volume exists. Dominic Alessio, "The Great Romance, by The Inhabitant", *Kotare*, vol.2, no.2, Nov. 1999, pp.3-17; Dominic Alessio, "The Great Romance: a science fiction/utopian novelette", *Kotare*, vol.1, no.1, Oct. 1998, pp.59-101.

¹⁶"Torpedo" [pseud.], *The Electric Universe: Flashing Thoughts for Consideration and Facts from Many Sources*, Auckland 1883. For a review, see Zamiel's column in *Auckland Evening Star*, 20 Oct. 1883, p.1(supplement).

¹⁷Algernon Reginald Hillearn Mortimer, *The Very Latest News*, Edinburgh 1871, p.25

¹⁸[Meers], *The Ultimate of Man; Cunningham, Crums [sic] of Thought; [Harris], Women's Work and Destiny*. Harris is discussed in chapter six.

¹⁹Converting to belief in spirit communion in the late-1870s, King later became part of the "southern cross circle" which transcribed messages in the 1890s from spirits claiming to be Jesus, Satan, Kings, Queens, politicians and extra-terrestrials. His views dumbfounded listeners when he first aired them in a lecture at Gore in 1895. *This World and the Next* [Melbourne], vol.2, no.17, 15 Nov. 1895, p.70, vol.2, no.18, 14 Dec. 1895, pp.91-2; *Mataura Ensign*, 3 May 1895, p.4; *Southland Times*, 2 May 1895, p.3. Thomas Theodore King, *Occult Research*, Gore 1899; Thomas Theodore King, *Occult Research, Reincarnation, Life on Other Planets, and Antiquity Unveiled by Spirit Intelligences*, Invercargill 1909.

²⁰J.M. Torrens, *A Trip to Mars: an "Awful Venture", a Curious Message* ["a copy of a circular addressed to the inhabitants of this world, by Mr H.V. Mundo, the late visitor to the planet Mars"], Auckland 1901. This work postulated an Arcadian world of immense scientific advancement where beings of superior purity, candour and intelligence, who were adept in thought-reading, lived harmoniously in a

Progress (1903) continued this tradition of spiritualistic utopianism. The latter publication was a novel which employed spiritualistic concepts and themes such as trance, psychic power, laying-on of hands, magnetism, phreno-mesmerism and belief in eternal progress, and integrated them into a futuristic world of technological and spiritual advancement. Brown, the first professor of Classics and English at Canterbury College, was sceptical of spiritualist phenomena, yet this novel suggests his thinking was closely allied to spiritualist philosophy.²¹ It is clear that utopian literature was a site where spiritualism and political reform were often fused into an optimistic vision of human destiny and New Zealand's future.

The optimistic reformism of spiritualists found radical expression in the 1880s in experimental Sunday schools. These schools were based primarily on spiritualist models in America. They embraced the idea that social transformation must begin with the young: if children were raised and trained in the correct way, a liberal generation would rise up and inaugurate a revolution in society.

REFORMING CHILDREN

To Robert Owen and his followers, education was a vitally important agent of social and moral change. As Royle put it, education was "the key which would unlock the gate back into paradise." Believing in the potency of "external circumstances" (environmental factors) in shaping the individual, Owen viewed education as the means to transform society. Owenite schools for children were a major initiative in this direction. These schools attempted to attune the child to nature and make education an enjoyable experience. Education was less mechanical and disciplinarian. Dancing, singing, visual aids and child participation were standard features. This education sought to develop the 'whole' person and was adapted to suit each individual's innate predispositions and capacities.²² Spiritualists later reinvigorated the philosophy of their Owenite predecessors through the Lyceum movement.

The desire to institute Lyceums in New Zealand was fuelled by a dislike of sectarian education. Lyceum advocates believed childhood education ought to be based on the 'universal laws of nature' rather than the perceived source of sectarian strife, the Bible. In Dunedin, Christian-centred education was attacked unceremoniously by Robert

world of luxurious scenery and advanced technology. Mars was portrayed as a world that humanity was destined to achieve in the future.

²¹Among Brown's many and varied friends were Robert Stout, Alexander Bickerton and John Marshman, a spiritualist. J. Macmillan Brown, *The Memoirs of John Macmillan Brown*, Christchurch 1974, pp.57-62,84-5,128,130,139,182-3. Godfrey Sweven [J. Macmillan Brown], *Limanora, the Island of Progress*, New York 1903. See also Godfrey Sweven [J. Macmillan Brown], *Riallano: the Archipelago of Exiles*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1931 (first published in 1897).

²²Harrison, *Robert Owen*, pp.139-47; Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866*, Manchester 1974, p.44.

Rutherford, the chairman of the Caversham school committee, in a pamphlet damning the Bible-in-schools movement. "If parents are selfish, are afraid, believe, and tremble, and will persist in thrusting their wicked teachings upon their children," he wrote, "I respect personal liberty too much to seek to prevent them, but let us not tempt the Legislature to introduce the Book containing them into our public schools."²³ Emma Hardinge Britten expressed similar sentiment, though used far more temperate language, in a lecture published in Dunedin in 1879.²⁴ Many spiritualists and freethinkers hoped Lyceums would provide an environment where their young would be left untrammelled by Christian dogma and conform to their 'true' natures. A recitation in the Dunedin *Lyceum Guide* captured their philosophy succinctly: "What distinguishes the Lyceum method from other modes of tuition? Its recognition of the intellectual rights, freedom, and conditions of the young; its comprehensiveness, variety, and tolerance; the scope it gives to individuality, and its perfect accordance with the laws of nature."²⁵

Though spiritualist Lyceums were attempted in Britain in the 1860s and '70s, marked growth did not occur until the 1880s.²⁶ In Victoria, Lyceums were first inaugurated in 1872 in Stawell and Melbourne and experienced steady growth into the 1880s.²⁷ In New Zealand, Lyceums were first attempted in Dunedin in 1870 and 1873, but they failed to get off the ground. A Lyceum was also planned in the early-1870s by the Aurelian Society. In common with Britain, Lyceums were formed *en masse* in New Zealand during the 1880s in conjunction with freethought and spiritualist associations. Most were short-lived and collapsed along with their parent societies in the mid- to late-1880s. Due to a lack of sources, a detailed examination of Lyceums throughout the country cannot be undertaken, however, it is clear that many hundreds of children (perhaps into the thousands) experienced a Lyceum Sunday schooling at some point in the 1880s. Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland all had well-attended Lyceums, though smaller centres appeared to struggle to sustain them. The first and most successful Lyceum in the decade was probably that formed as part of the Dunedin Freethought Association in April 1881, and a number of sources permit a reasonable discussion of it.

The DFA Children's Lyceum ran from 1881 to 1888. In its first year it attracted an average of 70 children every Sunday, and for the rest of its existence the average was around 80. Up to 140 children attended during periods of heightened enthusiasm.²⁸

²³Robert Rutherford, *The Bible in Schools*, [Dunedin 1880?], pamphlet, Robert Stout Pamphlet Collection, Victoria University, Wellington.

²⁴Emma Hardinge Britten, *The Bible in Schools*, Dunedin 1879.

²⁵Dunedin Freethought Association, *The Lyceum Guide*, Dunedin 1881, p.86.

²⁶Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, pp.194-201.

²⁷Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.143-50.

²⁸Exact figures for most years do not exist, however, approximate attendance at the Lyceum was reported weekly in the *Echo* during 1881-83, and in occasional DFA annual reports. *Echo*, 2 Apr. 1881, p.2; 31 Dec. 1881, p.2; *ODT*, 6 May 1884, p.3, 10 May 1887, p.3. In May 1888, only a few months before the effectual demise of the Association, the Lyceum was reported as "still in healthy operation." *Otago Witness*, 4 May 1888, p.21.

Girls outnumbered boys by a significant margin in Sunday classes. Referring to a class in June 1882, a reporter for the *Echo* wrote that "there was a creditable attendance, especially girls, in fact they preponderate every Sunday."²⁹ A greater proportion of males were teachers and administrators. A report in 1881 lists twelve men and six women as officers of the Lyceum, though among actual 'leaders' (group teachers), there were four women and six men.³⁰ Another report lists nine men and five women as teachers, in addition to one female pianist, in October 1883.³¹ Lyceum Superintendents tended to be men such as Isaac Selby, Robert Stout and Joseph Braithwaite, and men held the more prominent offices such as secretary and music director.

Lineham observes that the great majority of those who described themselves as 'freethinkers' in census returns were male.³² The preponderance of girls at the Lyceum and the presence of many women teachers suggests that females were more involved in the movement than official figures suggest. Female involvement may also reflect the strong spiritualist element within the DFA. It is also likely that some non-freethinkers took their children to the Lyceum. The Lyceum was acknowledged widely as a lively and entertaining system of Sunday schooling, and visitors were encouraged to attend and become involved in classes.

The Dunedin Lyceum catered explicitly for the many spiritualists in the DFA. Prominent spiritualists and their sympathisers took an active part in running weekly classes and general administration. The Lyceum was managed for many years by T.C. Farnie and Joseph Braithwaite was a regular teacher up until his departure from the Association in January 1884. Jessie Logan was an active teacher and administrator, and Annie Bright took an active interest in the Lyceum when visiting Dunedin. John Parker, who took "an estimable amount of interest in the welfare of the Lyceum", conducted the Lyceum Juvenile Opera Troupe and in 1887 was paid an annual salary of £52 for his services to the Association. In 1883 Robert Stout asserted that most teachers were "theists", though his definition of theism was probably a very liberal one.³³

In June 1881, Braithwaite published *The Lyceum Guide* on behalf of the DFA, a manual which appeared to be used in other Lyceums around the country.³⁴ In both format and philosophy it was very similar to a manual written by A.J. Davis entitled *The Children's Progressive Lyceum*. *The Lyceum Guide* was written largely because

²⁹*Echo*, 10 June 1882, p.2.

³⁰*Morning Herald*, 17 Oct. 1881, p.2. Officers were: Conductor, Robert Stout; Music Director, John Parker; Assistant Conductor, J.G. Marshall; Guardian, I. Selby; Band, Miss Parker, Miss Logan, Mr [John] Parker, Mr Barrett, Mr Naumann; Leaders, Mrs Champion, Miss Walker, Miss Davidson, Miss Dornwell, Mr Luks, Mr [Joseph] Braithwaite, Mr Criddle, Mr Hunter, Mr Macadam, Mr Cairns.

³¹They were: Conductor, Robert Stout; Music Director, Mr Lister; Leaders, Mrs [Mary] Braithwaite, Mrs [Jessie] Logan, Miss Walker, Miss Bateman, Miss Farnie, Mr [Joseph] Braithwaite, Mr Macadam, Mr [T.C.] Farnie, Mr [O.J.] Hodge, Mr Hewitt, Mr Rice; Pianist: Miss Logan. *Echo*, 20 Oct. 1883, p.3.

³²Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", p.68.

³³*ODT*, 19 Jan. 1884, p.1(supplement), 6 May 1884, p.3, 2 May 1884, p.3, 19 Oct. 1885, p.3, 11 Feb. 1885, p.1, 10 May 1887, p.3; *Harbinger of Light*, no.197, July 1886, p.3249.

³⁴The Young People's Progressive Lyceum in Wellington, an arm of the Wellington Secular Society, utilised the *Lyceum Guide*. *New Zealand Times*, 26 Oct. 1885, p.2.

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Advertisement for the *Lyceum Guide* in Robert Stout's *The Resurrection of Christ: a reply to Messrs Brunton and Forlong*, Dunedin 1881.

insufficient numbers of Davis' guide and a similar Melbourne manual were available. The authors acknowledged their debt to both.³⁵ A.J. Davis wrote that the Lyceum was an attempt "to realise on earth, as far as possible, the music and harmony of the Heavens." Davis believed that if children were left unsullied by the influence of others, they would conform to their inner, truthful and pure natures. He viewed them as "redolent of divine simplicity and unsuspecting truthfulness." The compilers of the *Lyceum Guide* shared Davis' faith in the goodness of human nature and his preference for a happy, permissive and varied Sunday schooling. Employing gay apparel, coloured flags, marching, gymnastics, music and chants, there were to be "no hard tasks for the children" and Sundays were hoped "to be to them the pleasantest day of the week."³⁶ As a writer for the *Echo* put it, the "aim is to let the children feel that they are happy. They are to be joyous as Nature's warblers are full of delight."³⁷

The *Lyceum Guide* was a pantheistic publication full of lofty sentimentalism and altruistic ethics, but as an agent of moral and social reform it was rather vague and abstract. The following passage from a poem entitled "The Worship of Nature" is fairly typical of its general thrust:

The trees and flow'rs that deck the land,
 The soft and grassy mead,
 The firm set earth on which we stand,
 Are worshipful indeed.
 We venerate great Nature's plan,
 And worship at her shrine,
 While goodness, truth, and love in man,
 We hold to be divine.³⁸

A review by the Presbyterian minister, Michael Watt, dwelt on the "dreariness" of its instruction "given in the form of dull, dreary, leaden, precept." He disliked its pretentiousness, its materialism and its complete lack of sympathy for "the aspirations of the human soul." Watt also echoed the view, common among critics of spiritualism and freethought, that its godless morality was sanctionless: it offered no firm incentive for children to put its morals into practice.³⁹

Another Presbyterian reviewer conceded that, though "utterly vain and hollow", the *Lyceum Guide* was largely sound in its morality, and that Christian Sunday schools might learn from its innovations. The reviewer wrote: the manual "does not contain very much

³⁵*Lyceum Guide*, p.iii; A.J. Davis, *The Children's Progressive Lyceum*, London [undated], located in Stout's pamphlet collection, Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington.

³⁶Davis, *Children's Progressive Lyceum*, pp.6,17; *Lyceum Guide*, pp.iii-iv.

³⁷*Echo*, 18 June 1881, p.3.

³⁸This poem was credited to G. Sexton. *Lyceum Guide*, p.116.

³⁹*Saturday Advertiser*, 6 Aug. 1881, p.20.

from which we differ" and "we have no hesitation in saying that the far greater and better part of it is just the same as is being taught in all our Sunday schools". The general impression formed was of "a sort of good-natured (inclining to maudlin) attempt to produce an eclectic morality coated over with the thinnest possible varnishing of sentimental religiousness of the Pantheistic sort." Nevertheless, "our Sunday School teachers might perchance get a few hints from it as to ways of making the Sunday School brighter."⁴⁰ In his study of English spiritualism, Barrow writes: "As against the lyceum type of curriculum, there is abundant evidence that traditional Sunday-school methods were at a disadvantage. One opponent complained that lyceum children were 'allowed to run riot, allowed to the nearest sweetshop to buy sweets, to learn to march, etc.'" One of the secrets of the Lyceum's popularity was marching, which "were supposed to have great variety and were often more like large dances." Marching later became a successful ingredient in the rise of the orthodox Christian Boys Brigade movement.⁴¹

Lyceums often provided a gallery where the public could observe and judge for themselves the virtues of this experimental system of schooling. In its first few years, the public gallery of the Dunedin Lyceum was often well-filled, with onlookers occasionally assisting with proceedings and joining in songs. A Sunday class at the Dunedin Lyceum was observed by a contributor to the *Saturday Advertiser* in 1881. Braithwaite, dressed in a purple sash, had charge of eight groups of children. Each group carried flags, which contained the four stars of the Southern Cross in one corner, and were dressed in a particular colour, denoting a certain attribute of nature, for example, "stream", "river", "lake", "sea" and "ocean". These names were metaphors for the spiritual, mental and physical development of the individual. The most advanced group was designated "Liberty". After singing Thomas Bracken's "National Hymn" to the accompaniment of the juvenile band, marching and "pedestrianism" took place, followed by group discussions and the reading of poetry. The meeting terminated with marching and the recitation of moral precepts culled from sources as diverse as the Koran, the Talmud, the Bible, A.J. Davis, Swedenborg, Thomas Paine, Wordsworth, Coleridge and "Brahminic" texts.⁴² It is clear that the Dunedin Lyceum experience was a comparatively permissive and varied one for children, a fact which helps explain its healthy patronage.

Though unimpressed by a system of schooling that aimed to amuse rather than teach, the correspondent of the *Advertiser* noted a stern sense of purpose among the frolicsome antics of the Dunedin Lyceum: "to an onlooker the spectacle of grown-up people, dressed in fantastic style and carrying flags, gravely keeping step with the children, has an effect rather comic than impressive; but the fact that people will risk the chance of appearing ridiculous for the sake of amusing youngsters proves at any rate that

⁴⁰*New Zealand Presbyterian*, 1 July 1881, pp.2-3.

⁴¹Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, pp.197-8.

⁴²*Saturday Advertiser*, 6 Aug. 1881, p.8; *Lyceum Guide*, pp.4-7,40-107.

they are in earnest."⁴³ A writer for the *Otago Daily Times* made similar observations during a class conducted by a purple-clad and energetic Robert Stout. The reporter was struck by the "slightly mystic" symbolism employed by the class, but noted that the children "went through it without betraying any symptoms of failing interest." He observed that "children of all ages and sizes were represented". Some "were smiling, some were fixedly earnest; but all were heterodox and not ashamed."⁴⁴ A similarly happy, optimistic and earnest scene was reported by a journalist in Wellington after a meeting of the local Young People's Progressive Lyceum. Forty "happy-looking, well-dressed, and respectable boys and girls" followed the programme of the *Lyceum Guide* and received instruction from J.C. Harris on kindness to animals. Harris then lectured to thirty parents and onlookers on the importance of encouraging virtue and reverence in children. The reporter tendered the view that the Lyceum "seems to be supplying a want, and we see no reason why it should not fulfil a useful and instructive purpose."⁴⁵

The Dunedin Lyceum was viewed by its founders as a key component in social and individual transformation. By rescuing the child from the 'snare' of orthodox Christianity and instilling the values of liberty, freedom and universal brotherhood, spiritualists and freethinkers hoped to lay the foundations for future change. On a personal level, they wanted their children to avoid the theological 'scarecrows' that they believed obstructed their own path to enlightenment. As a writer in the *Echo* commented, "those who have "passed through the valley of the shadow of death" - from superstition to liberty - do not surely desire their children to go through the mental struggle they had to encounter. Let our children be taught to face the problems of life, without slavish fear and superstition."⁴⁶

The Dunedin Lyceum collapsed in 1888 along with the DFA, and like its counterpart, it suffered from indefinite direction and a crippling level of compromise between spiritualists and secularists. In 1888, C.J. Rae, an ex-Christchurch freethinker, hoped that the Lyceum would "make a fresh start, for their Lyceum Guide was, or is, rather milk and watery, and growing stale."⁴⁷

Though Lyceums struggled to survive beyond a few years, they constituted an experimental approach to childhood education and social reform in settler society. They introduced novel educational ideas and practices to hundreds of children, parents and observers. For over seven years, the DFA put into practice, as no other group had done, a system of education that echoed the utopian thoughts and activities of their Owenite and secularist forbearers. Lyceums echoed the wider belief among settlers that New Zealand was a land where experiments in humanity and society were possible and desirable.

⁴³*Saturday Advertiser*, 6 Aug. 1881, p.8.

⁴⁴*ODT*, 1 May 1882, p.2, reprinted in the *Echo*, 6 May 1882, p.3.

⁴⁵*New Zealand Times*, 26 Oct. 1885, p.2.

⁴⁶*Echo*, 9 Dec. 1882, p.2.

⁴⁷Quoted in Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *New Zealand Rationalist*, October 1939, p.5.

The following section offers vignettes of prominent spiritualists and their sympathisers, focussing on individuals involved in political reform movements in New Zealand. They include Lyceum teachers Braithwaite and Stout, and fellow DFA members Robert Rutherford and William Bolt, along with the Wellington radical, William McLean. These men were among the most prominent political radicals in the period to be visibly influenced by spiritualism, and their lives and philosophies reveal how spiritualism fanned liberalism and political activism among settlers.

SPIRITUALIST RADICALS

Historians have identified the social and intellectual traits of political radicals in New Zealand in the 1880s. Olssen observes that radicals in Caversham, Dunedin, drew heavily from their British counterparts. They opposed monopoly and privilege, and fused an individualistic sense of democracy, religious freedom and the Rights of Man with socialist sympathies that stressed co-operation, mutualism and the dignity of labour. Chartism and Owenism were visible influences, as were J.S. Mill and Henry George, especially the belief that the only right to private ownership of property was work.⁴⁸ Analysing leaders of radical political groups in Dunedin, Boyd notes that a disproportionate number were petty proprietors from Nonconformist backgrounds who held positions of considerable responsibility in the community. A significant number spent time in Victoria before emigrating to New Zealand.⁴⁹ Many radicals in Dunedin were freethinkers. DFA members such as Stout, Braithwaite, Bolt, Rutherford, T.C. Farnie, William Dickson, C.J. Rae, J.N. Merry and Isaac Selby were all politically active in the 1880s. As early as 1879, freethinkers had mobilised behind progressive reform in the Dunedin Liberal Association, an organisation dubbed "the Freethought Association by another name" by Henry Hogg, a "workingman's candidate" and the secretary of the Operative Tailors' Society.⁵⁰ Given these traits, it is unsurprising that spiritualists were also involved in radical movements and that spiritualist ideas were entangled in political liberalism.

Some spiritualists were as enthusiastic as other settlers about the work of Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* (first published in 1879) was one of the most influential political texts of the 1880s. George favoured land nationalisation and stressed the need for a tax on the 'unearned increment'. He also advocated the 'Single Tax', a tax

⁴⁸Olssen, *Building the New World*, pp.158-9; Boyd, "Urban Radicals", pp.68-73, 98-9; Frank Rogers, "The Influence of Political Theories in the Liberal Period, 1890-1912: Henry George and John Stuart Mill", in Robert Chapman and Keith Sinclair (eds), *Studies of a Small Democracy: Essays in Honour of Willis Airey*, Auckland 1963, p.153.

⁴⁹Boyd, "Urban Radicals", pp.68-73, 81-6. See also G.S. Bradley, "The Otago Trades and Labour Council 1881-6", dissertation, University of Otago, 1974, pp.71-82.

⁵⁰John H. Angus, "City and Country, Change and Continuity: Electoral Politics and Society in Otago 1877-1893", thesis, University of Otago 1976, vol.1, pt.1, pp.235-7.

on the unearned increment to replace all other forms of taxation. Jane Elizabeth Harris was a passionate supporter of George. In her 1884 work, *Woman's Work and Destiny*, she stressed the need for women to inculcate children in the "mighty truths of 'Progress and Poverty'". Her views induced a Dunedin journalist to describe her as "a disciple of Henry George in petticoats."⁵¹ William Bolt was heavily influenced by Henry George. As one of the pioneers of freethought in New Zealand and an active spiritualist investigator, his political activities merit attention.

William Mouat Bolt (1838-1907) was a Scottish sailor from Lerwick. He settled in Dunedin in 1863 and worked as a storeman for Bing, Harris & Co for 30 years. As a co-founder and prominent member of both the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Association and the Dunedin Freethought Association, Bolt was a pioneer of freethought in New Zealand. He was often at the fore of investigations into spiritualism in Dunedin. He was a member of the Dunedin SIS in 1872 and chaired lectures by spiritualist orators such as Charles Bright and John Tyerman. In 1886 he chaired a meeting of persons interested in forming a new spiritualist society.⁵²

While pursuing his spiritualist interests, Bolt was involved in several radical political organisations in Dunedin, including an appointment as vice president of the Otago Trades and Labour Council. In 1891, he was elected secretary of the National Liberal Association. The following year he was called by John Ballance to the Legislative Council, remaining there until his death in 1907. He was a single-taxer, a supporter of women's rights and a keen advocate of co-operative settlement in New Zealand.⁵³

In his philosophy, Bolt drew on socialism, freethought, spiritualism and Fabianism, and followed thinkers such as William Denton, Henry George and Herbert Spencer.⁵⁴ A lecture published in 1882, *Land and Labour*, reveals that Bolt shared the progressive utopianism of spiritualists and their Owenite predecessors. Advocating land nationalisation and progressive taxation, he declared that this system promised the worker "a new civilisation born of liberty and independence", and that "Already on the political horizon may be seen the dawning glory of the coming splendour."⁵⁵ During his oration

⁵¹[Harris], *Woman's Work and Destiny*, pp.10-13; *ODT*, 10 Jan. 1885, p.2.

⁵²Scholefield, *DNZB*, vol.1, pp.76-7; Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", p.65; *Echo*, 15 Oct. 1881, p.2; *ODT*, July 12 1872, p.2, 15 Oct. 1879, p.2, 6 Sep. 1884, p.1; *Evening Star*, 12 Feb. 1885, p.4; *Otago Witness*, 1 May 1907, p.49; *Harbinger of Light*, no.197, July 1886, p.3249.

⁵³Bolt was also active in the Dunedin Tailoresses Union, the Dunedin Progressive Society and the Dunedin Fabian Society. In 1880 he lectured around the country on co-operative settlement, later advocating it in the Legislative Council. These co-operatives were intended to be a temporary home for the unemployed during times of fluctuation in the economy and a reformatory home for the lazy and dissolute. Robert Stout Pamphlet Collection, vol.86, Beaglehole room, Victoria University; K.A. Coleridge, "The Pamphlet Collection of Sir Robert Stout", Wellington 1987; W.M. Bolt, *Land and Labour*, Dunedin 1882, p.15; Bolt biographical file, in Roth Papers, Acc 94-106-63/12, ATL; Claire Connell, "Women in Politics 1893-1896: a study of women's organisations and their interest in social and political reform", M.A. thesis, University of Otago 1975, pp.17,113.

⁵⁴See his collection of pamphlets in the Robert Stout Pamphlet Collection, vol.86, Beaglehole room, Victoria University.

⁵⁵Bolt, *Land and Labour*, pp.2-3,11-13.



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Bolt claimed that the inequity caused by private ownership of property was "thoroughly opposed to the christian spirit."⁵⁶ Though he may have admired Christ, Bolt drew inspiration from a number of sources, including spiritualism. The scientific possibilities of spiritualism fascinated him. He informed a group of spiritualists in 1886 that

Such is the nature of the facts brought forward by Spiritualistic Associations in Britain and elsewhere at the present time, that some of the most scientific minds are now giving it their attention, and with the best results, for they were gradually getting their eyes opened to the true nature of the question, and could get a glimpse of the great field for scientific research which lay in store for them.

At this same meeting, William Rough, a trance medium, relayed spirit communications to those present. Bolt "considered the results obtained very satisfactory".⁵⁷

Bolt occasionally delivered lectures eulogising William Denton at the DFA and in common with Denton, linked progressive reform to a greater spiritual force in nature. In his 1891 work, *An Open Letter to Dr Richard Laishley* (a Fabian-inspired attack on the evils of excessive private ownership of land), he alluded to the operation of a benevolent power in nature "which lies behind the phenomena of matter working through immeasurable ages".⁵⁸ Progressive reform was deemed divinely-guided and inherently benevolent, a post-millennialist view common to spiritualists, freethinkers and evangelicals alike in the late nineteenth-century.

Bolt's friend and fellow DFA officer, Robert Rutherford (1827-1904), was a thoroughgoing spiritualist and an outspoken political radical. Spiritualism both validated and fuelled Rutherford's political activism. The son of a Scottish weaver, Rutherford was born in Kinross and emigrated to Dunedin in 1864 with his family, working for many years as an accountant for the auctioneering firm McLandress, Hepburn & Co. Rutherford occupied a number of public offices in the Caversham area. He was the first Mayor of Caversham in 1877, the first and long time chairman of the Caversham Road Board, chairman for seventeen years of the Caversham School Committee, a member of the local Council for 20 years, president of the Ocean Beach Domain Board in 1892 and president of both the Caversham Mutual Improvement Society and Caversham Public Library.⁵⁹ The Rutherford family was one of the most well-known in the greater Caversham area from the 1870s to the 1890s.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Bolt, *Land and Labour*, pp.10-11,15.

⁵⁷*Harbinger of Light*, no.197, July 1886, p.3249.

⁵⁸Denton's philosophy is analysed in depth in chapter seven. *Saturday Advertiser*, 3 Nov. 1883, p.13; *Evening Herald*, 27 Aug. 1887, p.5; William Bolt, *An Open Letter to Dr Richard Laishley, LL.D., Ph.D., M.A.*, Dunedin 1891, p.2.

⁵⁹*Otago Witness*, 17 Aug. 1904, p.30; Alma Rutherford, *The Rutherford Story*, pp.6,15-16; McDonald, *City of Dunedin*, pp.200-2, *ODT*, 21 Jan. 1874, p.4

⁶⁰Rutherford's son, Robert William, was a photographer in Caversham, though he relinquished his trade to become manager of the Royal Wax Vesta match factory, Caversham, in 1895, a company co-founded with his father. His other son, John Robert, was a teacher at Caversham school, later the



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In his political philosophy, Rutherford was a self-declared Chartist and opponent of Adam Smith. He was chairman of the Caversham branch of the Otago Protection League, an active member of the National Liberal Association and a consistent supporter of Robert Stout.⁶¹ Rutherford believed that the hardworking small trader and labourer were victims of monopolistic capital, inherited wealth, moneylenders and landlords. He favoured progressive taxation and, though hesitant about land nationalisation, which he saw as being "beset with many practical difficulties",⁶² supported it as a plank of the National Liberal Association platform. Like others in Caversham, Rutherford was a firm believer in mutualism and had a strong sense of local community: "what would wealth or money be to anyone but for the people he lives among? He would be a Robinson Crusoe: his ducats would be trash." He believed that "we owe everything that raises us above the solitary savage to our neighbours." He also valued individual initiative, hard work and equal opportunity. Success in life should depend on "industry and intelligence" rather than hereditary privilege and station. Reiterating the Biblical injunction "unless you work neither shall you eat", Rutherford believed no one ought to be "placed above the necessity of exertion."⁶³

Rutherford fused his political views with an optimistic vision of New Zealand's future. In an 1883 lecture delivered at the Dunedin Lyceum entitled "The Way to a Peacable Revolution", Rutherford stated that New Zealand's political climate was such that a "great revolution" of the social and political order was possible. Envisaging a state of anarchic revolution in the Old World where "the poor will sack the palaces of the rich", he implored his listeners to help bring about a peaceful revolution in the New: "Let us in New Zealand, by an intelligent distribution of wealth, prove that this world is worth living in."⁶⁴

In the early-1870s, the Rutherford family experimented with spiritualism. Furniture moved unaccountably, spirit raps "conveyed messages beyond the minds of anyone present", and Rutherford experienced automatic writing: "my own hand moved under my eye without my being conscious of what was being written, and the result was words and sentences conveying an appropriate message - the forms of the letters not mine, the spelling not mine, the use of capitals not mine".⁶⁵ He once referred to

headmaster at Mornington school. His daughter Jessie was also a teacher, and a university graduate. Robert Rutherford's brother John and his family were also active in the community. In *Building the New World*, Olssen confuses the identity and occupations of the Rutherfords. Correct biographical and genealogical details can be gleaned from Alma Rutherford, *The Rutherford Story*, pp.4-16. See also Thomson, *Southern People*, p.437.

⁶¹*The Globe*, 10 Aug. 1892, p.2.; Olssen, *Building the New World*, p.169; *ODT*, 28 Apr. 1883, p.1(supplement), 12 Feb. 1887, p.3, 28 May 1891, p.3. In the 1872 and 1875 Caversham elections Rutherford chaired Stout's political rallies and vigorously supported his candidacy. In the 1887 election Rutherford himself ran for Parliament and despite the unpopularity of the Stout-Vogel administration, still pledged his faith in Stout. *Evening Star*, 7 Aug. 1875, p.2, 18 Aug. 1875, p.2; *ODT*, 7 Aug. 1872, pp.2-3, 10 Aug. 1872, pp.2-3, 15 Aug. 1872, p.2, 3 Aug. 1887, p.2.

⁶²*ODT*, 28 Apr. 1883, p.1(supplement).

⁶³*ODT*, 3 Aug. 1887, p.2; *ODT*, 28 Apr. 1883, p.1(supplement).

⁶⁴*Echo*, 23 June 1883, p.3.

⁶⁵Rutherford, *Spiritualism*, p.6.

spiritualist phenomena produced through a boy. The boy was probably his son, Robert William.⁶⁶ Rutherford became an ardent believer and was involved in a range of spiritualist activities in the 1870s and '80s. As well as organising and chairing numerous lectures, he helped form a new spiritualist society in 1886 alongside Bolt.⁶⁷

Spiritualism was attractive to Rutherford because it undergirded his existing liberal political views and added meaning and purpose to his life. Spiritualism was deemed a democratic form of religious belief because it ensured that "revelation does not dominate over individuality." Quoting Thomas Carlyle, Rutherford proclaimed that "matter is the time-vesture of God". Divinity, therefore, was discoverable in everyone and everything. He expounded the benefits of spiritualism for the poor and the labouring classes: "It flows on, and reaches the poor as well as the rich. It comes to the wretched drudge, whose earthly life is one perpetual mill-horse round of toil; his burden is lightened, his soul rises in hope beyond his present misery, and he sees a future of freedom and leisure." Spiritualism also made sense of social and religious chaos: it "connects the past, present, and future - joins all things into one harmonious whole." Rutherford probably referred to his own experience when he proclaimed that "the glimpse of a future state has come to the atheist, the sceptic, the materialist" and "made him a new creature."⁶⁸

In 1887, a Caversham Labour Representation Committee was formed to choose a candidate for the upcoming elections. They chose Rutherford over five others short-listed. Electioneering as a "labour" candidate who believed "working men were the truest men, and the most honest", he was endorsed by the *Otago Workman* and the Otago Trades and Labour Council.⁶⁹ Religious issues surfaced during the campaign. At a meeting to nominate electoral candidates, an elector deprecated Rutherford's religious views and his support of Robert Stout. In response, builder William Bragg lamented that a "petty religious question" had been dragged into the election when far weightier issues were at stake. In Bragg's opinion, "the religious man was the one who would do to his neighbour as he wished to be done by himself." Loud applause ensued.⁷⁰

Partly in jest, placards were placed in shop windows a few days before the election containing prophecies gleaned from the spirits at a recent seance. The spirits claimed to foresee commanding victories for Rutherford and other candidates endorsed by the Otago Protection League. A writer in the *Otago Daily Times* satirised the spirits' prediction that Rutherford would only win by 68 votes: "this at the first blush seems rather rough on Mr Rutherford, seeing that he himself is a believer and is reputed to have had much trafficking with the other world."⁷¹

⁶⁶This boy and the family experiments were discussed in a letter from Rutherford's nephew, Peter, to his parents: Peter Rutherford, Letter to Parents, [187?], Alma Rutherford papers, MS 95/014,3,6, Hocken Library, Dunedin.

⁶⁷*Harbinger of Light*, no.196, July 1886, p.3249.

⁶⁸Rutherford, *Spiritualism*, pp.3-5.

⁶⁹ODT, 3 Aug. 1887, p.2; Angus, "City and Country", vol.1, pt.2, pp.441-2.

⁷⁰ODT, 21 Sep. 1887, p.4.

⁷¹ODT, 24 Sep. 1887, p.7.

Rutherford did not hide his spiritualist views during his campaign. He told electors that he "had tried to serve other people while on earth, and when he left the earth he intended to try still to serve them." Rutherford "did not want to reign, but if he could choose he would hereafter choose to be at the service of other people." The prospect of Rutherford serving his community in spirit form after death may or may not have been taken seriously, but it did not repel voters. He captured 40% of the vote, not enough for victory, but a creditable showing against his highly favoured opponent, William Barron (a wealthy merchant and runholder), who secured the remaining 60%.⁷²

Olssen places Caversham in a position of importance in late nineteenth-century New Zealand politics: "the central cultural values which the people of Caversham forged during this period [1880-1920] and translated into a political programme came to permeate the city and (to a lesser extent) the entire Dominion."⁷³ Anchored and inspired by spiritualist beliefs, Rutherford was heavily involved in activities and institutions that shaped the cultural and political character of the Caversham community.⁷⁴ Rutherford, therefore, provides a clear illustration of how spiritualism infused liberal reform and was entangled in events and processes that shaped the nation. A further illustration is offered by another of Bolt's friends, Joseph Braithwaite.

Braithwaite (1848-1917) was a leading bookseller and publisher in Dunedin who, up until 1884, was also a prominent spiritualist, freethinker and freemason. Born in Penrith, England, he lived in Melbourne for eight years before emigrating to Dunedin with his father in 1860. His father died shortly after their arrival. He married an Irish woman, Mary Ann Bellet, in 1872 and they reared one of the largest families in Otago. Of their 22 children, a number excelled in music, while their son Eric became a leader of the Unemployed Workers Movement in Dunedin during the 1930s depression. As noted in chapter three, in 1884 he severed his ties from freethought and returned to the Anglican Church, later serving on the Anglican Synod.⁷⁵

Prior to 1884, Braithwaite was active in several radical political organisations, including the Liberal Association (formed 1879) and the Land Nationalisation Association (formed 1883). His political views at this time were expressed clearly in a letter to the *Otago Daily Times* in April 1883 during a debate on poverty prompted by Atkinson's National Insurance bill.⁷⁶ In Braithwaite's view, the key to solving poverty was

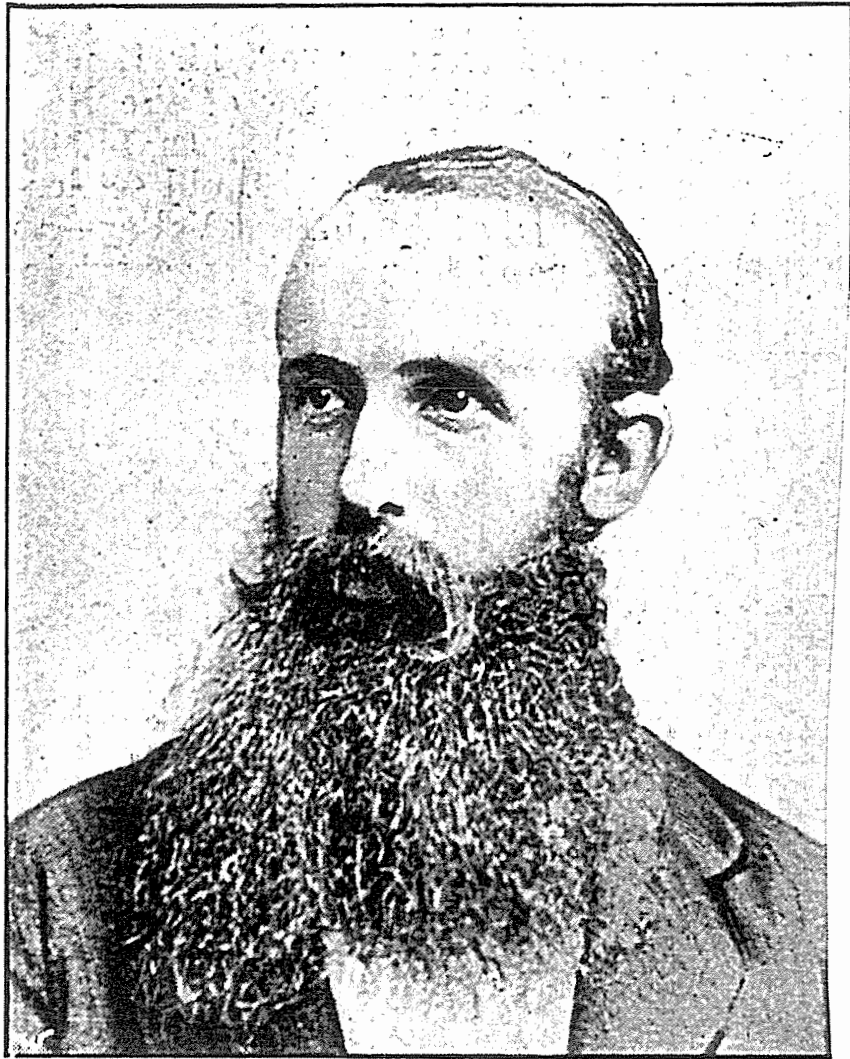
⁷²*ODT*, 3 Aug. 1887, p.2, 27 Sep. 1887, p.3.

⁷³Olssen, *Building the New World*, p.261.

⁷⁴There were many other spiritualists in the greater Caversham area. According to 1891 census returns, there were 53 spiritualists in Caversham and surrounding boroughs (Mornington, St Kilda and South Dunedin), plus a further 33 in the adjacent Dunedin borough (see table ii).

⁷⁵Biographical details relating to Braithwaite and his family can be gleaned from Thomson, *Southern People*, pp.59-60. See also "Warwick Braithwaite - Autobiography", MS-papers-5473-1, ATL.

⁷⁶*ODT*, 6 Apr. 1883, pp.2-3, 7 Apr. 1883, p.3, 14 Apr. 1883, p.3. See also *Echo*, 12 Apr. 1883, p.3. Other contributors to this debate included Stout and M.W. Green. Green proposed a "triple scheme" of legislation for eradicating poverty that included state selling of cheap land for housing, State funding for railways to open up new land for settlement and complete prohibition of alcohol. Stout, who believed poverty was the result of mental, moral and physical weakness, advocated increased education of the lower classes.



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the complete abolition of private ownership of land. He believed that the State should lease land to the people at reasonable rates. He glorified the self-sufficient worker who toiled on his plot of land and received "the full fruits of his industry." Such a system made economic, social and moral sense to Braithwaite. It aimed to benefit both woman and man, whose work would become uplifting and satisfying. Quoting Baring Gould, Braithwaite declared that "The man who toils on his own plot of ground is morally and physically healthy. He is a free man: the sense he has of independence gives him his upright carriage, his fearless brow, and his joyous laugh." Similarly, the "habits of marketing, and the constant demands on thrift and forethought, brought out new virtues and powers in the wives". Only a state land-tenure system fostered "industry, sobriety, and contentment".⁷⁷

This progressive vision echoed his religious views about the afterlife. In May 1880, the DFA celebrated the birth of Robert Owen at Queen's Theatre in the company of 250 people. After Robert Stout and Henderson Carrick had expounded Owen's legacy as the founder of co-operation in England, Braithwaite referred to the coming of "a religion more in accordance with the progressive aspirations of mankind."⁷⁸ For Braithwaite, political change echoed religious change and heralded the dawning of a new, advanced state of existence both on earth and in the spirit world. His 1881 lecture, "A Scientific Basis for Spiritualism", concluded with the following prophecy: "Spiritualism will re-establish on what professes to be a ground of positive evidence the fading belief in a future life - not such a future as is dear to the reigning theology, but a future developed from the present, a continuation under improved conditions of the scheme of things around us."⁷⁹

Braithwaite's decision to desert freethought and return to the Church was not a sudden one, but it did signal a move away from his earlier socialist leanings. Both before and immediately after his defection from freethought, Braithwaite saw little antagonism between spiritualism and Christianity. He often visited churches while a member of the DFA and occasionally delivered lectures which eulogised Christ.⁸⁰ At the time of his defection, Braithwaite explicitly stated that "New Testament Christianity and Spiritualism rightly understood are the same." He valued both systems for their promotion of the essentials of religion, that is, "God and immortality". A major reason behind Braithwaite's defection from the DFA was because he believed the Church promoted these fundamentals more effectively. "The value of the church consists in the steadfastness with which she has ever proclaimed a belief in God and immortality", he declared. "Without these, existence is a mockery and morals a farce." After his defection, Braithwaite retained a dislike of orthodox doctrine, rejecting the idea of a personal deity

⁷⁷*ODT*, 18 Apr. 1883, p.3.

⁷⁸*Echo*, 22 May 1881, pp.2-3.

⁷⁹*Saturday Advertiser*, 3 Sep. 1881, p.7.

⁸⁰*ODT*, 23 Jan. 1884, p.3; *Echo*, 19 June 1880, p.3.

and the doctrines of hell and eternal punishment. Cognisant of Braithwaite's views, Robert Stout suggested that he "join with other advanced Unitarians in founding a Unitarian church here [in Dunedin]." ⁸¹

Braithwaite began attending St John's Anglican Church in Roslyn, Dunedin, in 1884. He was a controversial figure within the Church. Attendance and revenue declined during the decade and in 1888 he became embroiled in a dispute over the ritualistic practices of the minister, R.A. Kerkham. Then a vestryman, Braithwaite defended the rights of Kerkham in the face of disapproval from many of his fellow officers and church members. One resentful member remarked at a parish meeting that "the people present had come there to discuss parish affairs, and not to hear a lecture on Spiritualism by Mr Braithwaite." This controversy provoked publications, one of which Braithwaite himself published, and bitterly divided the parish. ⁸² Nevertheless, he was elected to the Anglican Synod in 1889 and remained there until 1914. There is evidence that he embraced more orthodox Christian views by the late-1880s. ⁸³

His 1908 publication, *Some Thoughts on Socialism*, reveals that Braithwaite moved away from his socialist sympathies late in life, though he continued to prize the virtues of self-discipline, hard work and individual enterprise characteristic of his earlier spiritualist world-view. He completely rejected socialism on the grounds that it failed to reward these virtues. As a member of the Chamber of Commerce, a pillar of the Anglican community and a settler who had forged a successful career from bleak beginnings in 1860, Braithwaite thought it unjust to confiscate capital that had been legitimately acquired through enterprise and hard work. He extended his views on self-effort to eugenicist concerns over the fitness of the race and the declining birth-rate: "In looking to the State to supply our needs we violate the cosmic law of self-effort and must fall before a more strenuous race." He deplored "a love of ease and pleasure" which turned younger generations away from parenthood. The "greatest sinners" were those who could afford to but did not rear large families. They courted "race suicide" and were unaware of the "physical, moral, and spiritual injury the declining birth rate does to the individual, the family, and the Nation." ⁸⁴

Clearly, Braithwaite now sought his millennium through laissez-faire rather than socialist avenues. Self effort had rightly placed the "fittest" at the head of the nation and "produced the wonderful progress we see around us." In his autobiography, Warwick

⁸¹ODT, 16 Jan. 1884, p.3, 19 Jan. 1884, p.1(supplement), 23 Jan. 1884, p.3; *Freethought Review*, no.6, Mar. 1884, p.9; *Harbinger of Light*, no.169, Mar. 1884, pp.2669-70.

⁸²ODT, 19 June 1888, pp.2-3, 6 July 1888, p.2, 11 July 1888, p.6; J. Ashcroft, *Ritualism and the Rights of the People*, Dunedin 1888; [Charles Hunter Brown] "A Layman", *High Churchmen and Their Rights: a Parish Story Founded on Fact*, Dunedin 1888; Margot Ross, *A Church that is Set on a Hill: St John's Roslyn, a centennial history*, Dunedin 1980, pp.10-11.

⁸³[Brown], *High Churchmen and Their Rights*. This publication detailed the ritualist debate at St John's, though used pseudonyms. Braithwaite appears to be "Mr Catholic", a character who argued for tolerance, and obedience to Rev. Kerkham's practices and concessions. "Mr Catholic" is depicted as fairly orthodox in his theology.

⁸⁴Joseph Braithwaite, *Some Thoughts on Socialism*, Dunedin 1908, pp.2-8.

Braithwaite, the 20th of Braithwaite's 22 children, painted his father as a vigilantly domineering but loving man. He was "never cruel, but only cruelly just."⁸⁵

The city of Wellington was the scene of considerable spiritualist activity and political radicalism in the 1880s. It is appropriate to provide an illustration of a prominent spiritualist radical from this centre, and the best example is William McLean.

William McLean (1845-1914) was probably the best-known and most influential spiritualist in New Zealand from the mid-1880s until his death in 1914. His son, S.F. McLean, claimed that his father was a "Scottish school teacher, and had been brought up for the church, but finished up as a broker and accountant."⁸⁶ He was also the leading member of the Wellington Association of Spiritualists (WAS) from 1884 until at least 1891, and in 1907 he became the first president of the National Association of Spiritualists. His place in the history of New Zealand spiritualism is one of pre-eminence.

Born at Grantown, Inverness-shire, McLean emigrated to Dunedin in 1863. Following a stint on the Otago goldfields, he moved to the West Coast where he was employed as a schoolmaster while investing heavily in mining. He was a prominent figure in Reefton, appointed the first mining and commission agent in the area in 1871. Moving to Wellington in 1884, McLean worked as an auctioneer and sharebroker, instituting the Empire Loan and Discount Company. He was also secretary of the Wellington Opera House Company and a member of the Excelsior Lodge of Druids. S.F. McLean wrote that his father later travelled to Europe making "many eminent personal contacts with cultural and scientific men." Among such contacts were J.M. Peebles and Alfred Russell Wallace. Apart from his prominence in spiritualism and his political activities, McLean is known to historians as the first person to import and use a motor car in New Zealand, in 1898.⁸⁷

McLean ran for Parliament on at least five occasions between 1887 and 1905, but his only success came in an 1892 by-election. He was a steadfast supporter of the Liberal Government. A voice of the working man and one who had himself "worked with a pick and shovel", McLean became president of the Wellington Knights of Labour in 1890. He was heavily influenced by Henry George and Alfred Russel Wallace, favouring land nationalisation ("the Alpha and Omega of all our politics"⁸⁸) and a single land tax. He also lobbied to reform the upper house, drew attention to the electoral disabilities of

⁸⁵Braithwaite, *Socialism*, p.8; Warwick Braithwaite, "Warwick Braithwaite - Autobiography", MS-papers-5473-1, ATL.

⁸⁶S.F. McLean, article on his father in the *Evening Post*, 6 Sep. 1955, in William McLean, biographical file in Roth papers, MS 94-106-65/19, item 90, ATL.

⁸⁷William McLean, biographical file in Roth papers, MS 94-106-65/19, items 88-98, ATL; *New Zealand Times*, 7 Nov. 1890, p.3, 26 Aug. 1914, p.3; *Dominion*, 26 Aug. 1914, p.7; Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.44,52; J.M. Peebles, *Five Journeys Around the World; or, Travels in the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, India, Egypt and other countries*, 6th ed., Michigan 1910, p.56; Pam MacLean and Brian Joyce, *The Veteran Years of New Zealand Motoring*, Wellington 1971, pp.3-8; Darrell Latham, *The Golden Reefs: an Account of the Great Days of Quartz-Mining at Reefton Waiuta and The Lyell*, 2nd ed., Nelson 1992, pp.74,105-6,145,148,161,284,386-7.

⁸⁸McLean, *To the electors of Thorndon*, p.3.



William McLean. J. P. M. H. R.

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mobile workers and, somewhat hypocritically, castigated the influence of wealth and privilege in elections. McLean consistently won support from Wellington's trade unions and labour organisations, receiving their public endorsement in his 1890, 1892 and 1893 election campaigns. In 1892, he joined forces with W.P. Reeves and three trade unionists to form the New Zealand Times Company, a venture aimed at propagating liberal political views.⁸⁹ Clearly, McLean was an active political radical of significant stature in Wellington.

Spiritualist notions infused McLean's political philosophy. Though he considered himself a "Christian Socialist",⁹⁰ his religion was founded on spirit communion and spiritual evolution rather than orthodox doctrine. In 1887, he explained to a large audience at Wellington Opera House that spiritualists "have no quarrel with true Christians", those who "preach and practise Christianity in its simple forms as taught by Christ." The mission of spiritualism was "not to overthrow the Church, but to cleanse it from the dogmas that have crept into the system." Spiritualism was deemed a cleansed, truthful religion because dispensed with tradition and embraced the simple doctrines of personal immortality for all humanity and "the Progress of the Spirit throughout eternity."⁹¹

McLean pictured New Zealand society through his spiritualist glasses. In politics as in higher spirit spheres, he anticipated progress, evolution and prosperity. In an 1887 political pamphlet he declared the following: "I am of the opinion that it is within the range of practical politics, that man can be made to rise from poverty to progress, and not descend from progress to poverty. That if an honest attempt be made in the direction of progress we shall lay the foundations for an age of universal brotherhood". He concluded his pamphlet with a stanza of colourful spiritualistic language which echoed his vision of New Zealand's future:

Hand in hand, as brothers, through the world we go;
 Clinging to the weak ones, drawing up the slow:
 One electric fire chord, one electric breath;
 Soar we, through vast ages, higher, ever higher.⁹²

In January 1892, McLean defeated H.D. Bell by 153 votes to claim the City of Wellington seat in Parliament. Receiving the full backing of the Liberal Government - Ballance himself asked to him to stand for election - his electoral success was less the result of his own popularity than a show of support for the Government. McLean was

⁸⁹*New Zealand Times*, 6 Oct. 1890, p.3, 21 Oct. 1890, p.3, 3 Nov. 1893, pp.2-3, 7 Nov. 1893, p.2., 21 Nov. 1893, p.1, 23 Nov. 1893, pp.2-3; *NZPD*, vol.75, 1892, pp.281,621-2; McIvor, *The Rainmaker*, p.205.

⁹⁰*NZPD*, vol.75, 1892, p.622.

⁹¹McLean, *Spiritualism Vindicated*, pp.14-17, 24,27,47.

⁹²McLean, *Thorndon Election*.

viewed widely as a fortuitous victor with limited ability and little hope of enjoying a long tenure in Parliament. "He will not write his name large on the sands of time", wrote Joseph Evison. In Parliament, Thomas Mackenzie blasted McLean as "one of those political cripples that have been landed here on Ministerial crutches." A writer in the *New Zealand Times* concurred: "He is a miserable example of Ministerial interference in elections."⁹³ Even J. Ballance described him as a candidate weak "to the verge of almost certain disaster", and both he and W.P. Reeves took to the platform to aid McLean's campaign.⁹⁴ McLean appeared combative and defensive in Parliament. As a writer in the *New Zealand Times* stated in 1893, he was "faithful, not only in word, but in spirit to the cause to which he owes his political position." He once told fellow M.P.'s that he happily accepted the criticism of being among "faddists and socialists."⁹⁵ McLean lost his seat in 1893 after finishing sixth out of ten candidates, 2800 votes behind the victor, Robert Stout. This resounding defeat was due, in part, to bad publicity surrounding a near-riot at one of his political rallies, sparked by accusations from an elector that McLean "sued for a debt a poor old widow who had to beg for her bread".⁹⁶ He was never re-elected.

McLean's failure to achieve lasting tenure in politics had little to do with voters' dislike of his religious views. Electors were well aware of his spiritualist beliefs when they elected him to Parliament. He publicly defended and promoted spiritualism in the late-1880s. In *Political Portraits* (1892), Joseph Evison wrote the following: "Of course Mr Mclean is a politician, because he is in Parliament. But before all and above all he is a spiritualist, and it is as the 'boss' spiritualist of Wellington that his name will go down to posterity."⁹⁷ In Parliament, McLean sometimes spoke as if he was an authority on the afterlife. Following the death of Sir Harry Atkinson, the former Prime Minister and member of the Wellington Theosophical Society, McLean told fellow M.P.'s of a recent conversation in which Atkinson welcomed death as an opportunity to begin a new life hereafter: "In that conversation the honourable gentleman said to me that the prospect of death to him was the happiest thought of his life, and he only hoped that when the time came for him to give up work in this life he would be found ready for another." McLean then declared: "his prospects for the future were the happiest and noblest of any that could be thought of." Following the death of W.H. Levin, a prominent Wellington merchant of Jewish extraction and a former M.P., McLean informed his colleagues that Levin "has been called away to a place where he is much better off than if he had remained here". Despite parading his spiritualist beliefs, there is no evidence to suggest that he experienced significant prejudice from fellow politicians and voters. His outspoken defence of a radical, *avant-garde* religious belief probably symbolised to many

⁹³NZPD, vol.75, 1892, pp.627-9; *New Zealand Times*, 28 Nov. 1893, p.2, 23 July 1892, p.2; "Phiz" [Joseph Spence Evison], *Political Portraits*, Christchurch 1892, p.15.

⁹⁴McIvor, *The Rainmaker*, pp.200-2.

⁹⁵*New Zealand Times*, 4 Nov. 1893, p.2; NZPD, vol.78, 1892, pp.176-8; vol.75, 1892, pp.619-29.

⁹⁶*New Zealand Times*, 3 Nov. 1893, pp.2-3, 18 Nov. 1893, p.2, 20 Nov. 1893, p.2, 29 Nov. 1893, p.2.

⁹⁷[Evison], *Political Portraits*, p.15.

voters the struggle required to implement an equally radical set of political reforms. However, to most he was simply an inexperienced and unskilled politician, and so was voted out.

The resounding re-election of Robert Stout in 1893 illustrates clearly voters' disdain of sectarianism in politics at this time. Stout cultivated an image as a soldier for religious freedom throughout his political career, and settlers voted for him *en masse*. Significantly, Stout earned his liberal reputation, in part, through publicly defending and supporting spiritualism in the 1870s and '80s. As New Zealand's foremost nineteenth-century intellectual radical, and Premier during 1884-7, his close association with spiritualism merits attention.

Though several scholars have examined Stout, only Ellwood and to a lesser extent, Stenhouse, explore his close association with the spiritualist movement. Stout was genuinely fascinated by spiritualism. His pamphlet collection contains a large number of spiritualist works.⁹⁸ However, Ellwood is correct in his view that Stout was never seriously convinced about the truth of spiritualism.⁹⁹ His support of the movement served primarily to foster a voter-friendly image and to buttress his humanist world-view. Nevertheless, his interest in the topic is significant. It illuminates the ways in which spiritualism validated and fuelled liberalism in the lives of individuals, and reveals that an interest in spiritualism was no barrier to political success and public acclaim.

In the late-1860s and early-1870s, Stout was a prominent member of the nascent spiritualist community in Dunedin and was happy to be labelled a spiritualist. However, around 1873 he adopted a public stance of disbelief in spirit agency. As noted in chapter three, Stout supported spiritualism during 1869-73 as editor of the *Echo*, and was behind a number of spiritualistic publications in the early-1870s. He became vice-president of the Dunedin SIS in 1872. In his only lecture for the Society, he argued that human spirits, both good and evil, were more likely to be the origin of spiritualist phenomena than the demonic spirits talked of in scripture. Speaking at the farewell meeting for W.D. Meers in 1872, he rejected fraud as a possible explanation. "The days of jugglery are past," he declared. "If a delusion it was a most peculiar one, for none dare investigate but straightaway he becomes one of the deluded ones."¹⁰⁰ Stout was swayed by the experiments of William Crookes. "Taking the experiments as a whole", he implored members of the Otago Institute in 1871, "they must admit that, call it what they may, something had been discovered that had been as yet undiscovered to the scientific

⁹⁸K.A. Coleridge, "The Pamphlet Collection of Sir Robert Stout", Wellington 1987.

⁹⁹Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.31-2. Stenhouse notes Stout's interest in spiritualism, but scholars such as Hamer and Dunn overlook the subject. Stenhouse, "Science Versus Religion", p.69; D.A. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet: a Political Biography of Sir Robert Stout (1844-1930)", thesis, University of Auckland 1960; D.A. Hamer, "Sir Robert Stout and the Labour Question", in Robert Chapman and Keith Sinclair (eds), *Studies of a Small Democracy: Essays in honour of Willis Airey*, Auckland 1963, pp.78-101; Waldo Hilary Dunn and Ivor Lloyd Morgan Richardson, *Sir Robert Stout: a biography*, Wellington 1961.

¹⁰⁰*Echo*, 25 June 1870, p.3, 22 June 1872, p.2, 2 Mar. 1872, pp.2-3, 15 Oct. 1881, p.2.

world."¹⁰¹ When asked by Rev. Dr. Copland to declare his position on the agency of spirits in 1873, Stout wrote an evasive reply: "My position is not certainly dogmatic, but it is I think clear. I say that the explanations put forward by Dr Copland and others were not sufficient to account for the phenomena, and if the Spirit theory be not correct, then we would have to deny many things related as facts in the Bible."¹⁰² By 1874, Stout appeared to take sides on the matter of spirit agency. Speaking at the farewell meeting for his "private friend", Thomas Redmayne, Stout told the 150 present that "he was not a Spiritualist himself" but believed the subject should be thoroughly investigated.¹⁰³

Though spirit agency was taken seriously by Stout, he adhered to spiritualism less because he was convinced of its truth than because it undermined orthodox theology, preached progressive social reform and espoused a humanist world-view in tune with his own. Spiritualism was deemed a progressive substitute for orthodox belief: "it tended to widen the creeds, to smooth religious asperities, and put an end to theological warfare." The return of loved ones from beyond the grave "would have a most salutary influence" on personal conduct, and spiritual laws guaranteed that humans could not transgress the bounds of morality without retribution, since "every immoral act brought punishment".¹⁰⁴

In politics, spiritualist belief, like freethought and secularism,¹⁰⁵ was probably an advantage for Stout in a society anxious to avoid sectarian conflict. Running for the Caversham seat in a Provincial Council by-election in 1872, Stout's rhetoric of religious freedom met with a hearty reception at political rallies. He told electors that "religious convictions were far too sacred to be made a question upon the political platform." Electioneering to a community of Protestants, he defended his own spiritualist sympathies by evoking their own history of religious oppression: "how would they like it, presuming they were living in a catholic country, and that being in a minority of protestants, the catholics went around the various districts and said to the people, you must not vote for the protestants, because of the religious opinions they hold?" During the campaign it was rumoured that Stout's main opponent, the shrewd H.S. Fish, labelled him an "infidel" because of his spiritualist beliefs. This caused uproar at one political rally. Fish denied the allegation: "all I said was that I did not believe in Mr Stout's peculiar Spiritualistic views, nor did I believe that the good sense of the electors would allow them to do so either. But whether his being a Spiritualist makes him an infidel, I don't know, nor did I ever say so." Stout won the Caversham seat comfortably, securing 39 votes more than Fish and 59 more than his second rival, R.H. Leary.¹⁰⁶ In an about-face three years later,

¹⁰¹*Report of the Meeting of the Otago Institute*, p.4.

¹⁰²*ODT*, 31 Mar. 1873, p.2.

¹⁰³*Harbinger of Light*, no.51, Nov. 1874, p.727.

¹⁰⁴*Echo*, 2 Mar. 1872, pp.2-3, *Otago Witness*, 3 Aug. 1872, p.10; *Harbinger of Light*, no.51, Nov. 1874, p.727.

¹⁰⁵Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", p.63; Stenhouse, "Science Versus Religion", p.82.

¹⁰⁶*ODT*, 7 Aug. 1872, pp.2-3, 9 Aug. 1872, p.3, 10 Aug. 1872, pp.2-3, 16 Aug. 1872, p.2.

Fish defended Stout and his efforts to introduce spiritualist literature into the Dunedin Athenaeum. Fish believed such literature was "as religious as the best of them."¹⁰⁷

Stout defended spiritualist belief throughout the 1870s and '80s, frequently chairing lectures on the topic. In 1884, he presided over a lecture by Charles Bright on "The Emancipating Influence of Spiritualism".¹⁰⁸ A particularly revealing example of Stout's defence of spiritualism was his support of Emma Hardinge Britten in Dunedin during her debates with Rev. M.W. Green in 1879. At the end of one lecture, Stout rose to refute Green's accusation that spiritualists supported free-love. In a series of tit-for-tat letters in the *Otago Daily Times*, Stout sought to vindicate spiritualism from charges of immorality while Green maintained that "Spiritism destroys the distinction between right and wrong, virtue and vice."¹⁰⁹ Both Stout and Green had wider political objectives to serve during this altercation. Stout utilised the debate to cultivate his image as an opponent of sectarian religion and a supporter of freedom, truth and morality. Green, on the other hand, courted public acclaim to enhance his political prospects and enlarge his congregation. A recent arrival in Dunedin, fresh from fighting spiritualism in Melbourne as a minister of a small Protestant sect, Green had much to gain and nothing to lose in fighting a battle that could enhance his image as both a brave soldier of the Christian faith and as an authority on public matters in general. Indeed, in 1881 he successfully challenged for a seat in Parliament, narrowly securing Dunedin East from rival Baptist minister, J. Upton Davis.

Though Green's success stemmed from his "advanced liberal views on all questions affecting the welfare of the working classes",¹¹⁰ his publications detailing his debates with Charles Bright, Thomas Walker and Emma Hardinge Britten during 1878-9 undoubtedly enhanced his academic and public profile.¹¹¹ Despite clerical apprehensions over his confrontational tactics, Green's lectures received favourable reviews in Christian journals. After his debates with Britten, he was presented with a glowing testimonial from fellow clergymen and a large number of supporters. In June 1879 he was elected a member of the Otago Institute.¹¹² As one of his supporters wrote in 1884 when Stout himself sought to dislodge Green from Dunedin East, "the man who so ably sustained the evidences of the Christian religion in the debate with Mr Charles Bright - who so signally discomfited [sic] the astute Mrs Britten - deserves better of the professing Christians of Dunedin". However, Stout easily defeated Green in 1884, who had been one of the most

¹⁰⁷ODT, 30 Jan. 1875, p.1(supplement), 9 Feb. 1875, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ODT, 9 June 1884, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ODT, 15 July 1879, p.3, 16 July 1879, p.3, 17 July 1879, p.3, 18 July 1879, p.5, 22 July 1879, p.3, 25 July 1879, p.3.

¹¹⁰Angus, "City and Country", vol.1, pt.1, p.314.

¹¹¹[M.W. Green and Thomas Walker], *Christianity vs Spiritualism*, Melbourne 1878; M.W. Green, *Mrs Hardinge-Britten in the Crucible*, Dunedin 1879; Green, *The Devil's Sword Blunted*; [Green and Bright], *The Divine Origin of Christianity*.

¹¹²TPNZI, vol.12, 1879, p.454; *New Zealand Wesleyan*, vol.9, no.5, May 1879, p.104; *New Zealand Christian Record*, 31 Jan. 1879, p.1, 28 Feb. 1879, p.9, 29 Apr. 1879, p.9, 2 May 1879, pp.9-10, 18 July 1879, p.1, 15 Aug. 1879, p.1.

unpopular M.P.s in the House during the previous term and "a disappointment to his best friends". A fervent moralist and advocate of temperance and, moreover, a man of far superior political acumen than Green, Christian voters saw much to admire in Stout.¹¹³ A few weeks after this election, Stout became Premier and Minister of Justice. An outspoken freethinker and supporter of spiritualism was New Zealand's political leader. As Lineham notes, Stout's ascension to Premier alongside Julius Vogel, a broad-minded Jew and the Colonial Treasurer, evoked horror from clerical observers: "New Zealand seemed to have cut its Christian roots, and declared itself a pagan nation." Freethinkers at home and abroad celebrated these developments as a sign of things to come.¹¹⁴

To reiterate, Stout's consistent defence of spiritualism functioned as a club to demolish orthodox belief, a means of propagating liberal reform and a tool to propagate the voter-friendly rhetoric of morality, integrity and religious freedom. Other factors were also important. As the leading freethinker in New Zealand, he needed to assuage the large spiritualist contingent in their ranks in order to maintain harmony. Stout may have also felt obliged to defend spiritualism for the sake of his wife's parents, John and Jessie Logan, who were spiritualists, and perhaps also for Anna herself.¹¹⁵ Some of his closest friends were ardent investigators.¹¹⁶

Spiritualism also genuinely appealed to him because it reinforced and validated his progressive, humanist philosophy. Stout enjoyed the practical, earthly focus of spiritualist rhetoric and its stress on self-salvation, self-redemption and self help in the here and now. This ethic reinforced and helped legitimate his Social Darwinist views. He concurred with spiritualism's focus on the reforming power of education, hence his zeal in promoting the Dunedin Lyceum with all its spiritualistic trappings. Though unconvinced by spiritualists' scientific claims, Stout appreciated the attempts of investigators to be empirical and methodical. "In the investigation of all questions, whether religious or otherwise, we should begin with the facts of observation", he declared in 1874. "This was what the Spiritualists were doing" and was "the only true scientific method."¹¹⁷ Spiritualism also preached a humanistic cosmology predicated on the infinite progression, evolution and perfectibility of humankind, beliefs which formed the mainstay of Stout's 'religion of humanity'. Lecturing late in life at the Unitarian Church in Wellington, Stout quoted Lewis Morris to articulate a sense of the infinite in humanity:

We are part of an Infinite Scheme,
All that we are;
Man the high crest and crown of things that be

¹¹³ODT, 12 July 1884, p.2(supplement), 25 June 1884, p.2(editorial), 19 July 1884, p.3.

¹¹⁴Lineham, "Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand", p.62.

¹¹⁵Ellwood claims that Anna Stout was a spiritualist, though I have been unable to confirm this. Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.37.

¹¹⁶William Bolt and Arthur Beverly are two conspicuous examples.

¹¹⁷*Harbinger of Light*, no.51, Nov. 1874, p.727.

The fiery-hearted earth, the cold unfathomed sea,
The central sun, the intermittent star.
Things great and small,
We are but parts of the Eternal All.

Morris went on to expound the ultimate goodness and purpose of all human action, expressing an optimistic sentimentalism that had adorned spiritualist texts for many decades:

Each impulse towards an unattained good,-
All with a sure, unfaltering working tend
To one Ineffable, Beatific [sic] End.¹¹⁸

Given this world-view and a long history of close involvement in the spiritualist movement, it is clear that spiritualism influenced Stout in his politics and philosophy.

Robert Stout's connections with spiritualism epitomise the central points made in this chapter. As in the life of Stout, spiritualism was a small thread within liberal thought in late nineteenth-century New Zealand. Spiritualists and their sympathisers rarely found their heterodox religious views a barrier to public acceptance and political success. In fact, spiritualism often helped to validate their radical endeavours and endear them to a society sensitised to the evils of sectarian religious conflict. As a general movement, spiritualism reinforced the optimistic and progressive sentiment that underpinned liberalism in New Zealand and fuelled political radicalism among settlers. Spiritualism resonated with the liberalism of wider society, just as it resonated with the liberal views of Stout. The following chapter examines one area of liberal thought in particular: women's rights. Given the importance of women to the spiritualist movement, the topic merits close attention.

¹¹⁸Robert Stout, *Brotherhood: a Vision of the Future*, Wellington 1917, p.14.

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN AND SOCIAL REGENERATION

Female spiritualist reformers are the subject of work by several British and American scholars. Though Ellwood touches briefly on the feminine aspects of spiritualism and some prominent female spiritualists, the discussion below represents the first detailed treatment by a scholar in New Zealand.¹ This chapter discusses spiritualist views of women and examines them in relation to the rise of feminist issues in New Zealand in the 1870s and '80s. It dwells primarily on a small but visible and controversial group of female spiritualists who, like their male counterparts in the previous chapter, lobbied for social reform in the 1870s and '80s. Spiritualist support of women's rights reform was rooted in an idea that permeated colonial Christianity and liberal political thought: that the female sex had immense regenerative and purifying powers, and that through such power, women might transform New Zealand into an advanced and morally pure civilisation.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ISSUES

As noted in previous chapters, spiritualism was a relatively feminised movement. "Whatever spiritualism was or was not, the role played by women was central to it, whether as instigators, mediums, or advocates on its behalf."² Basham notes that mediumship could be "as domesticated and feminine an art as embroidery."³ Most spiritualists sympathised with women's rights issues and joined in a growing chorus of discontent over the position of women in society. Considered broadly, spiritualism was probably part of a wider 'feminisation of religion' that took place with increasing pace in the late-nineteenth century. A survey and critique of scholarship abroad is necessary before examining the New Zealand context.

Significant scholarly contributions in this area include works by Anne Braude, Alex Owen and Diana Basham. Others such as Walkowitz and Moore devote chapters to the subject. In general, these scholars explain female involvement in spiritualism as a result of, and response to, female disempowerment and marginalisation. They also view spiritualists as playing a significant and pioneering role in the women's rights movement.

¹Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.35-6,40-1,198-99,205-12.

²Basham, *The Trial of Woman*, p.121.

³Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.9.

They argue that spiritualism challenged gender norms, gave impetus to women's rights reform and was a source of empowerment for women.

Owen, Walkowitz and Basham observe that the eccentric activity of the seance room infringed cultural limits and subverted gender codes. It "reversed the usual sexual hierarchy of knowledge and power: it shifted attention away from men and focussed it on the female medium, the centre of spiritual knowledge and insight." Spiritualist mediumship, Owen writes, "was capable of sabotaging the mechanics of power inherent in the Victorian codification of gender difference."⁴ Basham detects "revolutionary gender politics" at work in the seance. Spiritualism offered the female medium "the active role of penetrating the minds of her audience." Spiritualist phenomena and spirit messages given in trance are interpreted by some scholars as the unconscious language of despair and resistance. Basham claims that seance effects were "a language which specialised in metaphoric performance and the actualisation of desire." Seance phenomena "'spoke' that which was inadequately signified in its own right, or could not speak for itself except through the agency of the spirit medium." Owen cites the operation of a "motivational unconscious" in spiritualist phenomena, as does Moore, who states that "in the personalities of the spirits trance mediums found outlets for unexpressed and inexpressible desires."⁵ Moore detects an envy of male social power in the utterances and behaviour of mediums. Emma Hardinge Britten, for example, often delivered spontaneous spirit-inspired orations on 'manly' scientific topics chosen by men, and she evidently enjoyed her 'victories' on such occasions.⁶ Spiritualism is viewed by these scholars as unconscious resistance to the prevailing social and gendered order.

Moore and Braude note how spirit guidance and encouragement emboldened women in America to overcome social barriers and their lack of confidence to enter the public sphere. Trance lecturing in mid-century America is interpreted as a transitional phase in women's entry onto the public platform. By claiming that spirits inspired them and were responsible for their orations, trance lecturers could divorce themselves from their views and actions on stage, thereby deflecting blame in transgressing social codes. Trance lecturers occasionally evolved into reformist orators. Spiritualist lecturing, therefore, opened the way for some women to speak publicly in other roles and on other topics.⁷

Some scholars stress the point that spiritualist women usurped male religious leadership. Spiritualism is deemed an avenue through which female leadership could be exercised and become normative. As Braude argues: "mediumship circumvented the structural barriers that excluded women from religious leadership". It "bypassed the need

⁴Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.11; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p.176.

⁵Basham, *The Trial of Woman*, pp.108,127; Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.203; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, p.112.

⁶Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, pp.113-14.

⁷Braude, *Radical Spirits*, pp.82-98,193-6; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, pp.102-29.

for education, ordination, or organisational recognition, which secured the monopoly of male religious leaders".⁸

Spiritualism is viewed as being favourable for women in a number of other ways. Its reinforcement of the idea of the individual and 'self sovereignty' is seen as a positive step towards the emancipation of women in wider society. Spiritualist healing challenged male allopathic medicine and offered alternatives to the often treacherous and demeaning practices of orthodox practitioners. Careers as mediums and spiritualist lecturers provided rare opportunities for women to escape boredom, responsibility and prescribed roles. It offered adventure, travel, power, independence and fulfilment.⁹ Basham, along with Oppenheim regards menstruation as important to an understanding of Victorian women and discussions of women's issues. Spiritualism is portrayed as a more positive paradigm for women than Christianity and medical science in which the difficulties and mysteries of menstruation could be understood:

many women then, as now, suffered acutely from bad experiences of menstruation, with spiritualism offering a more positive construct for such suffering than was offered by the old notion of original sin, the curse of Eve, or the newly sophisticated theories of hysteria. Spiritualism at least managed to provide a forum in which 'the menstrual voice' could try out its articulations and dramatise the affects of its productions...

Basham views spiritualism as a site where women explored and challenged the guilt-ridden silence bestowed on them by Eve's original sin.¹⁰ With the exception of Moore, there is a trend in this historiography toward viewing spiritualism as a site for the celebration of female independence, emancipation and spiritual authority. This trend is epitomised in a recent work by Barbara Goldsmith, who writes: "At a time when women had no power to achieve equal rights, they relied on the "other powers" provided by Spiritualism to sustain their efforts. Through the mouths of trance speakers came words of wisdom from long-dead seers, and from the spirits came the courage to go forward."¹¹

However, celebrations are tempered by a fundamental paradox. While demanding female equality and self-sovereignty, spiritualists stressed female difference. They claimed that women were men's equal and strove to remove social barriers to women's progress, while simultaneously subscribing to prevailing Victorian notions that women were innately passive, spiritual, intuitive and moral. Such traits reinforced the elevating, but ultimately limiting, 'cult of womanhood' which pervaded society. Braude notes how spiritualists "struggled with the cultural vocabulary of Victorian ideas about gender and stretched them

⁸Braude, *Radical Spirits*, p.84.

⁹Oppenheim, "Shattered Nerves", pp.190-1; Braude, *Radical Spirits*, pp.56-7,117-27,142-51; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, pp.115-16,128-9; Owen, *The Darkened Room*, pp.137-8.

¹⁰Basham, *The Trial of Women*, pp.vii,ix,125-7,131

¹¹Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: the Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull*, New York 1998, pp.xiii-xiv.

to their limits", and in doing so, "bumped up against the contradictions inherent within them." She believes that in America, these tensions within spiritualism "began to undermine its significance for woman's rights and reform during the 1870s and '80s."¹² Owen argues that female spiritualists' construction of themselves as innately amenable to mediumship allowed women to assume a position of power but simultaneously "trapped them within a limiting self-definition."¹³

Referring to those historians who view hysteria as an unconscious form of feminist protest, Elaine Showalter writes that "such claims ... come dangerously close to romanticising and endorsing madness as a desirable form of rebellion rather than seeing it as the desperate communication of the powerless."¹⁴ A similar danger exists in these histories of spiritualism. Spiritualists enthusiastically supported reforms which have led to improvements in women's position in society. However, this fact should not tempt scholars into celebrations. There is validity in the view that women's involvement in spiritualism was more a symptom of depression, powerlessness and frustration than an empowering response to it.

The following section examines the activities of female spiritualist orators in New Zealand. Such speakers were well-known and controversial figures in settler society. As in America and Britain, they challenged the gendered order of society in a number of ways and lobbied for political reform in favour of women.

SPIRIT-INSPIRED FEMINISTS

Public speaking among spiritualist women in New Zealand began in earnest in the late-1870s. Though Susan Nugent-Wood delivered a spiritualist oration as early as 1869, the late-1870s mark the beginning of a small but significant proliferation of female spiritualist orators. By this time, spiritualism and freethought gained footholds in most parts of the country and provided markets for local and overseas speakers. Freethought platforms were the most common site for their orations. Annie Bright, for example, lectured on "The Emancipation of Women" at the Dunedin Lyceum in 1884, following in the footsteps of her husband, Charles, who in the late-1870s spoke on topics such as "Women, and her mission" and "Female Emancipation" to freethought and spiritualist audiences at Dunedin's Princess Theatre.¹⁵ Other activists, most of whom utilised freethought platforms, include Lotti Wilmot, Lena Cooke, Addie Ballou, Jane Elizabeth Harris, M.S. Ettie Moore, Elizabeth Attenborrow, Emma Hardinge Britten and Mrs Kimball-Chainey. Spiritualists, therefore, were among the first women to speak regularly

¹²Braude, *Radical Spirits*, pp.161-2

¹³Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.242.

¹⁴Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p.5.

¹⁵ODT, 2 Nov. 1878, p.1, 9 Nov. 1878, p.1, 8 Mar. 1884, p.1.

in public to mixed audiences on religious and socio-political issues in New Zealand. Three of the more prominent of these women, Britten, Harris and Wilmot, are discussed below.

Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899) was a professional singer in America for ten years before becoming an advocate of spiritualism. She was also a co-founding member of the Theosophical society in 1875.¹⁶ Oppenheim writes that Britten became famous "not only as a chronicler of contemporary spiritualism on both sides of the Atlantic, but as a tireless propagandist whose speaking tours after the mid-1860s took her all over England and introduced large audiences to inspirational lectures delivered with great fervour."¹⁷ Britten arrived in New Zealand in 1879 after a tour of Australia and delivered lectures in Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin and Nelson. Her orations, she claimed, were directly inspired by the spirits, and some were delivered spontaneously on topics chosen by the audience. In Nelson, a committee of men, which included Dr F.W. Irvine, invited her to speak on "What new thing has spiritualism taught" and "what good thing has it done." She also spoke in Nelson on topics such as "The Ministry of Angels", "Life in the spirit world", "Ancient and Modern Freemasonry" and "Popular physiology".¹⁸ Britten's stay in Nelson appeared to be a successful and agreeable one. At the conclusion of her final lecture, delivered at the Nelson Institute in the presence of the mayor, J.R. Dodson, Britten received "loud and continued applause". Appreciative of her Nelson reception, she declared that "nature and art had combined to render this place a little paradise".¹⁹

Britten spent her most lengthy stay in Dunedin. As she herself wrote, "lectures were given every Sunday in the Princess Theatre, and on week evenings, in the Athenaeum, and those were attended for several months, filling the buildings to their utmost capacity." While in Dunedin, a certain group of women "had been her most staunch friends and supporters." They organised a special farewell meeting for her at which she was presented with greenstone ornaments set in gold. On one occasion Britten was invited by the Mayoress, Mrs Walter, on a tour of the institutions of the city, which included an inspection of the Dunedin Industrial School. An extensive report of her inspection, praising the progressiveness of the Institution and the Government which secured its establishment, was published in the *Otago Witness*. In addition to spiritualist topics, Britten delivered a course of lectures on "popular science" to large audiences, traversing subjects such as astronomy, physiology, magnetism and miracles.²⁰ She also spoke on political reform. In a lecture on "Capital and Labour", Britten cited the vital need for collective effort and industrial co-operation to redress inequality.²¹

¹⁶Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.35.

¹⁷Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p.22.

¹⁸*Nelson Evening Mail*, 16 Oct. 1879, p.1, 22 Oct. 1879, p.2, 27 Oct. 1879, p.2, 28 Oct. 1879, pp.1-2, 29 Oct. 1879, p.2.

¹⁹*Colonist*, 1 Nov. 1879, p.3.

²⁰Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, pp.271-3; *Otago Witness*, 24 May 1879, pp.12,23, 31 May 1879, p.17, 7 June 1879, p.13, 14 June 1879, p.17.

²¹*ODT*, 17 July 1879, p.2.



MRS EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN.

Britten devoted two chapters to New Zealand in a narrative of her many travels, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*. Describing the country as "the brightest gem in the Pacific Ocean", she dwelt extensively on noble attributes of Maori, the progress of spiritualism and freethought and the great prospects that awaited the colony as a whole. She wrote glowingly of the country's future: "its internal growth is marvellous, and when the natural charm of its delightful soil, climate, and scenery, shall have produced their legitimate effects upon the characteristics of its inhabitants, New Zealand ought to be, the Paradise - physically, mentally, and morally, of the Southern Seas."²² Such comments reflect the sentiment, common among spiritualists, that New Zealand's future would be a glorious one in which women would play an important role. This theme is clear in the writing of Jane Elizabeth Harris.

As Ellwood documents, Harris (1852-1942) was born in London and came to New Zealand in 1866. She married a Thames farmer, Thomas Harris, in 1873. In the early-1880s the couple conducted seances with close friends, some of which were attended by S.J. Neil (the local Presbyterian minister) and his wife. At one seance, Jane fell into a trance and was informed by her spirit control that she would be a messenger for the cause of spiritualism. In 1887 she was widowed and took up an invitation from W.H. Terry to lecture in Australia. She returned to New Zealand in 1896 and became an active apostle of the cause, delivering lectures and establishing spiritualist churches around the country. She was one of the foremost spiritualists in New Zealand from this time until her death in 1942.²³

This study is primarily interested in her activities prior to her departure for Australia. Harris wrote prolifically in the 1880s under the pseudonym "Jenny Wren" and had a wide variety of items published. Jane herself explained that the spirits were the source of her writing: "in the silence of the night I would hear voices, uttering beautiful thoughts in prose and poetry."²⁴ In addition to articles published in the *Harbinger of Light*, in 1882-3 she contributed a serial to the *New Zealand Baptist* entitled "Ruth and Naomi; or, the Blessing of the Solitary".²⁵ During 1885-6 the *New Zealand Watchman* (formerly *Labour* and *The Watchman*) published poems and articles by Harris. The *Watchman* was an organ of liberal and labour interests in Auckland, and Harris' poems were passionately pro-labour and millenarian in tone. "The Whisper of the Wind" provided spiritual foregleams of the labourer's utopia beyond the grave:

²²Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, pp.262,274.

²³Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, pp.45-9,205-12; J.E. Harris, *Lectures Given by Mrs. T. Harris at the Opera House, Wellington*, Thames 1897. This work was mistakenly duplicated in Bagnall's *New Zealand National Bibliography* under the title *The Unveiling of the Divine Image*. They are one and the same.

²⁴Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.206.

²⁵This serial began in *New Zealand Baptist*, Oct. 1882, pp.158-9, and concluded in the Sep. 1883 issue, pp.333-4.

Then he bends his ear to the fairy breath,
 And catches the murmur [sic] of hope,
 That speaks of a world where there is no death;
 Where labour no longer shall cope
 With the evils that crush the poor man's heart,
 Where labour shall nobly claim her part,
 And oppression ne'er cause the tear to start.

Hark! hark to the voice of the wind.

Other poems were political exhortations toward various labour reforms, such as "Eight Hours A-Day," "A Plea for Half-a-holiday" and "No Rent to Pay."²⁶

Of particular interest is her 1884 publication *Woman's Work and Destiny*, a paper read before the Thames Mutual Improvement Association and the Auckland Rationalist Association.²⁷ This lecture was published through the support of Sir George Grey, with whom Harris initiated a correspondence. It is an excellent example of spiritualists' position on women and social change.

In a letter dated 8 October 1882, Harris told Grey that she wished to publish a work which would "introduce into the homes of the people, among our wives and mothers, as well as to the sterner sex, the weighty questions and righteous measures of the Nationalisation of the Land, the Equitable exchange of Labour, and the abolition of the hurtful systems of Profit, Usury, and Taxation." Harris regarded Grey as a great liberal reformer and sought advice from him on how best to achieve this end. Grey wrote an "encouraging letter" in reply. He also had a role in publishing her second work, a collection of poems entitled *Leaves of Love*, published in Sydney in 1890. Harris wrote to Grey asking him to use his influence to secure publication, which he seems to have done obligingly. Writing in June 1890, Harris thanked him for his "unexpected kindness" and "all the interest you have taken in my success".²⁸ In 1886 the *New Zealand Watchman* published a poem by Harris about Grey's impending 74th birthday. She wrote:

We look to thee as father, brother, friend,
 We clasp thy hand with trusty spirit fond,
 Feeling that when for thee earth's labors [sic] end,
 We still shall claim thee in the great beyond.²⁹

²⁶*Watchman*, 4 July 1885, p.5, 29 Aug. 1885, p.4; *New Zealand Watchman*, 6 Jan. 1886, pp.5,7, 10 Mar. 1886, pp.9-10,17 Mar. 1886, p.9, 24 Mar. 1886, p.10, 7 Apr. 1886, pp.9,12, 6 May 1886, pp.10-11.

²⁷[Harris], *Woman's Work and Destiny*, p.3; *Freethought Review*, no.10, July 1884, p.6.

²⁸Letters, Harris to Grey, dated 8 Oct. 1882, 5 Feb. 1886, 12 Nov. 1887, 17 Feb. 1888, 23 June 1890, Harris-Grey letters, GL:H10, Auckland Public Library; [Jane Elizabeth Harris] "Jenny Wren", *Leaves of Love*, Sydney 1890.

²⁹*New Zealand Watchman*, 7 Apr. 1886, p.9.

Inspired by the spirits, *Woman's Work* was both a protest against the iniquities of excessive wealth and capitalism, and an argument for the necessity of sexual equality. Harris drew directly from J.S. Mill, Henry George and Gerald Massey, the British poet and spiritualist. She believed woman must take an active role in social reform through educating their sons and daughters in an enlightened manner. Woman's moral influence in the home - "that enlightened purification of soul which is obtained by the experience of maternity" - was deemed the lever by which to uplift both man and society. Woman was given the task of saving society from ruin, primarily through urging her children "to promote the future welfare and happiness of both sexes" and to reject "the idea of inequality and disability". Harris also stressed the need for female education. Woman must be given an "industrial education to make her independent and strong in herself" and "the broadest and deepest psycho-physiological education" to enable her to perform her role in social change. This role did not intrude upon "the special sphere of Man's physical or intellectual world."³⁰ Harris summarised her views well in a letter to Grey in 1890: "Surely it is time for woman to think for herself, to take up the grand study of human interests for her children's sake; and in the beauty of her own thought, to give those pre-natal conditions which alone can confer upon the race a higher mentality, a loftier soul-power."³¹

Harris was one of several New Zealand women spiritualists who took up public speaking in the 1880s. Two other examples were Elizabeth Attenborrow and M.S. Ettie Moore. Attenborrow, a Hawkes Bay trance medium, was born in Staffordshire, England, and appeared to gravitate toward spiritualism from a strict Baptist background.³² Attenborrow (1845?-1918) aroused considerable interest in Taradale and Napier when she first lectured there in April-May 1888. Her orations were rarely documented by local reporters, but appeared to focus on Christian spiritualist topics. She delivered weekly Sunday orations, termed "Divine Service", free of charge at the Athenaeum Hall in Napier. In 1902 Attenborrow was described by a Masterton spiritualist as "one of the best mediums in New Zealand."³³ M.S. Ettie Moore came to prominence in 1883-5 after delivering lectures on spiritualism and women's issues in places such as Wanganui, Palmerston North, Woodville and Fielding. Little is presently known of her background, though she was a materialist before embracing spiritualism. Lecturing in Palmerston North in September 1885 on "Woman's Influence", the Mayor and chairman, J. Linton,

³⁰[Harris], *Woman's Work and Destiny*, p.10, *passim*.

³¹Letter, Harris to Grey, 23 June 1890, Harris-Grey letters, GL:H10, Auckland Public Library.

³²I cannot verify her denomination, though her husband, Samuel, was a "strict chapel man", probably a Baptist (personal communication from some of Elizabeth's descendants). A Baptist background makes sense given that the Baptist minister, P.H. Cornford, publicly challenged her orations in Napier.

³³*The Hawkes Bay Herald*, 13 Apr. 1888, p.2-3, 2 May 1888, p.2, 12 May 1888, p.1(supplement), 24 May 1888, p.3, 6 Oct. 1888, p.3; Mrs Attenborrow and Rev. P.H. Cornford, *Spiritualism From Two Points of View: Trance Addresses by Mrs Attenborrow and Sermon by the Rev. P.H. Cornford*, Napier 1888; *Messenger* [Melbourne], no.51, Mar. 1902, p.7.

described her oration as an "intellectual treat" that was "by far and away the best lecture, and the best delivered, that had ever been heard in Palmerston."³⁴

The women discussed above were relatively conservative and respectable representatives of their faith. Other female propagandists were far more risqué in their promotion of liberal reform. There were no better examples of this than Lotti Wilmot, the self-titled "CELEBRATED LECTURESS AND ADVANCED PROGRESSIONIST."³⁵

Wilmot came to New Zealand from Australia in 1880. From that year until her death in 1884 she travelled from town to town accompanied by her daughter and a pet dog, delivering lectures on spiritualism, freethought, social reform and other sundry topics. Her life and activities prior to arriving in New Zealand are yet to be researched.³⁶ Fiercely independent, playfully controversial and cuttingly sarcastic, Wilmot wilfully transgressed social codes and the bounds of respectable womanhood both on and off stage. Her tactics and demeanour alienated many freethinkers as well as more orthodox settlers. A Dunedin freethinker wrote: "When Madame Wilmot was in Otago she was not recognised as a Freethinker. She was continually fighting and quarrelling with everyone she came into contact with, and she lived far beyond her means. It could not be expected that she would make many friends."³⁷

A tall woman, Wilmot had a commanding stage presence and considerable sexual allure, an effect she appeared to nurture. One press report noted how her garb conspicuously paraded her physical attributes:

The *entree* of the lecturess was the signal of the most devoted attention being paid to her. Her get up was iconoclastic, because unorthodox, and her commanding person (she cannot be less than five feet nine) was displayed to as much advantage as the dressmaker could make it. In a black dress, with bodice *a la* jersey, black kid gloves extending over her wrists, and black lace sleeves exhibiting the naked contour of her arms, her figure was left untrammelled with excessive garb, and from a pocket over each breast was suspended a chain linked with charms. The conventional choker of the parson was worn round her neck.³⁸

Her lectures ranged from suggestive topics such as "Forbidden Fruit" and "Courtship and Marriage", to provocative freethought subjects entitled "His Majesty the Devil" and discourses on "The Social Evil" (prostitution). They were infused with pro-spiritualist sentiment and strictures against Christianity. Her disposition provoked comment from the

³⁴*Fielding Star*, 24 Sep. 1885, p.3, 29 Sep. 1885, p.3, 24 Oct. 1885, p.2; *Rationalist*, vol.1, no.20, 8 Nov. 1885, p.2; *New Zealand Times*, 8 Oct. 1885, p.3, 19 Nov. 1885, p.2; *Freethought Review*, no.4, Jan. 1884, pp.7,13, Mar. 1884, p.6; *Manawatu Standard*, 3 Sep. 1885, p.3, 8 Sep. 1885, p.2, 9 Sep. 1885, p.3.

³⁵Lotti Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds; A Sequel to Beds I Have Slept In*, Christchurch 1882, title page.

³⁶According to unsourced remarks by Eldred-Grigg, Wilmot was born in London of French parents. Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *Pleasures of the Flesh: sex and drugs in colonial New Zealand 1840-1915*, Wellington 1984, p.39.

³⁷*ODT*, 19 June 1884, p.4.

³⁸*Taranaki News*, 2 July 1881, cited in Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, p.44.

New Zealand Times: "Pungent and free in her remarks, it is difficult to conceive that the fair speaker could ever be *en rapport* with an orthodox Christian, the more especially as her humorous reflections upon ideas which the generality of Christendom consider sacred, were not always couched in the most perfect taste.³⁹ These traits may have motivated the individual who allegedly delivered Wilmot a death threat while she was lecturing in Christchurch in 1880. Her stance also motivated clergymen in charge of the Christchurch Female Refuge to refuse a donation from Wilmot, a decision which provoked lengthy comment in *New Zealand Beds*. "To gratify their prejudices", she wrote, "they refused a large sum of money, which, by their own begging in the public papers, they were clearly in great need of." On her second visit to the city in 1881, Wilmot claimed that clergymen of the city made house to house calls to prevent her from lecturing.⁴⁰

Wilmot also conducted private seances for investigators. In Auckland, she put an advertisement in the *Evening Star* which read: "Madame Lotti Wilmot during her stay in Auckland will hold Spiritualistic Seances, Single tickets 5s; Six for £1 1s, Private seance, £1 1s." Her seances were enthusiastically reported in detail by a writer for the *Auckland Free Lance*, a "firm believer" in table-turning. At a seance in Napier patronised by six men, table-turning prevailed, and "during the whole of these gyrations the six investigators, with the medium and her daughter, were flying around the room, perspiring copiously, scattering furniture in all directions".⁴¹

On occasions Wilmot found herself in court. She refused to be sworn on the Bible. At Christchurch in 1882, she was charged with bad language and assault. The case involved an attack on a man, small in stature, named Moon, whom Wilmot had thrashed with a supplejack for his role in a plot to ambush her lecture. The bruising was so severe, the prosecution argued, that "it was a total eclipse of the Moon", to which the defence replied, "no, only a partial eclipse." Wilmot claimed she was provoked and was subsequently awarded £25 12s plus costs. On another occasion, Wilmot entered court to parade one of her favourite themes, women's rights. She surreptitiously infiltrated the public gallery at a rape trial, in spite of the judge ordering "all respectable women" to vacate the courtroom. She was spotted and ejected.⁴² Outraged that the morbid curiosity of men could be gratified while women were excluded, she wrote to the *Evening Star* in disgust: "would it not be better in all such cases, if the prosecutrix is a modest woman, to order all the motley crowd of idle men (whose prurient curiosity was yesterday gratified at the public expense) out of court, and the reporters of the female sex to be employed during such cases as these[?]"⁴³ Wilmot critiqued a number of features of society which she

³⁹*New Zealand Times*, 31 Jan. 1882, cited in Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, p.21.

⁴⁰Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, pp.16-18,52.

⁴¹*Auckland Evening Star*, 29 Mar. 1882, p.1; *Free Lance*, 30 Apr. 1881, cited in Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, pp.32-37; Napier seance, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Feb. 1881, cited in Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, pp.28-9.

⁴²Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, pp.46-58; *New Zealand Herald*, 8 Apr. 1881, cited in Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, pp.37-38.

⁴³*Auckland Evening Star*, 7 Apr. 1882, p.3.

viewed as having an adverse impact on women. She protested against immorality in schools, public-houses, prostitution and the hypocrisy that she believed sustained them. She drew attention to women's impractical dress in the colonial environment and bemoaned unfair perceptions of women in society: "in these colonies anything a woman alone does has, by a certain class of people, a morbid construction put on it." The "general mind is prone to think evil".⁴⁴

Viewing herself a martyr for the cause of woman, Wilmot's efforts were not without personal cost. A passage in *New Zealand Beds* suggests she suffered depression and frustration and sought solace in spiritualism and its offer of a future life: "How many bitter enemies had our heroine for insisting on the rights of her sex; for keeping her position proudly to the world; of suffering in silence only; smiling hopefully to the outside world, when her heart was aching and breaking for sympathy; rejoicing only in the certain belief of a future life, where trouble will cease and sympathy be found with peace at last."⁴⁵

Wilmot spent the last nine months of her life in the Hutt Valley, destitute and seriously ill with cancer. She always struggled financially in New Zealand. In 1881 she declared herself bankrupt, owing money to a number of sympathisers, newspapers and businesses, £127 15s in total.⁴⁶ Wilmot died ignominiously in May 1884 at the age of 37. In common with John Tyerman, her death instigated debate between Christians and freethinkers. Wilmot suffered for some time with little assistance, though was under the benevolent care of a Wesleyan minister, J. Garlick. The debate was a familiar one in the history of freethought, centering on whether she had died happily a freethinker or recanted her beliefs on her deathbed.

Writing in the *New Zealand Wesleyan*, Garlick used the incident to condemn freethought. He observed that a public appeal for help came to nothing: "the response to this public appeal was such as convinced the dying woman most conclusively that, as far as practical sympathy was concerned, the Freethinkers, to whom she had pandered in her public lectures, had not a spark of true benevolence in them. In time of need they are 'found wanting.'" Garlick also wrote that Wilmot's last injunction to her daughter was to "Have nothing to do with Freethinkers", and that before her death "she had presented her prayers to God through Jesus Christ as His Son." In Auckland, Christians sold pamphlets on the incident outside the door of the Lorne Street Hall, a regular venue for heterodox orators.⁴⁷ The Wellington Freethought Association launched an official inquiry led by Alfred T. Jardine, who allegedly uncovered discrepancies in Garlick's account of events. He believed it was a fabrication calculated to exalt the Wesleyan Church and discredit freethought. Jardine's claims were contested by Rev. J.S. Smalley in the columns

⁴⁴Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, pp.26,37-9,41-2.

⁴⁵Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, p.59.

⁴⁶*Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette of New Zealand*, Jan-June 1882, pp.6,14,21-2.

⁴⁷*New Zealand Wesleyan*, 2 June 1884, p.122; *Freethought Review*, no.10, July 1884, p.6.

of the *Otago Daily Times*, but by 1885, the *Freethought Review* had dismissed the case as "another pious fraud."⁴⁸

The above figures provide clear illustrations of spiritualist women who entered the public sphere, challenged social mores and lobbied for social and political change. Spiritualism also had a diffuse influence among a far wider group of mainly liberal women. Kate Edger, for example, the daughter of the spiritualistic Rev. Samuel Edger, was the first woman to graduate with a degree in New Zealand, in 1877. Jessie Rutherford, the daughter of Robert Rutherford, was also a university graduate. A "brilliant student" at school who excelled at physics, she spoke several languages and graduated from the University of Otago in 1896 with a Masters degree with first class honours. She passed on her skills to her son, Robert Rutherford Nimmo, the distinguished physicist who went to the United States in 1944 to help develop atomic technology.⁴⁹ Anna Stout, wife of Robert Stout, was the daughter of two well-known Dunedin spiritualists (John and Jessie Logan) and became a leading women's rights activist. Anna lived at home with her parents until her marriage to Robert in 1876, therefore she shared at least four of her formative years with either nominal or thoroughgoing spiritualist parents. Her mother was a medium.⁵⁰ According to Ellwood, Anna herself was a spiritualist, but I have found no evidence to confirm this.⁵¹

Anna Stout was one of several leading women's rights activists with spiritualist interests. In her biography of Kate Sheppard, Devaliant presents evidence which indicates that feminists such as Sheppard and Lucy Smith, and the Lovell-Smith family, held a deep interest in spiritualism. Sheppard, for example, consulted and corresponded with mediums and spiritualists. She once met and spoke with W.T. Stead, the well-known spiritualist and editor of *Review of Reviews*, and was well acquainted with Christchurch intellectual liberals such as A.W. Bickerton and Rev. O'Bryen Hoare. Sheppard was a liberal Congregationalist from an educated and intellectual family. Her interest in spiritualism was compatible with her background, philosophy and politics.⁵² It is clear that spiritualism was part of the liberal baggage of many feminists and reformers in late-nineteenth-century New Zealand. Their interest in the topic signifies at least two things. First, that spiritualism was entangled in liberal political thought in New Zealand and often brought liberals into its sphere of influence. Second, that personal discontent and religious longings were common to liberal and progressive women, as they were to many other settlers.

⁴⁸*Freethought Review*, no.10, July 1884, pp.4,8, no.11, Aug. 1884, pp.1,13, no.16, Jan. 1885, p.1; *ODT*, 12 July 1884, p.2(supplement).

⁴⁹Alma Rutherford, *The Rutherford Story*, pp.4-16; *ODT*, 20 July 1982; Thomson, *Southern People*, p.437; *Otago Girls High School Magazine*, 1951, p.59.

⁵⁰The Logans were discussed in chapter three.

⁵¹Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, p.37. According to Helen Wilson, a good friend of the Stout's in the early 1900s, Anna once stated that she "saw no reason to believe that there was any life hereafter." Helen Wilson, *My First Eighty Years*, Hamilton 1950, pp.150-2.

⁵²Judith Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard: the Fight for Women's Votes in New Zealand*, Auckland 1991, pp.5-13,43,51,178-9,196-7.

Though spiritualism inspired, validated and fuelled liberal views among such women, in some respects it hindered women's rights reform in the nineteenth century. With its connotations of pathology, immorality and social subversion, the spiritualist movement was probably as much a hindrance to reform as it was an asset. Female spiritualist orators often attracted a notoriety which discredited both spiritualism and the women's issues they supported. Rev. M.W. Green cited the words of spiritualists themselves when condemning its itinerant propagandists in 1879: "more than one half of our travelling media, speakers, and prominent spiritualists, are guilty of immoral and licentious practices that have justly provoked the abhorrence of all right-thinking people."⁵³ Brookes notes that in the 1890s, women orators were often portrayed as unnatural 'masculine' figures in search of notoriety. Such criticisms served the purpose of dismissing women's demands for change,⁵⁴ and were probably inspired by perceptions of women such as Lotti Wilmot and Victoria Woodhull. It may be significant that reform movements gained momentum from the late-1880s, when spiritualism decreased in visibility. The women's movement shed its more radical and contentious appendages to become widely accepted. A deeper analysis of spiritualism beyond the 1880s, which cannot be undertaken in this study, is necessary to clarify the exact relationship between spiritualism and feminist reform.

A significant point can be made at this juncture. The above women must be placed in a wider context of religious-inspired social reform. These women were not oddities of settler culture, but were an arm of the widespread evangelical drive for social regeneration in the nineteenth century. Female spiritualist reformers drew largely from an evangelical tradition of subversive female oratory and from evangelical notions of female moral and spiritual superiority, both of which were important aspects of liberal thought in settler society.

To discuss this point, it is necessary to examine briefly how historians have understood the women's movement in New Zealand. In general, three main themes have been articulated by scholars. One view is that first wave feminism was an attempt by the middle classes to institute the hegemony of their values and exert social control in the community, a position enunciated, for example, by Richard J. Evans.⁵⁵ Another view stresses the basic feminism of the women's movement. Barbara Brookes argues that challenging male culture, male prerogatives and the sexual double-standard to bring about equality of the sexes was central to the campaign.⁵⁶ A third view (an approach which should be viewed as inseparable from the second) dwells on the basic religious motivations of the campaigners, in particular, the central role of evangelicals and their

⁵³Green, *The Devil's Sword Blunted*, p.92.

⁵⁴Barbara Brookes, "A Weakness for Strong Subjects: the Women's Movement and Sexuality", *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.27, no.2, Oct. 1993, pp.142-3.

⁵⁵Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists: women's emancipation movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920*, London 1977.

⁵⁶Barbara Brookes, "A Weakness for Strong Subjects: the Women's Movement and Sexuality", *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.27, no.2, Oct 1993, pp.140-56.

Christ-inspired drive for social justice and social purity. The work of Phillida Bunkle is a good example of this view.⁵⁷ Other themes are also stressed by scholars, but the three outlined above represent the most popular and probably the most explanatory.⁵⁸

It is possible to find evidence from the spiritualist movement to lend weight to all these views. However, this study lends support primarily to the latter approach. It delineates a hitherto unrecognised religious dimension in liberal and feminist thought, and places spiritualism and female spiritualist orators in the context of a wider evangelical desire for social regeneration. This point is illustrated below.

Evangelicalism, Methodism in particular, was an important nursery for female public speakers in the nineteenth century. During the Christian revivals which swept America during 1790-1830, women converts appeared to outnumber men by as much as three to two, and women's organisations proliferated. The emphasis for women in this movement, Rendall notes, was increasingly on "usefulness, both inside and outside the home, fulfilling the requirement of renouncing the self, yet offering opportunities for action that were socially approved, in the company of like minded women."⁵⁹ Despite opposition from established Churches and public opinion, female preachers proliferated. Female itinerants were particularly common among Methodists and Baptists, and they included black women preachers in the South. It was also common during these years for women to pray aloud in church and take leading roles in revivalist meetings. Women played a critical role in the eruption of religious fervour in western New York, the birthplace of spiritualism. In Rochester itself, women "rose out of old subordinate roles and extended their moral authority within families."⁶⁰ A tradition of subversive female public speaking among evangelicals, therefore, preceded the birth of spiritualism and female spiritualist orators in America.

In England, a similar tradition existed. Women preachers from Nonconformist groups were common from the 1790s, particularly among Methodists, and particularly during revivals. In common with later spiritualist orators, these female revivalist itinerants risked scorn and ostracism to challenge mainstream churches, transgress gender norms and initiate social change. As Valenze writes, such women

travelled widely on their own and spoke publicly and freely to audiences of both sexes. Rather than deferring to official clergymen, they contradicted and reproached them. Female preachers were remarkably strong-willed. They took up occupations and abandoned them

⁵⁷Phillida Bunkle, "The Origins of the Women's Movement in New Zealand: The Women's Christian Temperance Union 1885-1895", in Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes (eds), *Women in New Zealand Society*, Sydney 1980, pp.52-76.

⁵⁸Grimshaw discusses New Zealand historiography alongside overseas scholarship in Patricia Grimshaw, "Women's Suffrage in New Zealand Revisited: Writing from the Margins", in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland 1994, pp.29-34.

⁵⁹Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860*, Chicago 1985, p.78.

⁶⁰Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, pp.77-86,91-2; Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millenium*, p.108.

according to the spirit, and, when necessary, relied upon networks of followers for modest means of support. Risking physical well-being and reputations, laboring women preachers strove to establish their own models of female piety.

Valenze argues further that "by breaking the rules, as it were, of an institution historically controlled by men, women preachers allied their sectarian cause with the general political and social unrest of the early Victorian period."⁶¹

Secularist, Owenite and Chartist women orators emerged in the wake of revivalism, in both America and Britain. These heterodox women almost invariably came from evangelical backgrounds, and their militant social activism, though anti-orthodox in tone, echoed that of evangelicals in many respects. Their radicalism, Taylor notes, "was simultaneously a product of their puritanism and a reaction to it." Owenite socialism was regarded by many adherents as Christianity without temples and priests.⁶² In the decades following the collapse of Owenism in the 1840s, the 'woman question' became increasingly distanced from the subversive extremes of the Owenites. This enabled feminism to become more mainstream, and middle class women replaced their radical working class precursors on the lecture platform.⁶³

It is clear that revivalism and evangelical enthusiasm created spaces for women to exercise spiritual power and leadership. In New Zealand, spiritualist women speakers were prominent in the depressed 1880s amid a period of evangelical enthusiasm and revivalism. Both were part of a wider spiritually-inspired drive for social reform and regeneration that gained momentum during the onset of the long depression. The spiritualist orators discussed earlier were mirrored and overshadowed by the popularity of evangelicals such as Margaret Hampson, the English evangelist, and Mary Clement Leavitt, the American temperance orator. Leavitt, an orator from Boston, was a travelling representative of the American Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). She arrived in New Zealand in 1885 and, through public orations and meetings with women and religious groups, instigated branches of the WCTU in New Zealand. Her orations stressed not only temperance, but urged the need for women to exercise their womanly influence to propel wider social reform.⁶⁴

Margaret Hampson was a popular and successful evangelical orator who toured New Zealand during 1881-3. Hampson came to New Zealand to regain her health after twenty years of evangelism in Liverpool, and then travelled to Australia in 1883 to continue

⁶¹Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England*, Princeton 1985, pp.7-8,11.

⁶²Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1983, pp.128-30.

⁶³Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp.275-8; Jane Rendall, "Introduction", in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Oxford 1987, pp.18-19; Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, pp.91-3. See also Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, ch.1.

⁶⁴Bunkle, "The Women's Christian Temperance Union"; Charlotte Macdonald, *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink: a History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993*, Wellington 1993, p.32.

her work.⁶⁵ She spoke to large, mixed audiences on Christian topics and promoted the cause of temperance. A writer in the ecumenical *New Zealand Christian Record* described a meeting in Dunedin in May 1881: "Probably close on 3000 persons of both sexes and all ages were crowded into the Garrison Hall, which is both the largest and handsomest building in Dunedin, and amongst those present I observed nearly a dozen Ministers of the Gospel from the various evangelical denominations." Around 400 people were allegedly converted following Hampson's address, in addition to "large numbers of both men and women" who "signed the pledge, to abstain from the use of all intoxicating liquors, at the request of the lady preacher."⁶⁶

As a woman speaking in public on emotive issues such as salvation, temperance and moral reform, Hampson encountered opposition from various sections of society, both Christian and non-Christian. In the columns of the *New Zealand Christian Record*, for example, correspondents debated the scriptural issues, particularly the statements of Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians in which he wrote that "the women should keep silence in the churches" and "it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."⁶⁷ A freethinker quoted this piece of scripture in a handbill, entitled "Christians, Read Your Bible", which was distributed at one of Hampson's meetings. An editorialist for the *Record* dismissed the "excessive literalism" of those who invoked Paul, and came out firmly in support of Hampson: "under the changed circumstances of society and the conditions of modern Church life, lady evangelism and lady-preaching are permissible to those who are plainly called to it."⁶⁸ Prominent evangelicals such as Alfred Brunton and Samuel J. Deck, both Brethren Christians, came out in support of this verdict. As Deck wrote: "She seeks our shores in quest of health and rest; and yet she cannot rest, for burning zeal consumes her. And we, how shall we receive such Christ-like devotion? Thwart, insult, hound her down, simply because she is a *woman*? Perish such cold, unmanly, heartless Christianity!"⁶⁹

The parallels between female spiritualists and evangelicals extend beyond their similar heritage and modes of activism. Both shared a belief in the immense regenerative power of the female gender. This aspect of spiritualist and evangelical thought is discussed below and placed in a wider context of liberal thought in settler society.

⁶⁵Phillips, *Defending "a Christian country,"* pp.64-7,113-4.

⁶⁶*New Zealand Christian Record*, 13 May 1881, p.7.

⁶⁷1 Cor. 14:34-35.

⁶⁸*New Zealand Christian Record*, 6 May 1881, pp.9-10.

⁶⁹*New Zealand Christian Record*, 20 May 1881, p.11, 24 June 1881, p.7.

THE ELEVATION OF WOMEN

The notion that women assumed and were prescribed the role of mothers, domestic workers and moral guardians of the nation is well documented by historians and needs little elaboration. Generally speaking, women were often regarded as morally superior to men, a fact which reflected the belief that the female sex was more emotional, religious, nurturing and sympathetic. Such traits implied that women would take greater interest in the morality and well-being of the community, the race and the nation. By virtue of their maternal nature, they would be more willing to deny the self for the sake of others. Primarily, women were ascribed the position of wives and mothers whose task was to provide domestic comfort to men, moral elevation for her family and the domestic foundation necessary for the progress of the nation.

Spiritualists interpreted these notions a mediumistic light: the female gender was injected with mediumistic qualities. Women were deemed passive, intuitive, sympathetic, sensitive and 'magnetic', attributes necessary for establishing a 'rapport' with both the corporal and spiritual entities in the seance room. Such clairvoyant qualities gave women immense maternal insight, wisdom and moral power, and an ability to see beyond worldly concerns to deeper moral and spiritual issues. This perspicacity made women powerful candidates for leadership roles in society. William McLean echoed the sentiments of many spiritualists when he told fellow M.P.s in 1892 that women "will outstep the opposite sex, especially on the platform, because they have greater electricity, greater force of power, greater attraction, and larger sympathies than men have." He believed "women are far keener in intellect than men are, and would detect whether a man was genuine far more quickly than men."⁷⁰ This mediumistic view of women can be conveniently labelled 'spiritualist feminism'.

Spiritualists believed in sexual-equality, but they also believed men and women were distinctly different in nature. In this respect, spiritualist feminism stopped short of rejecting the central paradigm of nineteenth-century gender relations. It reinforced sexual difference and largely retained the notion that women's rôle lay primarily in a domestic context. W.D. Meers believed men and women embodied complementary traits. Women were more "endearing, softening and affectional" while men tended to be "aspirational". When brought together in a relationship of true 'affinity', these traits formed a perfect whole, and in the afterlife woman and man coalesced into one harmonious spiritual being.⁷¹ Many spiritualists believed that women would, and perhaps should, retain a domestic and reproductive focus in an ideal society. William McLean held that marriage ought not be the primary ambition of women, but he still believed that those who did marry should recognise their domestic role as man's help-meet. "Man to produce, and women to crown and beautify all with bright colours", he declared, citing Addie Ballou as his

⁷⁰NZPD, vol.75, 1892, p.163.

⁷¹Meers, *The Ultimate of Man*, pp.27-8.

authority. "It should be your endeavour to make your husband's home so bright and happy that when his bachelor friends visited him they would wish to follow his example."⁷²

Harris, Britten and Wilmot all elevated woman and believed that society could be transformed through her power, yet they also located her in a domestic context. Jane Elizabeth Harris believed man and society needed woman's leadership, though it was a leadership exercised primarily from the home. To woman was "committed the sacred trust of saving Man from himself." Social and moral reform could only gather pace, she argued, through the maternal and domestic influence of fully educated and independent women. "Thus educated, Woman will be able to take her stand as Man's equal and co-worker, Man being sustained by her faithful, loving counsel, and children wisely trained for future labour in the world's great field of progress by her earnest zeal and powerful influence."⁷³

Emma Hardinge Britten argued for greater freedom outside the domestic sphere, but upheld the importance of woman's role in marriage and motherhood.⁷⁴ During an oration on "The Cause and Cure of Crime and Poverty" she dwelt on the vital need for marriage reform to regenerate society:

human souls were launched on the ocean of eternity through the impure and unholy alliance contracted between estates, titles, and fortunes, rather than hearts, minds, and temperaments. So long as our young women were mere objects of traffic, adorned like merchants' wares ... and our young men married a pretty face instead of a noble mind, it would be in vain to look for noble characters and elevated minds as the result of such unions.⁷⁵

Britten believed social change would accrue through reforming gender relations rather than overturning them.

Wilmot also believed that man and society could be transformed through the regenerative powers of woman. Reports of her lecture in Dunedin on "Forbidden Fruit", delivered to an audience of over 400, sheds light her views. She portrayed women as embodiments of virtue, order and progress, and men and society as dependent on women for their advancement. Believing bachelorhood was the primary cause of drunkenness and male vice in the colonies, Wilmot "advocated that a poll tax of £10 a year should be levied on every unmarried man over twenty-five years of age" to force them into marriage. She told listeners that women must be educated, independent and enfranchised if they wanted the nation to progress. "Women were their mothers, their wives, and their daughters, and the higher they raised women, the better would the legislation of the Colonies become."

⁷²McLean, *Spiritualism Vindicated*, p.41.

⁷³[Harris], *Woman's Work and Destiny*; pp.8,10-11.

⁷⁴Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p.31.

⁷⁵*Otago Witness*, 30 Aug. 1879, p.17.

She went on to claim that "the United States owed their independence and influence to the culture of their women." Wilmot's cited events surrounding the Fall of Man to portray men as indolents in need of female guidance:

Referring to the Fall of Man as related in the Bible, and to the phrase, "The woman tempted me and I did eat," Madame Lotti Wilmot said that the quotation was advanced at the present time by man as an excuse for all his frailties. If it were not for the fact that Adam yielded to the temptation of Eve, there would not now be any railways or steamboats, nor would Australia have been discovered. Adam was leading a slothful life in the Garden of Eden, and idleness was the root of all evil. ... It was one of the greatest blessings which could have happened to man that the "Forbidden Fruit" was given to Adam.

It should be noted that this argument was a hypothetical one, since Wilmot disbelieved the Genesis account of Creation.⁷⁶

The elevation of women has a long history in the nineteenth century. As Taylor notes, the "notion that women had a unique moral mission to perform was popular among all kinds of people in the early nineteenth century, anti-feminist as well as feminist." This belief often reinforced a domestic womanhood and led to "a celebration of female specialness and moral superiority". Among Owenites and socialists, these ideas were taken to extremes in some sects and communities which idealised the mystical and moral powers of women, and occasionally worshipped a female Messiah.⁷⁷ In New Zealand, the elevation of women was a conspicuous feature of liberal political thought and evangelical Protestantism.

The liberal political ideology of the late-nineteenth century embraced the view that woman's influence was a powerful and elevating one. This theme is clear in the work of Edward Bellamy and John Stuart Mill. In *Looking Backward*, Bellamy described a utopian world where women were fully emancipated. Women had not lost their femininity, but eugenicist policies ensured that both women and men were physically, mentally and morally advanced. Freed from domestic drudgery, women took full part in the 'industrial army' of society. They played a pivotal role in the health of the race and the nation through "sexual selection". By exercising their moral judgement to select only the best males for marriage, women held the key to future prosperity. Referring to this process, one citizen wrote that "Our women have risen to the full height of their responsibility as the wardens of the world to come to whose keeping the keys of the future are confided. Their feeling of duty in this respect amounts to a sense of religious consecration. It is a cult in which they educate their daughters from childhood."⁷⁸ In America, Buhle observes, many women were inspired into socialist activism by *Looking*

⁷⁶*Morning Herald*, 6 Sep. 1880, quoted in Wilmot, *New Zealand Beds*, p.6.

⁷⁷Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp.30,156-172.

⁷⁸Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, p.271. See also pp.99,118,168-9,240-1,263-71.

Backward, which "appeared as a virtual mirror image of women activists' own, decidedly sex-conscious dream of a just society."⁷⁹

John Stuart Mill was probably the most popular political philosopher among New Zealand liberals. Mill believed the status of women in a society was a measure of its level of civilisation, an idea which had its roots in the eighteenth century, but became conspicuously popular among feminists and Owenites in the early nineteenth century.⁸⁰ In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill argued forcefully that the inequality of the sexes was the primary cause of misery and the chief hindrance to the progress of society. "All the selfish propensities, the self-worship, the unjust self-preference, which exist among mankind," he wrote, "have their source and root in, and derive their principle nourishment from, the present constitution of the relation between men and women." Mill argued that gender relations were the key to regenerating society.⁸¹ Women's unique capacities and experiences - whether "artificial" or innate - would elevate men and civilisation.⁸² Through greater "intuitive perception", greater "quickness of apprehension", superior morality, a bent toward practicality, maternal experience and a softening influence, women's emancipation would trigger social progress.⁸³

Julius Vogel's utopian novel, *Anno Domini 2000*, captured many reformist themes about women circulating in liberal thought. Set in the year 2000 in "United Britain", Vogel described a world where women remained very feminine yet were the mentally stronger sex and took a leading role in politics. It was a world of advanced technology and moral purity where the "purity and holiness" of women inspired and guided the nation.⁸⁴ Vogel envisaged an evolved, highly refined, morally pure womanhood, located in an advanced and purified society. Women guided while men executed. The under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs in his utopian future was a beautiful twenty-three year old woman, a descendant of "Hilda Richmond Fitzherbert". Commenting on her speech, Vogel wrote that "there was about it a luminous intelligence, a purity, and a pathos that seemed to belong to another world." She possessed intuition and instinct and "spoke with great fervour, as one inspired." Vogel also dwelt on the "sensitive" nature of women and their unique imaginative faculties.⁸⁵ Vogel did not explicitly refer to the inspiration of spirits or mediumship, nor perhaps did he intend to, but his novel appears to draw upon a spiritualist view of woman.

⁷⁹Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920*, University of Illinois 1981, p.75.

⁸⁰Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp.28-9.

⁸¹John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, London 1870, p.148.

⁸²In arguing for sexual equality, Mill went to great lengths to demonstrate that the perceived inferiority of women, and the innate differences between the sexes, were artificial constructs: "What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others." Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, pp.38-9. He nonetheless believed, however, that whatever the causes of sexual difference, women's unique proclivities would be a boon to society if given a wider sphere of influence.

⁸³Mill, *Subjection of Women*, pp.105-7,110,156-8,160. See pp.148- 88 for a lengthy discussion of the likely benefits to society following the emancipation of women.

⁸⁴Vogel, *Anno Domini 2000*, pp.28-30,125.

⁸⁵Vogel, *Anno Domini 2000*, pp.28-30,36,45-6,65,122,125.

The elevation of woman was also prominent among evangelicals. The belief in a special link between women and religion pervaded Victorian society, and can be traced largely to the evangelical revivals of the early-1800s. As Rendall writes, "Women, assumed to be more emotional and affectionate than men, were increasingly assumed to be potentially closer to God." The literature of the period, she notes, "emphasises that latent superiority, in terms which suggest women's greater power to embody the evangelical appeal."⁸⁶ Valenze observes that Hannah More, the influential evangelical writer, "elevated women to the position of moral and social guardians of the family, and advocated their education and activity as crucial support for an authoritarian family and state."⁸⁷ Similarly, Taylor notes how evangelicals "developed a concept of femininity based on the identification of womanliness with godliness and both with the private virtues of domestic life." McLoughlin portrays spiritualism as a radical manifestation of the 'feminisation of Christianity' during the Second Great Awakening.⁸⁸

The temperance movement is a good example of the evangelical elevation of women in New Zealand. Temperance was part of a wider evangelical-inspired movement pre-occupied with social purity, and at its root was a millennial belief that Christians ought to make the world fit for the coming of Jesus Christ. Women instigated and lead this movement in the 1880s and '90s. Inspired by Mary Leavitt, the Women's Christian Temperance Union became a leading force in the women's rights movement. It was the primary impetus behind the campaign for women's suffrage in New Zealand, as it was in Australia and the American west, the areas where women first achieved the vote. The WCTU promoted the notion that women's voice in politics would stem the influence of alcohol in society, elevate politics into the realm of moral action and introduce Christ into the legislation of the nation. The WCTU philosophy stressed not only temperance, but social reform and regeneration.⁸⁹

Imbued with notions of social, moral and physical purity, many spiritualists were also active supporters of temperance, occasionally allying themselves with evangelical groups to promote the cause. Spiritualist propagandists such as Dr. E.C. Dunn, William Denton, Emma Hardinge Britten, George Chainey and Anna Kimball-Chainey supported temperance in New Zealand. Dr. Dunn, for example, delivered lectures in Dunedin in 1873 in aid of the Otago Temperance Alliance and the Dunedin Band of Hope. Despite a snub by the Wesleyan minister, Alexander Reid, who would not allow the Wesleyan Hall to be used as a venue where a spiritualist would educate children, Dunn was well received by local temperance groups. Reid was criticised by some observers and temperance

⁸⁶Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, pp.74-5.

⁸⁷Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, p.22.

⁸⁸Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p.126; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977*, Chicago 1978, pp.120-1.

⁸⁹Macdonald, *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink*, pp.32-3; Bunkle, "The Women's Christian Temperance Union", pp.62-7; Patricia Grimshaw, "Women's Suffrage in New Zealand Revisited: Writing from the Margins", in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland 1994, pp.27-9,34-5.

supporters for a lack of judgement and liberality over this incident.⁹⁰ Emma Hardinge Britten encountered little opposition in 1879 when she delivered an oration in aid of the trust fund of Temperance Hall in Nelson. Bouquets of flowers were tossed at her feet from children whose parents appreciated her labours in aid of temperance.⁹¹

The links between women, spirituality and social reform were epitomised in popular novels. One example is Louisa Alice Baker's *A Daughter of the King*, published in 1894. Baker (1856-1926) was a Warwickshire-born writer and journalist who lived in Christchurch, then Dunedin, before leaving for England in 1893 to publish *A Daughter of the King*, the first of her many novels. Set in New Zealand, this novel was a Christ-inspired demand for freedom from male dominance, indifference and selfishness. Baker urged the female reader to "come from behind the paper screen of man's protection, which has so poorly kept off the cold, and weave for themselves a warmer garment." She believed woman had, by virtue of her spiritual nature, received a new vision of power and fulfilment:

when once a woman's spirit has caught a glimpse of this trinity of union - spiritual, intellectual, and physical - she will no longer be content with the figure only. And she has caught sublime glimpses of that God creation. Nor need man wonder that to woman this revelation has come, for she is the intuitive half, and represents the soul of the world.

Baker's words were inspired by her admiration of Jesus Christ, "the only man who knew how to love a woman perfectly."⁹²

As Roberts notes, Baker was one of several female novelists, such as Edith Searle Grossman, Constance Clyde and Ellen Ellis, who argued that women were oppressed in a society that valued men's experiences and that "women have a unique and important contribution to make to society."⁹³ These writers were part of a wider field of writing by 'new women', the "new generation of women who were entering higher education and new areas of employment". These women used fiction to discuss problems such as barriers to higher education, men's sexual behaviour, the inequities of marriage, the burdens of child-rearing and women's ill-health.⁹⁴ A sympathy for spiritualism often accompanied such sentiment. Ellen Ellis, author of *Everything is Possible to Will* (1882), was brought up in a strict Methodist tradition but became a member of the liberal Samuel Edger's congregation in Auckland. She was unafraid to defend causes with which she identified,

⁹⁰ODT, 19 Feb. 1873, p.3, 20 Feb. 1873, p.3, 18 Mar. 1873, p.2, 19 Mar. 1873, p.2, 21 Mar. 1873, p.2, 22 Mar. 1873, p.2.

⁹¹Colonist, 1 Nov 1879, p.3.

⁹²Louisa Alice Baker, *A Daughter of the King*, London 1894, pp.184-5,261-2; DNZB, vol.3, Wellington 1996, pp.27-8.

⁹³Heather Roberts, *Where Did She Come From? New Zealand Women Novelists, 1862-1987*, Wellington 1989, p.10.

⁹⁴Lucy Bland, "The Married Woman, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s", in Rendall, *Equal or Different*, pp.143,151-5.

and this included spiritualism. As she wrote in a letter to the press in 1879, "If the orthodox clergy of Auckland ... give but half the good sense ... which Mrs Britten has given in her lectures they will perhaps have as good audiences as she".⁹⁵

This chapter revealed that spiritualist women were among the first women in settler society to speak in public to mixed audiences. Drawing on beliefs about female mediumship, these and other spiritualists portrayed women as a regenerative force capable of revitalising both man and society. Women were deemed a conduit between the material and spiritual realms, and a vehicle for the realisation of a heaven on earth. It is argued here that female spiritualist orators must be placed in the wider context of female evangelical oratory and religious-inspired social reform. Spiritualists expressed, in radical form, a feminist notion popular among settlers: that New Zealand might be a site where women would achieve emancipation and guide society toward a more advanced level of civilisation. More generally, feminism among spiritualists formed part of a political consensus in society over the desirability and expectation of transformative progressive reform. The final chapter dwells on similar themes, focussing on the links between 'spiritual science' and optimistic social change.

⁹⁵Auckland Evening Star, 8 Dec. 1879, p.3; Angela Caughy, *Pioneer Families: the Settlers of Nineteenth-Century New Zealand*, Auckland 1994, pp.133-4; Roberts, *Where Did She Come From?*, pp.12-14; Vera Colebrook, *Ellen: A Biography*, Dublin 1980, pp.11-12,139-40,142.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SCIENCE OF SPIRITS

This chapter explores the many and varied investigations into spiritualist phenomena in settler society and highlights their conspicuously scientific and experimental nature. Spiritualism was propagated by adherents as a scientific religion that provided firm evidence of survival after death. This claim and the highly publicised phenomena of the seance room compelled thousands of settlers to investigate the reality of spirits, psychic powers and innate capacities. In seances, private consultations, public experiments and popular entertainments, settlers participated in the methodical examination of the psychic and spiritual order. These investigations formed part of a wider conversation in society on the latent potential of the human mind, discussions which fuelled colonial liberalism and social reform. Such investigations were sites where progressive strategies for personal social improvement were articulated and debated. They expressed settlers' hopes that through science, experimentation and liberal reform, New Zealand might be a site where humanity would unfold in a more advanced and truthful way.

DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTALISM

Spiritualists believed their personal psychic investigations were valid and important scientific experiments, and they were confident in their ability to conduct and appraise them for themselves. Investigators in New Zealand were, in the language of Barrow, "autodidacts" who embraced a "democratic epistemology": "a definition of knowledge as open to anybody". In common with their English counterparts, they rejected tradition and authority, shaped their own world-views and encouraged others to do the same. They tended to be empiricist in their methods and democratic in their politics, and they believed that their psychical experiments and seances were contributing to work begun by leading scientists in earlier generations.¹

The democratic nature of spiritualist investigation was rooted in spiritualist ideas of what constituted valid empirical data and valid scientific experimentation. In contrast to the wider trend in the scientific world toward devaluing subjective experience, spiritualist investigators asserted the scientific validity of human testimony and mystical insight. This made anyone a potential authority on spiritualist matters.

¹Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, pp.146-59.

Human testimony was the mainstay of spiritualist scientific evidence. By the sheer weight of testimony, especially that from eminent authorities, believers hoped to confound sceptics and thrust spiritualism into the realm of serious 'mainstream' science. This endeavour was epitomised by W.D.C. Denovan, an Australian spiritualist whose voluminous *Evidences of Spiritualism* contained page after page of observations, testimonies and accounts of spiritualist manifestations from around the World, including New Zealand.² By elevating the trustworthiness of personal observation and testimony, spiritualists implicitly asserted the validity of laymen to witness and judge spiritualist phenomena for themselves.

Believers democratised spiritualist science further by asserting the scientific validity of 'intuition' and 'spiritual insight'. Spiritualists prioritised individual intuition over "materialistic tests" when investigating spiritualism. The authors of *The Proper Methods of Scientifically Investigating the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (a pamphlet published in Australia and America, and reprinted in the *Harbinger of Light*) explained this stance: "everyone has an inner light - a standard of truth - within his own soul, to which it is to him or her the best and surest guide, and is ever to be followed. It has been the prostitution of spiritualism that this sacred light has been neglected or ignored in order to pursue the *ignis fatuus* of materialistic tests." The desire to pursue "materialistic tests", they argued, may "emanate from, or serve to engender, ... unspiritual conditions" which "create the very incidents ... which they are designed to prevent."³ Joseph Braithwaite believed intuition was as trustworthy as reason in the pursuit of truth. As he declared in his lecture, "A Scientific Basis for Spiritualism":

Nature has given us two methods of attaining a knowledge of truth - intuition and reason. The one is intended to prove the correctness of the other ... neither are infallible; no human faculty is infallible. Nevertheless, intuition is a faculty of the soul, just as reliable as that of reason, and the teaching of one may be reposed upon with as much confidence as those of the other.⁴

Intuition and the 'inner light' were often the final arbiter in spiritualist matters, both moral and scientific. Scripture suggested to many that the individual should, and could, appraise the issue personally. Passages commonly quoted were: "Test all things; hold fast what is good", and "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God."⁵ Independent, individualistic and usually Protestant, settlers interpreted this as a moral imperative to investigate the topic.

²W.D.C. Denovan, *The Evidences of Spiritualism*, Melbourne 1882.

³Professor Henry Kiddle, Nelson Cross and E.H. Benn, *The Proper Methods of Scientifically Investigating the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, [Melbourne 1888?], pp.5,12.

⁴*Saturday Advertiser*, 3 Sep. 1881, p.7.

⁵1 Cor 12:1-11; 1 Thes 5:21; 1 John 4:1.

This marriage of reason, empiricism and intuition made spiritualism a highly democratic practice. Anyone could experiment with it in their own home, make their own observations and come to their own conclusions about it. Gabay draws similar conclusions in his analysis of Melbourne seances: "Spiritualism took the spontaneity out of mystical experience and produced an egalitarian order whereby trance, vision, healing, and so on were achieved on demand by convening a seance." Rather than being "the exclusive province of the deeply faithful or the mystic, such experiences were now available to anyone conversant with 'psychological law'."⁶

Self-confident and imbued with democratic notions of what constituted valid scientific activity, investigators claimed the psychic and spiritual realm as their own. Robert Malcolm Laing delivered an oration on "Thought Transference" to the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury in 1885. Laing was a Dunedin-born teacher who became a leading New Zealand botanist, specialising in the study of algae. In Laing's view, psychical researchers were taking up a promising new field of research untouched by other scientists. His oration concluded with the following words: "The Psychical Research Society [of London] ... does not postulate the existence of intelligent beings other than human. Nor do its members pose as explainers of the mysteries of the Heaven and earth. They are satisfied if they may work as hewers of wood and drawers of water in the task of exploring a territory which inductive science has yet to claim for its own."⁷

Many spiritualists believed they were involved in scientific research akin to disciplines such as Astronomy and Biology. This notion was articulated by the authors of *The Proper Methods of Scientifically Investigating the Phenomena of Spiritualism*. Discussing the importance of the spiritualist law of "spiritual affinity" (like attracts like), the authors compared the work of the "spiritual scientist" with that of scientists in established disciplines:

just as the astronomer is able to carry his researches even beyond the confines of the visible (as, for example, in the discovery of the planet Neptune), guided by the law of the attraction of Gravitation; and as the chemist may transcend the limit of optical visibility, in applying the law of molecular attraction, so the spiritual scientist, in his far more difficult investigations, may explore the realm of the spirit with equal confidence and success by keeping constantly in view the law of spirit affinity.⁸

Many settlers eagerly took up the investigation of spiritualism, and they confidently publicised their results in displays, lectures, debates and articles. As historians have observed in Victoria, many presentations had all the appearance of being scientific

⁶Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", p.202.

⁷Press, 4 Sep. 1885, p.3.

⁸Kiddle, *The Proper Methods of Scientifically Investigating the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p.4.

discourses and experiments.⁹ Transcripts of seances at the house of Thomas Allan were occasionally published in the *Otago Daily Times* in the 1870s. They usually specified the time, place, persons and general characteristics of the surrounding environment before describing in detail the events of the seance. One transcript was specifically designated "for study of any who are of a scientific turn." It began as follows: "Seance held at Mr. Allan's, Cumberland street, on Friday, 12th September. Clear, pleasant night. Sitters same as formerly, with the addition of Messrs. G. and Alexander Allan, nine years."¹⁰ When George Milner Stephen treated the poor in public healing sessions, he courted open scientific enquiry. A writer in the *New Zealand Times* noted that Stephen "challenges the closest investigation." He encouraged doctors and clergymen to attend. The *Times* treated his performances as scientific experiments: "we offer no opinion on the foregoing cases, which are at present in the experimental stage, but shall wait for results."¹¹

A spiritualist experiment sent to the press in Auckland in 1879 gained considerable publicity, and illustrates the desire among spiritualists to be open, accessible and scientific in their investigations. Dr Henry Slade, the world-renowned slate-writing medium, spent an afternoon in Auckland on his way from Sydney to San Francisco. Two local spiritualists, John Mcleod and Samuel Coombes, met Slade at the waterfront and enticed him back to Coombes' clothing shop in Queen Street for an experiment. Coombes later sent the details to the *New Zealand Herald* in an effort to publicise spiritualism and vindicate its scientific veracity. Coombes' letter outlined the strict experimental conditions imposed on the medium. He described how Slade managed to move a table two feet off the floor in broad daylight in the presence of six or seven observers, as well as produce his famous slate writing mediumship, in which he relayed messages from the spirits scratched on pieces of slate held under his arms. Slade also became entranced and delivered what Coombes described as "a magnificent oration" which "I would go a long way to listen to any Sunday". Coombes challenged the sceptical editorial staff and Christians readers to explain the "force or power" behind these events: "if you or your Christian friends know what it is, why not tell us and set the matter at rest, and in doing so you and they would be doing no more than your duty, and I have no doubt that a good price could be got for the secret." Coombes told them that "there is no wisdom in ridiculing Spirit-agency while these phenomena remained unexplained."¹² The *Herald* responded by reproducing articles which detailed an exposure of Slade's tricks in Edinburgh. Moreover, a few months later during visits by two troupes of illusionists, the Royal Illusionists and Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin, the *Herald* happily reported their attacks on spiritualism. The Royal Illusionists explicitly attacked Slade by 'exposing' his slate-writing phenomena. This received prolonged applause from the audience. The Baldwins were reportedly patronised

⁹Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", p.250; Gabay, "The Seance in the Melbourne of the 1870s", p.201.

¹⁰*Harbinger of Light*, no.39, Nov. 1873, pp.528-30; *ODT*, 25 Sep. 1873, pp.1-2(supplement), 26 Sep. 1873, p.1(supplement), 19 May 1877, p.1(supplement).

¹¹*New Zealand Times*, 8 Jan. 1883, pp.2-3, 2 Jan. 1883, p.2.

¹²*New Zealand Herald*, 16 Apr. 1879, p.5.

by "a number of leading citizens, and men of an undoubted discrimination", and their exposures were judged by the *Herald* to be "a complete success".¹³

Photographs of spirits and spirit drawings were among the most compelling scientific evidences in favour of spiritualism. Specimens were commonly publicised by settlers in New Zealand. In 1870, the Burton brothers, well-known Dunedin photographers, published spirit photographs and displayed them in their shop window for public inspection. John Parker presented spirit photographs to vindicate spiritualism during a lecture to the DFA in 1882. John Jackson, a Dunedin furniture and china retailer, gave details of his seances to the press in 1879 and placed spirit drawings in the window of his shop for public inspection. His advertisement in the *Evening Star* read: "Wanted, the public to examine Planchette Spirit Drawings, window Blue House, King Street, Opposite Caledonian Hotel." William McLean displayed drawings and "chromo-lithographs" of spirits, materialised hands and spirit lights during a lecture in Wellington in 1887.¹⁴ Spirit photographs brought considerable attention to those involved in producing them. One such person was Edward Wyllie, a Masterton cartoonist and photographer. Wyllie gained considerable fame when, after leaving New Zealand for America in 1886, he became an accomplished spirit photographer and attracted the interest of the Society for Psychical Research.¹⁵

Investigators occasionally formed associations in an attempt to investigate spiritualism in a methodical, scientific manner. Not content with the judgements of men such as Wallace and Crookes, or Carpenter and Faraday, settlers formed organised bodies to test and appraise current theories. These societies were usually open and democratic organisations dedicated to investigating spiritualism first-hand and bringing their findings to the notice of the general public. A conspicuous example was the Dunedin Society for Investigating Spiritualism (SIS). Unlike similar organisations elsewhere in the country, the SIS had a high public profile, and its visibility permits a reasonable analysis of its aims, membership, activities and achievements.

The SIS was formed in June 1872 following the visit of James Smith, the Melbourne spiritualist and literary critic, who created considerable publicity in Dunedin through his lectures on spiritualism. Though Smith's presence fuelled enthusiasm for its establishment, the success of a farewell meeting for W.D. Meers, who left for Christchurch in March, and the recent arrival of "considerable mediumistic talent" were also influential.¹⁶ More generally, the SIS was the cumulative result of over three years public fascination with spiritualism and a subsequent desire among settlers to solve its riddles and perplexities.

¹³*New Zealand Herald*, 4 Apr. 1879, p.5, 16 Apr. 1879, p.5, 25 July 1879, p.5.

¹⁴*Otago Witness*, 9 July 1870, p.14, 16 July 1870, p.16; *Echo*, 27 May 1882, p.2; *Evening Star*, 10 June 1879, p.2, 16 June 1879, pp.1,3,4, 27 June 1879, p.2; McLean, *Spiritualism Vindicated*, p.46.

¹⁵Gareth Winter, "Edward Wyllie", *New Zealand Journal of Photography*, no.26, Feb. 1997, pp.25-7.

¹⁶*Echo*, 9 Mar. 1872, p.3.

The SIS advertised in newspapers for interested investigators and gained over 100 members. In June, Henderson Carrick chaired the first official meeting and set an annual subscription of five shillings, from which women were exempt. This exemption probably stemmed, in part, from the fact that women were necessary for harmony in the seance and in developing mediumistic talent. The SIS later lamented the lack of fully-developed mediums which prevented them from giving public displays.¹⁷ Thomas Redmayne, a spiritualist, was elected president. Other office-bearers were Robert Stout and Henderson Carrick (vice-presidents), Arthur Beverly (treasurer) and Robert Wilson (secretary). John Logan, Robert Wilson, Henry Holton Moody, George Beeby (a jeweller) and William Christie formed its business committee.¹⁸

The aims of the SIS were directly modelled on the London Dialectical Society. The SIS resolved "to inquire into the nature of the Phenomena of Spiritualism, to examine its claim to credence, and its probable moral and spiritual influence on society" through "the forming and managing of circles, collecting facts obtained at such circles, and patronising lectures, readings, discussions, and the circulation of books and periodicals bearing on Spiritualism." The society was open to anyone "who bears a good moral character, irrespective of his or her religious opinions." They invited scientists and clergy to attend and lecture, though as with the Dialectical Society, few did.¹⁹ The SIS held fortnightly meetings and appeared to have some contact with other spiritualists in New Zealand, Australia and possibly Britain.²⁰ They also organised public lectures and discussions, which were patronised by large and attentive audiences.²¹

Despite efforts to appear unbiased, the SIS was a visibly pro-spiritualist organisation which contained strong anti-clerical elements. It was dominated by spiritualists and their sympathisers. Public lectures and discussions were often treated as an opportunity to air religious opinions rather than discuss science and report experiments. As president, Redmayne was the first to deliver a lecture. He chronicled and glorified the history and philosophy of spiritualism and denounced Christianity as "behind the march of civilisation". Writing to the *Evening Star* following Redmayne's speech, a fellow member declared the society a sham because of its poor methodology. Rather than "exalting themselves on a platform and whining over ... what was taught by heathen philosophies centuries ago", the writer opined, the SIS should "invite a small committee of sceptics, say Professors MacGregor and Black, and the Reverends Dr Copland and Roseby, to test, examine, and report." Another critic claimed that the SIS was "a focus for disseminating

¹⁷*Echo*, 22 June 1872, p.2; *ODT*, 31 Oct. 1872, p.2.

¹⁸*Echo*, 22 June 1872, p.2. I have been unable to ascertain the exact identity of Christie. He resigned in July 1872 - he lived outside Dunedin and could not attend regularly - and was replaced by Mr "Burrows". In June 1873, Christie publicly recanted any association with spiritualism. *ODT*, 12 July 1872, p.2; *Evening Star*, 25 June 1873, p.2.

¹⁹*Echo*, 22 June 1872, p.2; *ODT*, 6 Aug. 1872, p.3.

²⁰*Echo*, 29 June 1872, p.2; *ODT*, 18 Oct. 1872, p.2; *Echo*, 5 Oct p.2, 12 Oct. p.4, 2 Nov. p.2, 1872.

²¹*Harbinger of Light*, no.23, July 1872, p.287; *Bruce Herald*, 29 May 1872, p.8; *ODT*, 9 Aug. 1872, p.3, 21 Aug. 1872, p.1; *Otago Witness*, 6 July 1872, p.5, 3 Aug 1872, p.10, 31 Aug. 1872, p.5; *Echo*, 24 Aug. 1872, p.2, 7 Sep. 1872, p.2; *Evening Star*, 25 June 1873, p.2.

the principles and faith of a new sect under the fake name of an Investigating Society."²² One press report claimed non-believers were treated with hostility within the SIS.²³ In a rather revealing comment, Redmayne later declared that "most of the members of the London Dialectical Society became Spiritualists, and so I believe our Society must drift into a regular Spiritual Association."²⁴

The SIS struggled to gain respectability throughout its short existence. Its credibility was dealt a hefty blow in October 1872 by James Smith, who under spirit guidance, announced in Melbourne that the world was about to be destroyed by God in a wave of magnetic fire. This brought ridicule on spiritualism and local believers. Only a few months earlier Smith was given public eulogies by Stout, Logan and Carrick.²⁵ Redmayne claimed that many believers stood aloof because spiritualist belief interfered with their businesses and professions. The pro-spiritualist *Echo* suffered the consequences of its allegiance and collapsed in early-1873. The editor complained that "many of our advertisers have withdrawn support, because we have published what to them or their friends seemed blasphemy." After a year, the existence of the SIS was reviewed. An auditor was appointed to administer its accounts. They received £223 7s 7d during the year, a sizeable sum which reflected the interest in spiritualism in the community. Members decided that the SIS should continue in its present format, though it quickly became moribund.²⁶ Another society was subsequently established on a more openly spiritualistic basis, called the "First Society of Progressive Spiritualists", but paucity of information prevents any description of its activities, if indeed the society got off the ground.²⁷

Investigative organisations such as the SIS were fairly common in New Zealand. The Wellington Association of Spiritualists encouraged investigation in the 1880s by hosting a variety of lectures and demonstrations. In 1887, events open to public discussion at the Association rooms included a lecture on "The dangers of Mediumship", an oration by the spirit guides of D.R. Wright on "prayer" and a "Lecture on Spiritualism with proofs of Spirit Existence and Communion, by a member, assisted by a noted medium."²⁸

²²*Evening Star*, 29 June 1872, p.2; *ODT*, 27 July 1872, p.3.

²³W.S. Riddell, a commission agent and secretary of the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Society, reportedly expressed the opinion that nothing he had seen led him to accept belief in spirit agency, "for which irreverent remark he was severely condemned." It was "curious", a reporter remarked, "that Mr Riddell, who had attended so many seances and had witnessed so many of the 'spiritualistic phenomena', should still be unconverted; and it was more than half hinted that he was an unworthy member of the society." *Evening Star*, 19 Sep. 1872, p.2; *Otago Witness*, 21 Sep. 1872, p.15.

²⁴*ODT*, 27 July 1872, p.3, 6 Aug. 1872, p.3; *Evening Star*, 25 June 1872, p.3, 24 July 1872, p.3.

²⁵At a farewell meeting organised by the DMIS, Smith was honoured with a purse of fifty sovereigns. According to one press report, the meeting was overrun by spiritualists (among them John Millar, F.S.A., Henderson Carrick, Robert Stout and Thomas Redmayne) who glorified spiritualism and Smith's endorsement of it. Complicity with spiritualism contributed to the downfall of the DMIS. *Otago Witness*, 18 May 1872, pp.2-3; *Bruce Herald*, 22 May 1872, p.8.

²⁶*Echo*, 1 Mar. 1873, p.2, 8 Mar. 1873, p.2.; *ODT*, 2 Nov. 1872, p.3, 26 Apr. 1873, p.2, 24 May 1873, p.2. Writing to the *Evening Star* (3 Sep. 1874) a correspondent called "progressionist" wrote that "the Athenaeum Debating Society has perished, I believe, primarily by the deadly embrace of the Spiritualist Society, which has followed very quickly in its train."

²⁷*ODT*, 26 Apr. 1873, p.2, 24 May 1873, p.2; *Echo*, 1 Mar 1873, p.2; H.H. Pearce, "Early Dunedin Freethought", *Truthseeker*, Dec.-Jan. 1938-39, p.12.

²⁸*New Zealand Times*, 2 Apr. 1887, p.3, 12 July 1887, p.5, 24 Aug. 1887, p.5.

WELLINGTON

Association of Spiritualists.

HALL FOR MEETINGS:

Ingestre Street (near Miller & Booth's).

OPEN MEETINGS HELD EVERY SUNDAY NIGHT

AT SEVEN O'CLOCK.

ADDRESSES BY SPIRIT CONTROLS & OTHERS.

Private Circles held during the week in the
various rooms.

Members' Fees on entrance—Gentlemen - - - 2s.

„ „ Ladies - - - 1s.

Monthly Subscription—Gentlemen - - - 2s.

„ „ Ladies - - - 1s.

LIBRARY FREE TO MEMBERS.

Following British trends, 'psychological' associations were founded in several New Zealand centres in the 1880s and '90s.²⁹ These associations consisted largely of spiritualists: as in Britain, 'psychological' was usually synonymous with 'spiritualist'.³⁰ The New Zealand Psychological Association, based in Auckland, attracted over 200 investigators in 1884. It produced a membership card bearing the inscription "Feed one another with knowledge" and "Be strong in the cause like hearts of oak." The Association intended to set up sub-committees for the investigation of "thought-reading, mind transference, mesmerism, haunted houses, psychometry, clairvoyance and literature", with results to be submitted at meetings and then presented to the public for appraisal.³¹

In common with the SIS, psychological associations tended to be short-lived and did not appear to publish or systematically present their results. Apart from brief reports in newspapers and periodicals, experiments by spiritualists tended to take the form of belated autobiographies or philosophical tracts. However, they retained an image of scientific experimentalism. Examples include W.D. Meers' *The Ultimate of Man* (1889), T.T. King's *Occult Research* (1899), William Rough's *Forty Years' Experiences of Occult Research* (circa 1920), and William Nation's *The Unseen World* (third edition, 1920).

PUBLIC EXPERIMENTS IN SPIRITUALISM

The most dramatic and important spiritualist experiments in society took place on the public platform. During performances by itinerant mediums, magicians, mesmerists and allied entertainers, thousands of settlers witnessed and took part in psychic and spiritual experiments. These events received immense publicity. They attracted the interest of scientists, clergymen and doctors, as well as less influential members of society, and had a significant impact on the beliefs and attitudes of settlers.

Popular entertainers helped shape settlers' attitudes toward science and spiritualism. Clear lines demarcating expert and amateur, science and pseudo-science, were yet to be drawn in the 1870s and '80s. The construction and dissemination of scientific knowledge in society was a complex process, not simply a top-down filtering of 'true' knowledge from leading authorities to a sponge-like populace.³² Rather than absorbing the dictates of elite intellectual authorities, settlers often gleaned an understanding of the natural and spiritual order from popular publications, non-professionals, popular lecturers and stage entertainers. Bernard Lightman illuminates the role of science popularisers in Victorian society. As science became more professionalised and specialised in the late nineteenth

²⁹I have located associations in Dunedin, Wellington, Greytown, Palmerston North and Auckland, though others probably existed.

³⁰Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp.238-40.

³¹*Freethought Review*, no.14, Nov. 1884, p.4; *Harbinger of Light*, no.178, Dec. 1884, p.2873, no.182, Apr. 1885, p.2944.

³²Roger Cooter and Stephen Pumfrey, "Separate Spheres and Public Places: Reflections on the History of Science Popularization and Science in Popular Culture", *History of Science*, vol.32, 1994, pp.237-67.

century, there emerged a niche for nonprofessional popularisers "who could convey the broader significance of many of the new discoveries to a rapidly growing Victorian reading public." These "knowledgeable amateurs and journalists" have been largely ignored by historians, yet in many cases they were "wildly successful". Lightman believes they "may have been more important than the Huxleys and Tyndalls in shaping the understanding of science in the minds of a reading public composed of children, teenagers, women and nonscientific males." Popularisers dwelt on the "moral, aesthetic, teleological, and divine qualities of the natural world", providing their audiences with the moral and religious lessons of modern science. Furthermore, they perpetuated and encouraged a 'do-it-yourself' approach to scientific research, encouraging Victorians to practice science themselves in their own homes and neighbourhoods.³³

Lightman's points are applicable to spiritualist lecturers and mediums, as well as to magicians, mesmerists, phrenologists and physiognomists. These stage mystics and 'popular' scientists drew together social and scientific facts into a few simple natural laws, and related these laws to issues of individual and social importance for their patrons. They placed psychic and spiritual phenomena alongside other scientific developments and encouraged settlers to experiment and investigate in their own homes. Settlers often absorbed the concepts, lessons and instructions of these figures rather than the dictates of eminent local and overseas scholars. To illustrate these points, several public experiments and entertainments are analysed below.

In 1877, Thomas Walker conducted a series of 'public seances' before audiences in Dunedin and Auckland. Walker (1858-1932) was a Wesleyan child-preacher and pupil-teacher at St Thomas's school, Lancashire, before converting to spiritualism and emigrating to Canada at age sixteen. According to an account in the *Otago Daily Times*, Walker met J.M. Peebles at the Michigan State Spiritualist Conference in 1876 and joined him on a world tour. Walker separated from Peebles in Australia and while in Sydney, was invited to Auckland in 1877 by two local investigators, John Mcleod and Arthur Bettany. In 1882, he recanted his spiritualist beliefs, denounced spiritualism as fraudulent and formed the Australasian Secular Association. Walker subsequently became a populist political agitator in Sydney and, despite shooting and wounding a clergymen while drunk in 1892, in his last three decades he enjoyed a long career as a politician in Western Australia.³⁴

In New Zealand, Walker delivered public trance lectures on topics chosen by his audience and conducted private seances for local spiritualists. His orations were explicitly presented to the community by local believers as opportunities to scientifically investigate spiritualism. They attracted considerable interest. Clergymen and other prominent citizens attended and contributed to debates. Rev. Samuel Edger assumed the position of chairman

³³Bernard Lightman, "'The Voices of Nature': Popularising Victorian Science", in Bernard Lightman (ed), *Victorian Science in Context*, Chicago 1997, pp.187-191.

³⁴*ODT*, 19 June 1877, p.2; Pike, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol.6, pp.342-4; Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", p.255.

for the investigations, declaring truth and science his only motive. "My simple desire", he declared, "is to promote thorough and impartial investigation on a subject which has not only attracted unparalleled public notice, but exercised the earnest thoughts of many of the most learned and intellectual men of the age." The interest generated by Walker instigated the publication of a trance lecture and a sermon in reply by the Baptist, Rev. A.W. Webb, a tract which considered both religious and scientific issues impinging on spiritualism.³⁵

Walker's first public appearance was attended by an audience of 200, including the Superintendent of Auckland, T.B. Gillies, and "other prominent citizens". This event turned into a rather unsavoury episode and set the tone for Walker's entire stay in Auckland. At the conclusion of Walker's oration, Gillies and Thomas Fee, a Wesleyan minister, interrogated Walker about his mediumship, implying that he was a fraud. Uproar ensued, with one person demanding his arrest and others laughing and hurling epithets. Walker was evidently embarrassed by proceedings.³⁶ His reputation in the city was eroded further by reports which claimed that he was an accomplished mimic, a conclusion supported by a local phrenologist who claimed, after examining Walker, that "he was capable of [mimicking] anything from a mountebank to a parson." The spiritualist community was itself divided over Walker's authenticity. Arthur Bettany betrayed him by agreeing that he was an expert at mimicry. Walker later admitted that his reception in Auckland was not agreeable.³⁷

Despite a climate of sceptical hostility, Walker's lectures provoked discussion in the community on how a nineteen year-old boy could spontaneously deliver sophisticated and eloquent discourses while entranced. Several supporters maintained that Walker's abilities were not properly investigated or accounted for. They included Joseph Brabazon, a teacher, J.H. Burns, a retired soldier, and C.O. Davis. The *Herald* dismissed such people as credulous victims of a medium who "plays on the simplicity of a small section of a generation seeking a sign."³⁸

Lured to Dunedin by a gift of £50 from local spiritualists, Walker travelled south in June 1877 and delivered more trance lectures to public and private audiences. His visit was supervised by a committee of spiritualists and investigators who, like their Auckland counterparts, presented him before the public as a subject of scientific experiment. Walker offered to conduct seances for local scientists and theologians, and to debate the merits of Christianity with "any clergyman or other respectable representative person."³⁹ Walker found Dunedin a more tolerant and supportive environment. Dunedin settlers were accustomed to spiritualist controversy and more familiar with its eccentricities. Spiritualism

³⁵*New Zealand Herald*, 28 Apr. 1877, p.3; Walker, *Our Homes and Employments*; Webb, *Spiritism Weighed in the Balances*.

³⁶*New Zealand Herald*, 30 Apr. 1877, pp.2-3

³⁷*ODT*, 5 June 1877, p.3.

³⁸*New Zealand Herald*, 30 Apr. 1877, p.2, 1 May 1877, p.3, 3 May 1877, p.3, 9 May 1877, p.3, 10 May 1877, p.2, 17 May 1877, p.2; *ODT*, 19 June 1877, p.2.

³⁹*Southern Mercury*, 9 June 1877, p.548; *ODT*, 26 May 1877, p.2, 14 June 1877, p.3; *Otago Guardian*, 23 June 1877, p.3.

was enjoying considerable patronage in the community at the time, and on Walker's arrival, the *Southern Mercury* condemned the *New Zealand Herald* for its biased journalism during his stay in Auckland.⁴⁰

Walker's first public seance in Dunedin was attended by an audience of "fully 400 persons, including a few ladies", twice that of Auckland.⁴¹ Vocal critics during his stay in Dunedin included Dr. Carr, Rev. A.R. Fitchett, W.D. Stewart, a prominent lawyer and an elder of Knox Presbyterian Church, John Graham, a notorious street orator and political agitator, G.M. Reed, a newspaper proprietor and journalist, and J.L. Gillies, a former M.P.C., editor of the *Bruce Herald* and brother of T.B. Gillies. These identities and other citizens interrogated Walker during his discourses. A central point of contention was that while Walker could deliver lucid lectures on topics chosen by the audience on the night, the topics chosen were invariably spiritualistic ones, since most of those present were spiritualists. This annoyed sceptics. At one lecture, with a view towards giving him a more challenging lecture topic, Walker was asked to discuss "the best methods of treating diseases". According to a report in the *Otago Daily Times*, his discourse was inadequate. The spirits, speaking through Walker, apologised: "we have given you what we know." Dr. Carr, the mesmerist, dismissed Walker as deluded, claiming that one of his orations was "an ordinary Swedenborgian sermon."⁴² However, Charles Bright defended Walker's mediumistic talents during a lecture on trance mediumship. He told his audience that "the truth of Modern Spiritualism was simply a question of evidence, and if science could prove that it was not true, let it do so."⁴³

A striking public experiment in spiritualism took place in Dunedin in 1885. Gerald Massey arranged with Lena Cooke, a visiting American medium, to give a demonstration of her powers at the Lyceum Hall. The event was chaired by Robert Rutherford and, though not advertised in local newspapers, attracted a crowd of 300. Slips of paper bearing the names of deceased persons were forwarded from the audience to Cooke, who invited the writer to step up on the stage. She then placed the slip on her forehead and began describing the deceased person and asking questions about them. Her first attempt was reported as being totally incorrect, though her second, a name written by William Bolt, was "fairly correct, but not correct in every particular." Dr Lindo Ferguson, a local surgeon, also stepped forward but failed to recognise his relatives, though J.B. Hunter, a typesetter, "successfully had his stepfather described." Dissatisfied with proceedings, Dr. Millen Coughtrey and "Mr Reeves" (probably C.S. Reeves), suggested that Cooke describe a well-

⁴⁰Spiritualistic activities taking place in the city included lectures by Charles Bright and the formation of another investigative society. Illusionists exposing spiritualism were also performing, as was the mesmeric entertainer, Dr. Carr, who began a series of "seances" at the local Temperance Hall. *ODT*, 24 Apr. 1877, p.2, 3 May 1877, p.1, 19 May 1877, pp.2,2(supplement), 23 May 1877, p.1, 24 May 1877, p.1, 26 May 1877, p.2; *Southern Mercury*, 12 May 1877, pp.438-9.

⁴¹*Otago Guardian*, 14 June 1877, p.3.

⁴²*Southern Mercury*, 30 June 1877, pp.620-1; *ODT*, 14 June 1877, p.2, 16 June p.2, 1877, 22 June 1877, p.3, 23 June 1877, p.1(supplement), 2 July 1877, p.4; *Otago Guardian*, 5 June 1877, p.3, 11 June 1877, pp.2-3, 14 June 1877, p.3, 15 June 1877, p.3, 25 June 1877, p.3.

⁴³*ODT*, 2 July 1877, p.4.

known deceased Dunedin citizen known to many in the audience. She obliged, but was unsuccessful. The *Evening Star* labelled the affair "an undoubted failure" as a demonstration of clairvoyance, though Massey claimed the press were eager to chronicle Cooke's failures without noting her successes. From the outset, Massey complained about excessive noise, the absence of music to create a congenial atmosphere and the obstinacy of the audience. Cooke herself complained of fatigue. Massey later alleged that the event was intended to be a convivial meeting with around 50 spiritualists, but the Lyceum appeared to be overrun with sceptics.⁴⁴ Despite sceptical hostility, Massey's presence reportedly ignited the embers of spiritualism in and around Dunedin.⁴⁵

Events such as this took place in other centres. Addie Ballou conducted experimental seances during her visit to Auckland in 1885. Advertisements in the *New Zealand Herald* publicised her exhibitions: "Scientific and Spiritualistic Lecture (Important to Investigators) will be delivered in the Cook Street Hall ... This Evening, by Mrs Addie L. Ballou [sic] on 'Psychology, Psychometry, and Spirit Control'." Questions from the audience accompanied the event, chaired by W.D. Campbell, though a writer in the *Herald* complained that she did not offer to predict "the topics of the hour, such as what would be the next phase of the Afghan question that the cable would disclose".⁴⁶

Professor William Denton was the most successful of all spiritualists at popularising spiritualist science during the period. Through public lectures and displays, he presented large audiences throughout New Zealand with experimental evidence in favour of spiritualism. Denton's lectures focussed on geology, but were calculated steps toward inducing his listeners to experiment with spiritualism, accept its scientific veracity and embrace it as their religious truth.

His orations were widely acclaimed for their breadth, visual brilliance and romantic splendour. One of his many Dunedin admirers explained his oratorical appeal: "His lectures teem with humour, pungent and genial, at times overflowing. This with the eloquent, attractive and simple way he explains the most abstruse points, endows him with a power more than sufficient to hold his hearers spellbound from the moment he enters until he leaves the stage, and stamps him the best lecturer that has yet visited us."⁴⁷ Though most of his patrons were probably ignorant of the fact, Denton gleaned his scientific knowledge from both clairvoyant and orthodox sources.⁴⁸ Lectures were illustrated through the impressive technology of the "oxy-hydrogen light", which cast a colourful

⁴⁴*Saturday Advertiser*, 21 Feb. 1885, p.9; *Evening Star*, 12 Feb. 1885, p.4.

⁴⁵*New Zealand Times*, 4 Mar. 1885, p.2.

⁴⁶*New Zealand Herald*, 15 July 1885, p.8, 16 July 1885, p.4.

⁴⁷*ODT*, 6 Feb. 1882, p.4.

⁴⁸According to "Zamiel" of the *Auckland Evening Star*, Denton intended to write a geological history of Egypt and Great Britain through employing psychometrists residing in various colonies to interpret fossils and curios. One such psychometrist, a "quiet and very respectable old gentleman" residing in Auckland, gave Denton such excellent descriptions of the early races of England and the Ice Age that he wrote back to him in excited tones requesting more information. Denton also sent geological specimens from New Zealand to Alfred Deakin and his wife for psychometric interpretation. Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, p.267 (footnote 2); *Auckland Evening Star*, 20 Oct 1883, p.1(supplement), 10 Nov. 1883, p.1(supplement); Gabay, *Alfred Deakin*, p.26.

fifteen foot picture onto a screen. This device employed a lantern, usually operated by Denton's son Sherman; his other son Shelly sold tickets.⁴⁹ A keen trampler and collector of plant and animal, he incorporated knowledge from the local area to enhance the impact of his science. His imminent arrival in some towns was heralded by a profusion of posters showing illustrations of extinct animals.⁵⁰

In the larger towns he visited, Denton began with a series of lectures on the history of the Earth as revealed by geology. This was followed by more provocative lectures on the origin of humanity and the future of the planet. Having lured his audience in, he delivered his final lecture on the topic of spiritualism. Entitled "Scientific Evidences of Man's Future Existence", the lecture was equally popular with the public. In Auckland, many were refused admittance, while in Dunedin, standing room was difficult to find at Queen's Theatre, which seated 1200.⁵¹ Denton planned his lectures in this way to soften the impact of his spiritualist lecture, place spiritualism in a wider scientific and evolutionary context, and maintain his paying audience throughout. A Christchurch writer claimed that had his spiritualist lecture opened the series, his lectures "would have been a complete failure."⁵²

Though peppered with anti-orthodox barbs, Denton's orations were deliberately infused with a religious content that appealed to liberal Christian sentiment and enticed further attendance. His advertisements declared that his lectures formed "a Grand Panorama of Creation." He made it seem a Christian duty to attend: "If you wish to travel over the Earth with your eyes open, understanding the Volume in which the Infinite Spirit has written the story of our Planet and its inhabitants; if you want to learn to read the Scriptures of the Earth and understand their significance, neglect not this opportunity to hear these eloquent and philosophic lectures."⁵³ The central theme of his lectures was the evolutionary development of the "Infinite Spirit", a spiritual tendency in nature which was immortal, purposeful and progressive, and which underwrote the spiritual development of humanity. The "Infinite Spirit ensured that life continued after death in higher spiritual spheres:

There was in every egg of animal life a spirit that pushed the being it produced along its line of life in the direction of its eventual development - man - and every blade of grass had its spirit equally as man had his. ... death did not destroy the spirit, but simply brought it a little nearer to the great destiny that awaited it in another sphere of existence.⁵⁴

An advertisement in a Wanganui newspaper gave patrons a list of the visual treats that would demonstrate the evolutionary work of the Infinite Spirit: "Animals Produced in

⁴⁹Sherman F. Denton, *Incidents of a Collector's Rambles in Australia, New Zealand, and New Guinea*, Boston 1889, p.64; *ODT*, 27 Jan. 1882, p.1, 6 Feb. 1882, p.4.

⁵⁰*Lyttelton Times*, 11 Mar. 1882, p.5.

⁵¹*Auckland Evening Star*, 24 July 1882, p.2; *ODT*, 20 Feb. 1882, p.2.

⁵²*Lyttelton Times*, 31 Mar. 1882, p.5.

⁵³*ODT*, 27 Jan. 1882, p.1, and subsequent issues.

⁵⁴*Auckland Evening Star*, 26 July 1882, p.2.

heated infusions; infusoria in stagnant water; Development of the Frog; Development of Man; Ichthorinus and Hesperornis; Archaeopterix; Gorilla; Chimpanzee; Ourang and Negro; Dog-faced Man; Primitive Humanity; Humboldt."⁵⁵ From the production of life in a primordial puddle to the penultimate creation of great specimens of humanity such as the German geologist and polymath, Alexander von Humboldt, the Infinite Spirit guided life toward ever higher spheres of existence. This world-view closely resembled Christian post-millennial beliefs that pervaded the late nineteenth century.

Denton presented his final lecture on spiritualism as the natural conclusion to a series of scientific lectures, and spiritualism was portrayed as a logical extension of the work of the Infinite Spirit. In fact, spiritualism was not only presented as a science, but the most important of sciences, because it delved into the most important of subjects: "religion, and especially into the question of where the departed dead had their habitation."⁵⁶ Dismissing all other religions as exploded myths, he introduced spiritualism as a modern, scientifically verified religion that was destined to reform society. Denton then gave personal testimony from 25 years investigations, demonstrating to his listeners that they, like him, could confirm for themselves the veracity of spiritualism through personal experiments. The experimental apparatus used by scientists such as Robert Hare (professor of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania), Johan Zollner (Professor of Physical Astronomy at Leipzig) and William Crookes were pictured using the oxy-hydrogen light, and a number of exhibits were displayed, including spirit handwriting, spirit photographs and clay casts of spirit hands.⁵⁷ It was a compelling array of evidence in favour of spiritualism.

Denton's oration was enhanced by a somewhat mystical atmosphere, and by the excited tones of a lecturer imploring his audience to accept his most cherished beliefs. The lecture hall re-created some of the excitement and mystique of the seance-room, while his orations had the emotive vigour of revivalist meetings. Expectant crowds, euphoric and spontaneously applauding, gathered in darkened public halls to hear the enthusiastic utterances of their seer and witness marvellous phenomena. "When the lights [are] turned down", wrote a columnist in the *Wanganui Herald*, "the interest deepens tenfold, as a display is made ... representing specimens of creation embracing the most wondrous pages of Nature's Volume."⁵⁸ A columnist for the *New Zealand Times* wrote that Denton pointed the way toward a more factual conception of the unseen and the infinite:

He discourses not only on things as they are and as they seem, but he theorises on the ineffable and the unknown; discourses learnedly on things tangible and things unseen; and lifts, so far as the power is vouchsafed to mortal, the veil that hides the infinite and the future: not in mere dreamy speculation, or the wild raving of an enthusiast, but basing his

⁵⁵*Wanganui Herald*, 3 June 1882, p.3.

⁵⁶*Lyttelton Times*, 27 Mar. 1882, p.5.

⁵⁷*Lyttelton Times*, 27 Mar. 1882, p.5; *Echo*, 25 Feb. 1882, p.3.

⁵⁸*Wanganui Herald*, 30 May 1882, p.2; *Southland Times*, 30 Jan. 1882, p.2.

deductions, his parallels, and his systems, on the broad basis of reason and irresistible facts.⁵⁹

One observer wrote that his lectures would be "more appropriate to the pulpit than the lecture platform." Another noted how his illustrated panorama of the universe was "paraded with all the triumphant air of a new revelation."⁶⁰ Denton's cosmology was expounded further in a large number of published works which, judging by some advertisements, sold in significant numbers. The *Echo* advertised twenty of Denton's works on its front page for several months in early-1883, covering topics such as geology, spiritualism, psychometry and freethought.⁶¹

Denton was one of the most sensational and controversial lecturers to visit New Zealand in either the 1870s or '80s and, as outlined in earlier chapters, he left his mark on minds of many settlers. After his nationwide tour in 1882 he travelled to Australia where he earned a reputation as "the greatest spiritualist lecturer to visit Australia in the period." His impact in Australasia was enhanced by his death soon after his departure. Following his tour of Australia, Denton was appointed by the *Argus* to lead a scientific expedition to New Guinea, but died of fever in August 1883. Reported widely in the colonial press, his death at age 60 after years of activity led New Zealand and Australian sympathisers to eulogise him as a martyr for the cause of science and truth.⁶²

From some quarters, however, Denton's liberal cosmology met with hostility. Denton's lectures catalysed debates in New Zealand over what constituted valid science and sound theology, and who ought to be authorities on such matters. Denton was viewed by many settlers as a skilled and exuberant orator who expounded too many speculative and imaginative theories. Detractors aired their disapproval in letters to the press, pamphlets and questions during his lectures. "The impression left on the mind of the average spectator", wrote an Invercargill observer, "is that evoked by erratic genius and brilliant but sensational and audacious oratory." Another referred to his "brilliant nonsense" which betrayed "the lack of the true logical faculty and the philosophic spirit."⁶³ A correspondent to the *Otago Daily Times* named "Neo-Geologist" labelled Denton an "amateur", while another under the pseudonym of "Geologist" claimed that "the best scientists now living [would] 'laugh him to scorn' for [embracing Darwinian evolution]." A Denton supporter countered with the accusation that critics attacked him because he "commits the unpardonable sin of thinking for himself, and when dissenting from others, courageously giving reasons therefore."⁶⁴

⁵⁹*New Zealand Times*, 1 May 1882, p.1.

⁶⁰*Morning Herald*, 1 Feb. 1882, p.2; *Southland Times*, 30 Jan. 1882, p.2.

⁶¹*Echo*, 20 Jan. 1883, p.1.

⁶²*Illustrated New Zealand News*, 29 Oct. 1883, p.3; *Echo*, 20 Oct 1883, p.2, 27 Oct. 1883, 3 Nov. 1883, p.2, 10 Nov. 1883, p.2; *Freethought Review*, no.2, Nov. 1883, p.13, no.3, Dec. 1883, p.14; Smith, "Religion and Freethought", pp.125-8; Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", pp.254-5.

⁶³*Southland Times*, 2 Feb. 1882, p.2, 30 Jan. 1882, p.2.

⁶⁴*ODT*, 7 Feb. 1882, p.4, 10 Feb. 1882, p.4, 14 Feb. 1882, p.4.

The editor of Auckland's *Evening Star*, T.W. Leys, a political liberal from a radical Nonconformist background, published a pamphlet vindicating Biblical Creation and disputing Denton's evolutionary 'Infinite Spirit'. He labelled spiritualism "a dangerous search for phenomena to support a preconceived speculation."⁶⁵ In Wellington, Archdeacon Stock took exception to Denton's belief that "in twenty years his theories will be preached in Orthodox pulpits", and to his suggestion that Christian ministers did not keep up with science. A very capable astronomer, Stock criticised Denton's lectures on both scientific and theological grounds.⁶⁶ Following Denton's death, Robert Stout delivered a lecture entitled "The late Professor Denton" in which he stated that "had the late professor's geological works coincided with Genesis, he would have been the most popular of recent geologists."⁶⁷

Clearly, spiritualist mediums and lecturers encouraged spiritualist experimentation, provoked debates on spiritualist phenomena, raised questions about the nature and boundaries of science and contributed to wider debates on the relationship between science and religion. Spiritualist debates and experiments were also conducted and provoked by magicians. Their significance is discussed below.

MAGICIANS AND SPIRITS

As noted in the first chapter, magicians were immensely popular in the Western World. Their high profile rested largely on their claims to emulate the feats of spiritualist mediums. In fact, there was a degree of professional competition between magicians and spiritualists. With the spread of spiritualism around the world from the 1850s, a professional rivalry developed in Europe and America. Palfreman writes: "The financial success of professional mediums both in America and England had undoubtedly taken away some of the trade which magicians enjoyed, it was therefore very much in their interests to show that the activities performed by mental and physical mediums were just conjuring tricks."⁶⁸ This rivalry was a form of symbiosis. Though mediums encroached upon the clientele of magicians, spiritualism raised the profile of the occult and supernatural. Magicians subsequently found considerable financial rewards in parading as masters of the mystic world, champions of truth and heroes of orthodoxy while selling publications on their tricks and exposures. Both kept spiritualism in the public gaze and maintained healthy markets for each other's wares.

⁶⁵Thomson W. Leys, *The Doctrine of Evolution*, Auckland 1882, pp.5-6,42-5. See also *Auckland Evening Star*, 15 July 1882, p.3.

⁶⁶*New Zealand Times*, 8 May 1882, p.3, 12 May 1882, p.3, 13 May 1882, p.3.

⁶⁷Thomson W. Leys, *The Doctrine of Evolution*, Auckland 1882, pp.5-6,42-5; *Saturday Advertiser*, 27 Oct. 1883, p.13.

⁶⁸Palfreman, "Between Scepticism and Credulity", p.205.

The performances of illusionists were simultaneously theatre and scientific experiment. While entertaining patrons with humour, illusion and general theatrics, they informed them about scientific observation in experiments which tested the veracity of spiritualist phenomena. Palfreman observes that the importance of magicians in debates over spiritualism lay in their demonstration of how sensible, intelligent people could be easily deceived through terrestrial agency.⁶⁹ Witnessing a conjurer's illusion must have been a humbling experience for those who placed so much weight on human testimony and the evidence of their own senses. Magicians demonstrated to their audiences that the senses could deceive and that observation was fallible.

However, skilful illusions by eminent magicians did not dampen interest in spiritualistic topics. Some of the most publicised acts to visit the country invited settlers to take spiritual and psychic forces seriously. These performers demonstrated that enough gaps remained in science for settlers to speculate and investigate for themselves on all manner of possibilities. Among conjurers who utilised spiritualism as their central attraction, the two troupes who received the most publicity during the period were Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin, and the Davenport Brothers. Both of these acts claimed to utilise spiritualistic powers in their performances.

The Davenports landed in New Zealand in 1877 with their co-performers, Professor W.M. Fay and E.D. Davies, after a tour which had taken them through Italy, Egypt, India and Australia.⁷⁰ This troupe gained immense notoriety because they claimed to employ spirits to perform their tricks. Though their zenith had receded by 1877, their claim to harness the power of the spirits continued to generate publicity. A promotional pamphlet published in Australia in 1877 claimed that the Davenports were on a divine mission aimed at demonstrating life after death. In Melbourne, a writer in the *Harbinger of Light* authenticated their mediumistic abilities, though denounced their pecuniary motives.⁷¹

Their most infamous illusion was known as the 'Davenport rope-tying trick'. The two brothers were tied securely and immobilised with rope by members of the audience and locked in a cabinet on a darkened stage. After a short time, they freed themselves from their bonds and, while in the cabinet, instigated a range of spiritualist phenomena on stage, such as spirit lights, raps and the playing of musical instruments. When the lights returned they remained locked in the cabinet with the rope intact. This trick was usually executed through the alleged mediumship of Professor Fay, who used spiritual forces to aid the Brothers' escape.⁷² All this was performed under the close scrutiny of a committee of respected citizens selected from the audience. The trick may seem unremarkable in the late twentieth century, but confinement in locked boxes and/or rope-tying were commonly used by

⁶⁹Palfreman, "Between Scepticism and Credulity", p.206.

⁷⁰J.H. Jenkins, *Davenport, Brothers, and Prof. W.M. Fay*, Tamworth 1877, pp.30-1.

⁷¹Jenkins, *Davenport, Brothers*, p.5; Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", p.251.

⁷²A brief explanation of the trick can be found in Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: the Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London 1983, pp.283-5.

spiritual investigators to prevent chicanery and demonstrate that phenomena took place independent of the medium's physical effort.⁷³

Settlers flocked to witness their feats and investigate their claims of spirit agency. In Dunedin, Captain William Jackson Barry challenged the Davenports to free themselves from a knot fashioned by him using his own rope for a prize of £50. A well-known naval hero, who claimed to have been "tying knots in this country for 42 Years", Barry assured the audience they would not escape. Dr. F.C. Batchelor and "Mr Driver" (probably Henry Driver, a well-known runholder and importer), were appointed referees for this experiment. A report in the *Southern Mercury* conveyed the degree of anticipation surrounding this event: "we do not remember to have witnessed an audience excited and interested in the result of any performance than was that assembled in the Princess Theatre". After twenty minutes, following a profusion of spiritual manifestations, the Davenports emerged victoriously from their cabinet. Dumbfounded, Barry stated that "there must have been an agency or something outside assisting them to get out of that lot." Impressed by Barry's "system and science" of rope-tying, the Davenports chivalrously returned his £50.⁷⁴

In Auckland, the Davenports encountered scepticism and ridicule, fuelled largely by lingering hostilities toward Thomas Walker, who departed a fortnight earlier. At a "Grand Fashionable Night" under the patronage of the Mayor, W.J. Hurst, and the Auckland City Council, the Davenports accepted Hurst's offer to fashion a formidable knot from which they would try to escape. The Davenports immediately objected to Hurst's vigorous and merciless rope-tying, although a local doctor, adding his scientific stamp to proceedings, inspected the brothers and declared that "there was no such pressure as would impede the free circulation of blood." Anticipating failure, the Davenports left the stage prematurely amid laughter and uproar.⁷⁵

Spiritualism was subjected to considerable scientific scrutiny during visits by Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin to New Zealand in 1879 and 1885. Their tours contained an impressive selection of alleged spiritualist 'exposures'. Their 1879 visit to Dunedin coincided with that of Emma Hardinge Britten, and in direct opposition to her, they paraded themselves as exposers of spiritualism. Their advertisements boasted: "YOUR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES appear and communicate with you." They claimed to perform "by Human Agency all the Marvellous Physical and Mental Tests of the most Celebrated Spirit Mediums." The *Banner of Light*, an American spiritualist organ, was alleged to have declared Professor Baldwin a medium.⁷⁶ The Baldwins also sold a pamphlet entitled *Spirit Mediums Exposed* which claimed to reveal how their tricks were performed. However, in common with other publications of this kind, they did not reveal

⁷³Smith, "Spiritualism in Victoria", p.251; Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, pp283-4.

⁷⁴*Southern Mercury*, 24 Mar. 1877, pp.271-2.

⁷⁵*New Zealand Herald*, 28 May 1877, p.1, 29 May 1877, p.1, 30 May 1877, p.2.

⁷⁶*Otago Witness*, 31 May 1879, p.17, 7 June 1879, p.18; *ODT*, 28 May 1879, p.1, *Morning Herald*, 29 May 1879, p.1.

Amusements.

LORNE STREET HALL.

Hiscocks, Hayman & Co. Lessees & Managers.
George Lingard Business Manager.

GRAND OPENING NIGHT,

THURSDAY, JULY 24.

The Idols of Two Continents,

Prof. S. S. and Clara Baldwin,

Exposers of Spiritualism.

In the original and Startling Scance in the light performing by human agency of the marvellous physical and mental tests of the most celebrated spirit mediums.

THE DEAD BROUGHT TO LIFE.

CLARA BALDWIN'S

Renowned

SPIRIT BRIDE RECEPTION,

Of the

MATERIALIZATION OF THE DEAD.

The Melbourne Argus says:—"You can actually see and recognise the faces and forms of the dead as they appear in a bright light on the open stage during Clara Baldwin's spirit bride reception."

THE GREAT HANDCUFF TEST,

In which Professor Baldwin challenges anyone to bring the best cuffs, which seemingly melt.

Slade's Slate Writing—Fay's Coat Feet—

Clara's Great Pillory—Foster's Blood Writing,
&c., &c., &c., &c., &c., &c.

BALDWIN, THE HUMORIST,

The equal of Artemus Ward and Mark Twain.

The most amusing entertainment ever given
in the world by anyone.

CLARA BALDWIN'S CURIOUS CLAIR-
VOYANCY,

Answering questions written by the audience;
endorsed by over 1000 clergymen, notables,
literati, &c., &c.

DARK SEANCES, IRON RING TESTS.
Tricks of all Mediums given and explained in
the bright light on the open stage.

Your only chance to see the Baldwins, as
they sail for England in October.

Popular prices, 4s, 2s 6d, 1s.

Box Office at Montague's, Queen-street,

W. C. CONKLIN,

Agent.

Advertisement for Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin, "Exposers of Spiritualism", from the *Auckland Evening Star*, 1879

the tricks behind their most famous illusions.⁷⁷ Apart from the desire to protect trade secrets, this omission stemmed from the fact that the Baldwins claimed to possess authentic psychic abilities.

The Baldwins' specialty was the 'second-sight clairvoyance trick'. Small pieces of paper were handed to people in the audience, who wrote questions on them and placed them in their pockets. Clara Baldwin then became "mesmerised". While entranced she answered patrons' questions with apparent satisfaction to the writers and then repeated the question in almost exactly the same wording. This baffled and amazed onlookers. Investigative committees selected from the audience failed to decipher the *modus operandi*. These committees included spiritualists, clergymen and other eminent citizens. During their 1879 visit to Auckland, T.B. Gillies and Rev. A.W. Webb took the platform. In Dunedin Rev. J. Byng, an Anglican, was involved, along with Joseph Braithwaite, J.P. Armstrong, T.M. Hocken, H.J. Walter (the Mayor), C.S. Reeves and Dr Millen Coughtrey. Their opening show at Queen's Theatre was patronised by the "largest audience which has ever assembled within its walls."⁷⁸ In Wellington in 1885, men such as C.J. Pharazyn and William McLean were visible alongside several local businessmen.⁷⁹

Investigators also attended private seances conducted by Professor Baldwin, who claimed the ability to mind-read under favourable conditions. Invited to attend one of these displays in 1879, a journalist for the *Morning Herald* came away declaring that there "are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Another dazzled reporter declared to be "more puzzled than ever in regard to this most puzzling subject." These press-authenticated seances created a "profound sensation" in Dunedin.⁸⁰

Baldwin challenged spiritualists to investigate his clairvoyance and, for a large sum of money, challenged any medium to appear before a neutral committee to perform a feat that he could not himself expose. He claimed 'truth' as his sole motivation: "I think as Mrs Britten does, that fraud and trickery must be shown up, and every *honest* Spiritualist will agree with me." Two spiritualists, Joseph Braithwaite and John Boyd, were among several who took up his challenge by attending a private seance. Baldwin claimed to have successfully deceived both men. He described how they were "unusually severe in their tests". Braithwaite "took extraordinary precautions against fraud or trickery of any kind. Yet he got definite answers to his questions, and while holding his own paper in his own hand (paper he brought from his own home), he received a written reply inside the paper signed with his own mother's name." Boyd and Braithwaite challenged this verdict. They suspected sleight of hand. Braithwaite offered to arrange another "test sitting" to clarify the matter but it does not appear to have taken place.⁸¹ Other spiritualists held different

⁷⁷I have been unable to locate a copy of this work, if one still exists. A correspondent noted its contents in the *Morning Herald*, 2 June 1879, p.3, 3 June 1879, p.2.

⁷⁸*New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 1879, p.5; *Auckland Evening Star*, 26 July 1879, p.3; *Morning Herald*, 26 May 1879, p.2, 28 May 1879, p.2, 29 May 1879, p.2; *ODT*, 27 May 1879, p.3.

⁷⁹*New Zealand Times*, 22 May 1885, p.2.

⁸⁰*Morning Herald*, 23 May 1879, p.3; *Otago Witness*, 31 May 1879, p.17, 7 June 1879, p.18.

⁸¹*Morning Herald*, 29 May 1879, p.3, 30 May 1879, p.3.

opinions on the Professor's abilities. John Tyerman told a Dunedin audience that he "had most conclusive evidence to prove that Mr Baldwin was a genuine medium, a first class medium, and a living refutation of the lie he was from day to day proclaiming."⁸²

Significantly, when the Baldwins returned to New Zealand in 1885, they moderated their anti-spiritualist views and urged patrons to take spiritualist phenomena seriously. This stance was reported with interest by a journalist in the *New Zealand Times*, who wrote that "Spiritualists, and those who are investigating the subject, may be interested to hear that Professor Baldwin purposes making certain statements ... modifying the pronounced opinions he once entertained relative to the matter." During one performance, Baldwin expressed his belief in the agency of "thought waves". Though continuing to expose spiritualistic frauds, he also declared that "there is a force, ladies and gentlemen, ... quite outside my tricks that I cannot account for, neither can science, so far as it has yet investigated. What it is I do not know, but the higher manifestations are of it." A journalist for the *Times* agreed with Baldwin's statements, citing in detail the findings of the Society for Psychological Research to demonstrate the authenticity of thought-reading. His performances were described as "a genuine exhibition of mind-reading under semi-clairvoyant conditions."⁸³

It is clear from these examples that the performances of magicians were often presented, and perceived by onlookers, as scientific experiments which explored and criticised spiritualist phenomena. Leading intellectuals and public dignitaries took part in them, testing, debating and criticising their claims and illusions. Such events illustrate how 'popular' entertainers and lecturers were often influential in shaping settlers' views on spiritualism, and on the psychic and spiritual order generally.

These conclusions are directly related to the wider themes of this study. The practice of spiritual science reveals the autodidactic character of settlers and their liberal and experimental approach to solving problems in New Zealand. Furthermore, it is argued below that spiritual science was part of a much wider experimental science in settler society preoccupied with trying to understand and master the human mind and harness it for individual and social improvement. This broader experimental science can be conveniently labelled a 'science of mind'.

⁸²*Otago Witness*, 13 Sep. 1879, p.5.

⁸³*New Zealand Times*, 18 May 1885, p.2, 21 May 1885, p.5, 23 May 1885, p.2, 28 May 1885, p.2.

THE SCIENCE OF MIND

The phrase 'science of mind' (or 'science of the mind') was used occasionally by intellectuals of all kinds during the period, though its meaning was never precise. In this study, the term embraces the many and varied activities which sought to unveil the deeper psychic and spiritual elements of the mind, delineate its constitution and harness its powers to benefit the individual and society. Primarily, the science of mind was fuelled by the progressive optimism of the late Victorian era which bred faith in the ability of science to unleash the latent potential of humanity. In this respect, spiritualism and the science of mind were similar to mesmerism and Owenism in Europe in earlier decades. In Britain, mesmerism coincided with the Age of Reform, and provided "forums for studying the laws by which human society functioned, or should function ideally", as well as providing laboratories "for studying social relations."⁸⁴ In pre-Revolutionary France, mesmerism was a science which provided ideas and theories for political radicals to advance their cause, as well as a vehicle for the spread of radical ideas among the populace.⁸⁵ The early Owenites embraced mesmerism, phrenology and 'social science' of all kinds in pursuit of their New Moral World. Owenite social science, Taylor notes, was primarily a "science of human nature" which held great faith in the efficacy of environmental influences in shaping individual character.⁸⁶ In New Zealand, many settlers drew on spiritualism and the science of mind during the long depression, seeking ideas on how best to understand and harness the human mind, with the view of improving their lives and constructing a society in tune with their optimistic aspirations.

As demonstrated earlier, spiritualist societies, public seances and private circles were places where mental and spiritual powers were explicitly investigated. Seance-goers explored spiritual and psychic forces and tested their efficacy in domains such as medicine, religion, science, philosophy and politics. Spiritualist propagandists and their detractors regularly thrust these topics into the public arena. Such events were usually accompanied by commentaries and debates on wider social, religious and scientific issues. When united with the optimistic and progressive sentiment characteristic of settler society, these activities took on great social significance in the eyes of many investigators. Innate mental and spiritual powers had the potential to be utilised for industry, social progress and spiritual enlightenment.

In the domain of healing, settlers were intrigued by the apparent capacity of the mind to aid the healing of physical ailments. Many investigators argued that if properly understood, the mind could be a powerful lever to improve the health of society. As chapter four revealed, spiritualist healers, clairvoyants, mesmerists and faith healers triggered discussions over the causes and cures of illness. Many settlers accepted that such healers

⁸⁴Winter, *Mesmerised*, p.7.

⁸⁵Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment*, pp.83-124,161-66.

⁸⁶Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp.18-19.

did heal and debated the likely agents involved. Surveying such healers in 1889, the sceptical Edward Mackechnie conceded that a "mysterious" therapeutic agent was at work in the human mind, though was bereft of explanations: "How or why a patient is influenced to his cure is as yet a mystery". Mackechnie's interest in this topic stemmed from his belief that the study of the mind was an immensely important scholarly endeavour. He saw it as a godly pastime which promised to unravel the universal nature of humanity. "The study of the wondrous mechanism of the human brain, and its functional activity in health and disease, is frequently regarded even at the present day with as much hostility as necromancy and dealings in the so-called 'black art' were of old", he complained. "But surely such persons err. The reverent study of the glorious perfection of Creative Will is man's true homage. He therein recognises, however imperfect revelation may be, some of the attributes of the universal man."⁸⁷

The healing properties of hypnotism and suggestion attracted the interest of many settlers from the late-1880s. Robert Laing recognised the healing potential of hypnosis. In a paper delivered at the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury in 1898, he "prophesied that ere long proficiency in hypnotism would be a necessary part of education of every medical man."⁸⁸ William McLean used suggestive therapy when practising as a spiritual healer. In a pamphlet on the topic, he claimed that suggestion had the potential to eliminate crime and alcoholism, and cure the insane. He urged the government to appoint expert suggestive therapists to help improve the health of the race: "We appoint specialists to see that the breed of fowls is improved, and that the breed of horses is improved, and so on, and we ask if man is not worthy of as much consideration?"⁸⁹ However, such curatives remained tainted by subversive overtones which prevented their widespread acceptance. Mackechnie asked the following: "if the suggestions of one mind can sway another to all that is immoral and criminal, ... what becomes of our personality - the Ego, as it is called - and all its responsibilities?"⁹⁰

Mesmerists, phrenologists and physiognomists are groups which, because of their proximity to spiritualism and their interest in a 'science of mind', merit particular attention. A well-known entertainer working in New Zealand in the period was Thomas Guthrie Carr, an itinerant mesmerist known as 'Dr Carr'.⁹¹ In the late-1860s and 1870s he advertised his "Grand Psychical, Phreno-Mesmeric, Electro- and Biological Seance" in many centres. Other advertisements promised the following: "Mesmerism! Electrobiology! Laughing

⁸⁷E.A. Mackechnie, "A Mysterious Therapeutic Agent", *TPNZI*, vol.22, 1889, pp.119-129.

⁸⁸*Press*, 7 July 1898, p.2.

⁸⁹McLean, *The Power of Suggestion*, pp.4-7.

⁹⁰Mackechnie, "A Mysterious Therapeutic Agent", p.129.

⁹¹Carr also worked in Britain and Australia. He once claimed that, when in England, he contested the merits of spiritualism with the Davenport Brothers, D.D. Home and Charles Foster. *Otago Witness*, 25 June 1870, p.17; *ODT*, 23 June 1877, p.1(supplement). Carr committed suicide in 1886 at Glen Innes, a town in the far north of New South Wales, by taking an overdose of morphine. A jury could not decide whether he committed suicide, but it seems likely: "the evidence showed that Dr Carr admitted having taken the drug, and expressed an opinion that he would be dead in a few hours." *Evening Star*, 27 July 1874, p.2; *Bulletin*, 30 Jan. 1886, p.6; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Jan. 1886, p.10.

Gas! Hypnotism and Phrenology!! A Treat for All. The entranced will see Spirits, Ghosts, and Apparitions".⁹² During his performances, Carr commonly discussed mesmerism, spiritualism and phrenology and gave his opinions on social and political issues. His mesmeric demonstrations involved pre-selecting and mesmerising sensitive subjects from the audience, then inducing them into believing and performing absurdities. This sent onlookers into raptures. Carr occasionally delivered public lectures specifically on spiritualism, offering his own unique opinions on the workings of the human mind. In a lecture in 1871, he argued that spiritualist phenomena were largely illusory, though he expressed his belief in magnetic and odic forces. He also condemned spiritualism for inciting "libertinism" and being contrary to God's laws.⁹³

Itinerants like Carr continued to entertain and inform audiences in the 1880s. One example is Percy Proctor, a lecturer who demonstrated and 'exposed' thought-reading, clairvoyance and spirit-rapping in Dunedin in 1885. An advertisement promised patrons an impressive list of psychic feats and illusions: "Telling any numbers thought of by the audience, reading any line in a book with uncut pages, telling the names of dead persons thought of, second sight, clairvoyant perception, clairvoyant memory, reading the numbers on a banknote and revealing the future, answering questions thought of by different members of the audience." The show was "well attended" and "his explanations received with every satisfaction."⁹⁴

Some entertainers presented scientific machines and displays which contributed to the wider conversation on science, spiritualism and powers of observation. A striking illusion on display in Auckland in 1879 called "Fatima", elicited considerable interest in the city. The apparition of a woman's head and bust stood suspended in mid-air with no trace of her body. Patrons could come within six feet of her as she moved about, talking, answering questions and enjoying the surprise of onlookers. In the same year, Professor Jacob presented an illusion in Christchurch entitled "The Ghost", advertised as "The Greatest Scientific Illusion ever Discovered". A reviewer described a striking spirit materialisation during the show: "a shadowy outline appears, becoming more and more distinct, and at length standing forth as veritable flesh and blood." Jacob's performance was deemed an excellent exhibition of the "science" of "optical illusion".⁹⁵ In 1881, the renowned conjurers, Professor and Madame Haselmayer, advertised a "WORLD OF WONDERS" and a "series of scientific delusions" while performing in Wellington. Among them was "a little kettle-drum" which, a reporter wrote, "is able to beat the spiritualists hollow by rapping out answers to all sorts of puzzling questions."⁹⁶

⁹²*Evening Star*, 26 Dec. 1874, p.26; *ODT*, 16 June 1871, p.1.

⁹³*ODT*, 23 June 1877, p.1(supplement), 22 June 1877, p.3; *Otago Witness*, 25 June 1870, p.17.

⁹⁴*ODT*, 23 May 1885, p.1, 18 Sep. 1885, p.1, 19 Sep. 1885, p.2; *Evening Star*, 25 May 1885, p.3, 26 May 1885, p.3.

⁹⁵*Lyttelton Times*, 9 Oct. 1879, p.1, 13 Oct. 1879, p.5.

⁹⁶*New Zealand Times*, 31 Jan. 1881, p.1, 2 Feb. 1881, p.3, 4 Feb. 1881, pp.2-3; *New Zealand Herald*, 18 Feb. 1879, p.3.

The activities of physiognomists and phrenologists constitute an important site where a 'science of mind' was developed and practiced. These practices shared common philosophical ground with spiritualism, embracing a progressive and optimistic world-view that was implicitly reformist and liberal, and often anti-clerical. Practitioners offered patrons services which had particular appeal during the depressed and turbulent 1880s: an optimistic scientific plan for the improvement of society and personalised advice on how to improve one's material and spiritual life. Through analysing mental, moral and physical traits, they advised settlers on their health, social life, suitabilities and innate predispositions, providing strategies for individual and social improvement. Winter writes that "Victorians looked through physiognomic, phrenological, and, arguably, mesmeric eyes. They had habits of seeing and perceiving that required the knowledge one gleaned from these practices."⁹⁷ This was true for the many New Zealand settlers who flocked to itinerant practitioners to understand their psychic powers and predispositions.

Phrenology was the study of the cranium as an index to the position of organs within the brain, each organ embodying various mental capacities. Though professional practitioners were never ubiquitous, they dotted the colonial landscape alongside a large number of amateur dabblers. In public performances, phrenology was consumed with a strong dose of humour as patrons witnessed the skilful character delineations of fellow patrons, local dignitaries and infamous celebrities. In 1879, Professor Joseph Fraser, a "well-known Phrenologist and Physiologist" who frequently lectured in both Australia and New Zealand, commenced a series of lectures in Auckland. Many leading citizens took the opportunity to have their heads examined, while Mrs Fraser ran a series of classes for ladies. A lecture entitled "Phrenology: What is it; and what are its uses?" detailed the way in which phrenology would reveal the natural inclinations of individuals and place them in jobs most suited to their innate proclivities. With this benefit in mind, Fraser offered special discounts to families and schools.⁹⁸

In the eyes of practitioners and believers, the potential of phrenology to delineate, mould and transform both the mind and spirit made it a powerful agent of social change. An article by "D. McLean, M.C.G.", published in the *Saturday Advertiser* in 1881, expounded the social importance of phrenology. McLean defined phrenology as "the science of the physical constitution of the mind", and he believed that "a science like phrenology - which professes to put into our hands a key whereby we may unlock the most secret recesses of our nature, and discover the springs of both our strongest propensities and the guides of our daily conduct - must be regarded as worthy of our most diligent investigation". He believed it was "of especial value in the education of our youth" through delineating individual tendencies, dispositions and temperaments.⁹⁹ In *How to Read Men as Open Books*, Professor Fraser made similar claims: "If we grasp firmly the general

⁹⁷Winter, *Mesmerised*, p.30.

⁹⁸*New Zealand Herald*, 17 July 1879, p.4, 25 July 1879, p.5, 8 Sep. 1879, p.8, 10 Oct. 1879, p.5.

⁹⁹*Saturday Advertiser*, 9 July 1881, pp.8-9.

principle that form is an outgrowth of the quality or qualities that lie behind us; a representation of the character, disposition, and capabilities of each creature, we shall hold in our hands the key by which all objects will become intelligible to our minds as we unlock the portals of knowledge." Fraser dwelt at length on the spiritual significance of phrenology. He claimed that all humans are made in God's image and therefore possess the Divine within them. Phrenology delineated the Divine within, put people in touch with their inner selves and enabled them to "grow more God-like in spirit and in form."¹⁰⁰

Phrenology was an optimistic science designed specifically to mitigate biological determinism through education. In America, Walters observes how phrenologists told people that they "could take immediate steps to remedy defective organs", take "advantage of assets and compensate for liabilities" and improve their biology through "exercise, diet, education, new surroundings, or other means." Though the laws of human nature were determined by the phrenological organs of the mind, these organs could be moulded and channelled to maximise the health and happiness of the individual and their contribution to societal progress. Like spiritualism, phrenology was a reform movement "with a vision of how humanity might be perfected".¹⁰¹ This optimistic reformism pervaded George Combe's *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*, the most popular and influential phrenological text of the century. Combe held that phrenological "laws of nature" were created by God, and that humanity had ignored them and experienced great suffering as a result. Obeying the laws of phrenology was the key to both personal salvation and social progress. As he concluded in *The Constitution of Man*: "when the busy scenes of life shall be so arranged as to become a field for the practice at once of our philosophy and religion [that is, phrenology] - then will man assume his station as a rational being, and Christianity achieve her triumph."¹⁰²

Physiognomy was defined by a leading New Zealand practitioner, Oswald E. Hugo, as "the art of character-reading, or judging internal qualities by an examination of external appearances; or, in other words, the study of the mind through its external manifestations." Physiognomy was more comprehensive in scope than phrenology though more amorphous, embracing the study of mannerisms, hand-writing, wrinkles, body shape and other external features. Hugo embraced phrenology as a "sister science" which, when combined with physiognomy, "is destined to confer great benefits on the whole human race."¹⁰³

Itinerant physiognomists attracted large crowds in public halls throughout New Zealand, especially in the 1880s, through promising to reveal the innate characteristics of local celebrities and patrons. Many also maintained a healthy private practice, consulting enquirers at local hotels and business premises. A Presbyterian minister and part-time physiognomist, Thomas William Dunn, attracted interest during a tour of New Zealand in

¹⁰⁰Joseph Fraser, *How to Read Men as Open Books*, Melbourne [undated], pp.9-12,14.

¹⁰¹Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-60*, (revised edition), New York 1997, pp.148,159.

¹⁰²George Combe, *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*, 4th ed., Edinburgh 1836, p.98.

¹⁰³Oswald E. Hugo, *Physiognomical Chart of Character*, Auckland [1885?], pp.3,5.

1885. Dunn expounded both the personal and social benefits of physiognomy in public lectures. In Wellington, he "gave numerous instances of the usefulness of this science - to tradesmen, in judging their customers; teachers and parents, in dealing with children, &c." Dunn assured his audience that "much misery and unhappiness could be avoided through being able to judge a person's disposition and inclinations".¹⁰⁴ His *Descriptive Chart of Character*, given to customers following private consultations, contained a personalised "delineation of the Owner's Character and Physiognomical Conditions, a great number of signs by which Character may be read, the Trade you should follow, and a description of the person you should marry; also, how to Cultivate or Restrain the various Faculties."¹⁰⁵ A fellow practitioner, Dr. Gilbert, visited Wellington three months later. An advertisement informed clientele that he could be contacted daily "on Health and Character, on Choice of Occupation, on all forms of Chronic Ailments, Nervous Debility, Blood Disorders, &c, &c. No drugs, no pills, no plasters, nor blisters; no feeling of bumps, nor fortune telling; but good sound practical advice".¹⁰⁶ From the hand-written notes on two settlers' physiognomical charts, it is apparent that physiognomists treated self-esteem and personal insecurity as much as they advised on health, employment and marriage.¹⁰⁷

Dr. J. Simms was one of the more popular physiognomists to lecture in New Zealand during the period. In Wellington, as in other centres, he delivered a comprehensive course of lectures to large audiences, covering topics such as "Walking, handshaking, chin, wrinkles, &c", "Hair, Beard, Feet, Hands, and Handwriting", and "The Nervous System and Mind". He also sold "large physiognomical charts, of 240pp., accurately marked to indicate the mental and moral traits of applicants, their state of health, the occupations for which nature has adapted them, and the character of person they should choose for a life companion." The success of Simms' entertainment relied largely on the fun and wit that accompanied his physiognomic delineations of local citizens. Nevertheless, he believed firmly that the principles of physiognomy had the potential to transform and revitalise society. As a reporter wrote when discussing Simms' *Nature's Revelations of Character; or, Physiognomy Illustrated*: "He advances the opinion that if these principles were fully understood and practised, the consequence would be ... a regeneration of the human beings now living in the world". Vice "would hide its head and gradually disappear, while the human race would become refined and ennobled, mentally, morally, and physically."¹⁰⁸

Like phrenologists, physiognomists also infused a spiritual dimension into their science. Hugo informed his customers that physiognomy enabled one to delineate and understand their spiritual nature: "granting that the mind is a distinct individuality, and as such capable of surviving the eradication of this material conglomeration of atoms in which

¹⁰⁴*New Zealand Times*, 10 Apr. 1885, p.5. Dunn was a Presbyterian minister at Pukekohe.

¹⁰⁵T.W. Dunn, *A Descriptive Chart of Character, based on the principles of Physiognomy*, Auckland 1884, title page.

¹⁰⁶*New Zealand Times*, 17 July 1885, p.3.

¹⁰⁷Dunn, *A Descriptive Chart of Character*; Hugo, *Physiognomical Chart of Character*.

¹⁰⁸*New Zealand Times*, 20 Apr. 1881, p.1, 13 Apr. 1881, p.2, 14 Apr. 1881, p.2, 18 Apr. 1881, p.2. I have been unable to locate a copy of Simm's publication, if one still exists.

it is clothed, yet we must confess our inability to comprehend or conceive a definite understanding of the spiritual essence, excepting by a close study of the external and visible instrumentalities by and through which it renders itself manifest and perceptible."¹⁰⁹ Put simply, Hugo informed patrons that the body is a reflection of the spirit, therefore to understand one's spirit one needs physiognomy to decipher the language of the body.

Some practitioners were drawn into lectures and demonstrations on spiritualism, bringing their unique expertise to debates over spiritual and psychic forces. Hugo discussed spiritualism on a number of occasions in New Zealand. During an 1885 lecture on "Spiritualism: its Facts and Fancies" in Auckland, he affirmed his belief in thought transference and the movement of objects from a distance, but denied the agency of spirits. There was a "large attendance", and "so many persons appeared desirous of interrogating the Professor that it became necessary to have a Chairman".¹¹⁰ During 1880-1, W.G. Simon, an American medium and phrenologist, toured New Zealand lecturing on spiritualism and advertising his "Private Seances or Phrenological Examinations." Simon instructed on spiritualism and phrenology in public performances and private consultations around the country, as did figures such as W.A. Ellis in later years.¹¹¹

To reiterate, spiritualism, phrenology, physiognomy and other related practices and entertainments were part of a 'science of mind' in settler society. Underpinning them all was an optimistic belief that the human mind and human nature held latent powers which were open to scientific investigation and could be harnessed for personal and social good.

This chapter surveyed the democratic nature and ubiquity of spiritualist experimentation, placing it in the wider context of a 'science of mind'. In private circles and numerous public experiments and entertainments, settlers eagerly investigated spiritual forces, mental powers and innate capacities. In a society where public authority in science was diffuse and unsettled, these practices became influential. They informed settlers' views on the psychic and spiritual order and fashioned attitudes toward spiritualism. Imbedded in these activities were optimistic assumptions about the plasticity of human nature and latent transformative powers of the mind. These beliefs were part of a much wider notion among settlers that, through science, humans can discern truth, overcome their evil natures, harness their innate abilities and construct a better society. Spiritualist science and the 'science of mind' were experimental in practice, liberal in tone, optimistic in sentiment and allied to a pervasive desire among settlers to initiate progressive social reform.

¹⁰⁹Hugo, *Physiognomical Chart of Character*, p.3.

¹¹⁰*New Zealand Herald*, 21 Feb. 1885, p.4. See also *Freethought Review*, no.12, Sep. 1884, p.5.

¹¹¹*Echo*, 19 Feb. 1881, p.2, 26 Feb. 1881, p.2, 5 Mar. 1881, pp.2-3. Joseph Braithwaite published a work by Simon: W.G. Simon, *A New Concise Manual of Phrenology*, Dunedin 1881. No copies of this work appear to have survived (in New Zealand at least). It was advertised inside the cover of Robert Stout's *The Resurrection of Christ: A Reply to Messrs. Brunton and Forlong*, Dunedin 1881. See also *New Zealand Mail*, 14 May 1881, p.16.

CONCLUSION

Spiritualism was a religious movement of consequence in New Zealand which had a significant influence on the character and development of settler society. This study placed particular emphasis on how spiritualism both reflected and reinforced the progressivism of colonial culture. Spiritualism gave impetus to the liberalism that permeated society and which underpinned social reform in the 1890s, advocating values such as tolerance, egalitarianism, democracy, freedom of thought and co-operation. It also fuelled the broad experimentalism of settler society, encouraging settlers to experiment with novel ideas and strategies for individual and social improvement. More generally, spiritualism helped sustain and promote the notion that New Zealand was an embryonic utopia where experimental social reform would triumph and pave the way for an advanced New World civilisation. Spiritualism, therefore, resonated with the dominant liberal visions of Pakeha settlers.

As chapter one revealed, spiritualism first became popular among settlers in the late-1860s, and by the early-1880s it had gained significant footholds in most provinces. Hardcore adherents were few (perhaps 500 in the mid-1880s), but it attracted the interest of thousands and caused an immense stir in settler society. Devotees believed spiritualism signaled the dawn of a new era of harmony and enlightenment. The editor of the *Otago Daily Times* described spiritualism as "the most conspicuous, if not the most important" social movement of the age. Detractors were often no less impressed with its import. In Rev. M.W. Green's view, spiritualism was the harbinger of a satanic New World order, while to the sceptical Theophilus Heale it was "the most popular dream of our day".¹ In between these polar extremes were thousands of settlers of various persuasions who sampled spiritualism in diverse forms, motivated variously by spiritual seeking, pious concern, boredom and amused scepticism.

Later chapters traced the presence and influence of spiritualism in varied cultural sites and related its growth to the structure and broad philosophical streams of settler society. Ellwood is largely correct in his observation that settler society was amenable to the growth of novel religious movements. As a young egalitarian colony, powerful established authorities in science, medicine and religion scarcely existed at the time of spiritualism's arrival. Public authority in intellectual matters was unsettled. This gave scope for various laymen, 'amateurs' and unqualified practitioners to command attention and popularise their unconventional views and practices. Settlers themselves tended to be egalitarian in outlook and autodidactic in character, and were willing to investigate and appraise spiritualism (and

¹*ODT*, 30 Jan. 1873, p.2; Green, *The Devil's Sword Blunted*, pp.105-13; Heale, "Anniversary Address", p.442.

many other subjects) for themselves. The religious climate of the colony was not particularly hostile to spiritualism. Factors such as denominationalism, the popularity of informal and democratic forms of Christianity, the presence of Maori spirituality and settlers' dislike of sectarianism and ecclesiastical pedantry all created a climate conducive to spiritualist belief. The growth and spread of spiritualism was also aided by the gold-rushes. Gold discoveries in the 1860s and '70s precipitated a wave of immigrants from Victoria, where spiritualism was popular from the late-1860s. This influx introduced a relatively liberal and heterogeneous class of settlers who were familiar with political radicalism and open to experimental ideas and practices. Spiritualism first took hold in Dunedin and Thames, and settlers from the gold-mining generation were among the leaders of spiritualism in New Zealand.

Settler society was infused with utopian sentiments and reformist aspirations which resonated with spiritualist philosophy. Many settlers viewed New Zealand as a land of opportunity where an industrious worker of modest means could find prosperity, and where Old World ills such as poverty, privilege and sectarianism could be stamped out. Unburdened by tradition and entrenched authority, New Zealand was deemed a likely site for an advanced New World civilisation. Spiritualism itself was laden with romantic visions of new dawns, advanced futures and millennial realisations, and such sentiment harmonised with the liberal values and aspirations of wider society.

Spiritualism was also a pragmatic and democratic form of belief. It could be practiced by anyone anywhere, demanded few rules and rituals of its adherents and preached an egalitarian ethic. Many believed that the spirits could be put to good use. Spirits and spiritual forces might be harnessed to predict the future, find lost objects, aid business success, discover one's hidden potential, communicate with distant loved ones and find general peace and happiness. On a community level, spiritualistic practices promised to elevate the mental, physical and spiritual level of the nation and help bring about a South Seas paradise. This pragmatic emphasis appealed to many settlers immersed in the rigours of pioneering life and intolerant of formality and pedantry.

Alongside this New World optimism and pragmatism flourished deep religious yearnings and personal longings. Settlers were no less affected than Europeans elsewhere by the vicissitudes of industrial change and upheaval in Victorian religion. The emotional wounds inflicted through leaving home and family for a distant land, and the trials of life and death in an age of widespread religious questioning severely tested traditional religious paradigms. The long depression contributed to a climate of uncertainty. Economic troubles and social unrest threatened settlers' hopes of realising a better life in a new land. Uncertainty and anxiety turned many toward unconventional movements such as spiritualism, freethought, revivalist Christianity and political radicalism in pursuit of solutions to problems in society and religion, and in their own personal lives.

Chapter three focussed primarily on the influence of spiritualism among Christians and freethinkers. The religious questioning that pervaded Victorian society created spaces for spiritualism to enter the thoughts of many Christians. Clergymen and laymen alike commonly attended seances themselves and took part in public debates, experiments and popular entertainments which examined spiritualist phenomena. Freethinkers of various shades were among the most eager investigators of spiritualism, often becoming believers in the process. The ranks of spiritualists were populated with freethinkers as well as liberal Christians and ex-members of smaller evangelical denominations such as Baptists and Methodists. These findings suggest that evangelical Christianity, spiritualism and freethought might be viewed as one large and overlapping domain of religiosity within which doctrines and sentiments were exchanged, synthesised and modified. Considered broadly, a liberal consensus dominated relations between spiritualists and other religio-philosophical groups in society. Settlers were usually willing to give spiritualism breathing space and to put aside religious differences in the interests of constructing a better society.

Spiritualism also infused health and medicine in settler society. Healing of both psychological and organic ailments was a central feature of private seances. Settlers' ill-health also created markets for professional spiritualist healers and allied practitioners, particularly in the 1880s, and the relatively unstructured health industry encouraged their presence. These itinerants utilised an eclectic mixture of diagnoses and palliatives (such as clairvoyance, laying-on of hands, herbalism and magnetism), and, though plagued by accusations of quackery from various segments of the community, they received sympathy and co-operation from many registered doctors and clergymen. In medicine as in religion, settlers were generally willing to experiment with spiritualism, investigate its utility and tolerate its presence.

Chapters five and six teased out numerous spiritualist threads in social reform movements. Like other settlers, spiritualists embraced a post-millennial outlook that stressed the ability of humans to overcome sin and evil and improve the lot of humanity. This world-view manifested itself in a zeal for liberal social experimentation. Spiritualism provided the basis for the children's Lyceum movement in New Zealand, a novel Sunday school system designed to bypass orthodoxy and implant an eclectic liberalism in the young, thereby sowing the seeds of change in the future. Spiritualistic notions were also incorporated into utopian literature, some of which portrayed advanced worlds that echoed optimistic visions of New Zealand's future. The spiritualistic world-views of eminent spiritualists such as A.R. Wallace, Gerald Massey and William Denton formed a utopian religious strand in the liberal political philosophy of settler society. Spiritualists and freethinkers of various shades were often involved in political radicalism during the long depression, lobbying for liberal social reform in radical organisations. Alongside these male reformers were a handful of pioneering spiritualist women (such as J.E. Harris, Emma Hardinge Britten and Lotti Wilmot) who lobbied for reform as public speakers. These and

other liberal-minded women added spiritualism into the reformist mix of the women's movement and liberalism generally. Spiritualism declined in vigour and appeal by the time the Liberals came to power 1891. However, many spiritualist ideas and energies received new life from this time in movements such as trade unionism, socialism, feminism, Theosophy and alternative healing movements. Spiritualism fanned liberal causes in society and functioned as a seed-bed for the growth of other heterodox movements and philosophies.

The final chapter outlined the many and varied investigations into spiritualist phenomena in settler society and related them to wider trends and philosophical currents in colonial culture. Spiritualism was propagated by adherents as a scientific religion which provided firm evidence of survival after death. This claim and the highly publicised phenomena of the seance room compelled many settlers to heed scripture and "test the spirits, whether they are of God", and to gauge the nature and efficacy of spiritual powers, psychic forces and innate capacities. Such investigations were conspicuously scientific and formed part of a buoyant conversation in society on the latent potential of the human mind. Practitioners of this diffuse 'science of mind' included mediums, clairvoyants, magicians, phrenologists, physiognomists, popular science lecturers and other various opportunists, who for a small fee promised settlers insights into the psychic and spiritual realms. Such activities reflected and fuelled the reformist tenor of society: they were sites where new strategies for personal improvement and social progress were articulated and debated. They contributed to the wider notion among settlers that through science, humans can discern truth, overcome their evil natures, harness their innate abilities and construct a better society.

Before concluding, a few broad reflections on some important topics raised in this study are appropriate. One issue explored was the validity of the 'social disruption' paradigm: the notion among scholars that spiritualistic movements are products of widespread social upheaval, or a sign that individuals or communities are struggling to cope with the stress of rapid change. This study revealed that spiritualism had a life of its own: it was both a product and a producer of social change. Nevertheless, the popularity of spiritualism (and parallel movements such as political radicalism and Christian revivalism) was closely related to the stresses and disruptions of colonial life. Historians have documented in detail the afflictions of Maoridom in the late nineteenth century and the consequent rise of syncretic socio-religious movements. Such movements of adjustment sought to make better sense of social change and develop new techniques to cope with bereavement, illness and personal anxiety. As spiritualism illustrates, a similar phenomenon occurred among Pakeha at the same time. Despite securing greater health and material prosperity during the nineteenth-century clash of cultures, Pakeha were plagued by similar spiritual and psychological ills to Maori and explored similar avenues in an effort to overcome them. Related to this point is the question of the advantages and level of empowerment that spiritualistic pursuits conferred on adherents. A point made in chapter

six is worth reiterating here. Spiritualists enthusiastically supported values and reforms that led to improvements in society and which resonate with the cultural liberalism of the present day. Yet there remains some validity in the view that settlers' involvement in spiritualism was as much a symptom of depression, powerlessness and frustration as an empowering response to it.

A central theme running through all chapters was the experimental nature of spiritualism and how this echoed the larger experiment in civilisation that constituted New Zealand society. The idea that novel social experiments were possible and desirable in New Zealand permeated colonial culture and received impetus from spiritualist progressivism and utopianism. Believers embraced all that was radical and experimental, popularising the latest fads and visionary social science. Their religious practices were similarly experimental. The novel technology of spiritual science was adopted in spiritualist investigations: seances, table-rapping, clairvoyance, mediumship, ouija boards and planchettes. New forms of consciousness were also necessary: increased well-being, successful spirit communion and spiritual healing required novel modes of mental functioning and adherence to new psychological laws. Spiritualist belief itself was a kind of unending experiment in individual and social improvement. Through constantly experimenting, learning and evolving, the individual discovered what techniques and beliefs were most harmonious to their particular spiritual and social condition. This process of personal growth mirrored settlers' visions of New Zealand's future.

The experimentalism emblematic of spiritualism was not atypical of colonial religion in general. Arguably, religion itself was subject to experimental revision in New Zealand and constitutes a spiritual dimension of the New Zealand 'social laboratory'. Scholars portray this laboratory as primarily a secular experiment, yet evangelical Christianity and liberal religiosity provided much of the energy and moral foundation for these changes. What is more, religion itself was reformed in a novel manner in the process. With the weakness of mainline denominations, the popularity of informal Christianity, the presence of Maori spirituality, the growth of many cults and sects and an emphasis among settlers on religious tolerance, religion took on a fluid and liberal character. New Zealand religion became a relatively free-floating and many-coloured body of spirituality. Denominations were forced to find their way in New Zealand with little structure and few resources in a land where adaptation, social cohesion, compromise and co-operation were essential to life. Influenced further by New World optimism, romantic evangelicalism and the 'social gospel', religious believers of varied colours often put aside religious differences to work together to build a better society. Religion also became privatised as settlers expressed disdain at the influence of sectarianism in civic affairs. The broad trend that emerged was a diffuse, non-denominational religiosity tolerant of difference, responsive to feminist voices, disdainful of religious conflict and largely subservient to the causes of social harmony and national progress. As the quintessentially liberal, experimental, pluralistic, feminine and diffuse form

of spirituality in settler society, spiritualism was in these respects a harbinger of religious change in New Zealand. However, these points should not understate the extent to which Christians cherished and maintained their orthodox religiosity. Neither should they overlook the frequency and acerbity of disputation among religious believers in society. What is significant is that religious conflict never reached the extremes of the Old World and was usually curtailed when it threatened national unity.

A related and perhaps more significant insight offered by this study is a window into the extent and significance of heterodox religious activities in colonial culture. Spiritualism was the core of, and the vehicle for, a large body of eclectic spirituality in society that included alternative healing therapies, children's Lyceums, occult research, physiognomy, phrenology and popular sciences of various kinds, as well as many forms of spiritism, pantheism and heterodox Christian belief. The prevalence of such spirituality reveals that very few sites in colonial culture were devoid of religious content. Spiritual beliefs and religious seeking permeated society and flourished outside Christianity, among intellectuals and laymen alike. Though never wholly Christian, settler society remained religious in inclination, and this religiosity informed the opinions, activities and world-views of settlers in significant ways.

APPENDIX

Spiritualist phenomena as classified by Alfred Russel Wallace. Source: Alfred R. Wallace and Henry M. Dunphy, *Rise, Progress, and Defence of Modern Spiritualism*, Dunedin 1874.

SUMMARY OF THE MORE IMPORTANT MANIFESTATIONS, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL.

As we have not been able to give an account of many facts which occur with the various classes of mediums, the following catalogue of the most important and well-characterised phenomena may be useful. They may be grouped provisionally, as, Physical, or those in which material objects are acted on, or apparently material bodies produced; and Mental, or those which consist in the exhibition by the medium of powers or faculties not possessed in the normal state.

The principal physical phenomena are the following:—

1. *Simple Physical Phenomena*.—Producing sounds of all kinds, from a delicate tick to blows like those of a sledge-hammer. Altering the weight of bodies. Moving bodies without human agency. Raising bodies into the air. Conveying bodies to a distance out of and into closed rooms. Releasing mediums from every description of bonds, even from welded iron rings, as has happened in America.

2. *Chemical*.—Preserving from the effects of fire, as already detailed.

3. *Direct Writing and Drawing*.—Producing writing or drawing on marked papers, placed in such positions that no human hand (or foot) can touch. Sometimes, visibly to the spectators, a pencil rising up and writing or drawing apparently by itself. Some of the drawings in many colors have been produced on marked paper in from ten to twenty seconds, and the colors found wet. (See Mr. Coleman's evidence, in "Dialectical Report," p. 143, confirmed by Lord Borthwick, p. 150). Mr. Thomas Slater of 136 Euston Road, is now obtaining communications in the following manner:—A

bit of slate pencil an eighth of an inch long is laid on a table; a clean slate is laid over this, in a well-lighted room; the sound of writing is then heard, and in a few minutes a communication of considerable length is found distinctly written. At other times the slate is held between himself and another person, their other hands being joined. Some of these communications are philosophical discussions on the nature of spirit and matter, supporting the usual theory on this subject.

4. *Musical Phenomena*.—Musical instruments, of various kinds, played without human agency, from a hand-bell to a closed piano. With some mediums, and where the conditions are favorable, original musical compositions of a very high character are produced. This occurs with Mr. Home.

5. *Spiritual Forms*.—These are either luminous appearances, sparks, stars, globes of light, luminous clouds, &c.; or, hands, faces, or entire human figures, generally covered with flowing drapery, except a portion of the face and hands. The human forms are often capable of moving solid objects, and are both visible and tangible to all present. In other cases they are only visible to seers, but when this is the case it sometimes happens that the seer describes the figure as lifting a flower or a pen, and others present see the flower or the pen apparently move by itself. In some cases they speak distinctly; in others the voice is heard by all, the form only seen by the medium. The flowing robes of these forms have in some cases been examined, and pieces cut off, which have in a short time melted away. Flowers are also brought, some of which fade away and vanish; others are real, and can be kept indefinitely. It must not be concluded that any of these forms are actual spirits; they are probably only temporary forms produced by spirits for purposes of test, or of recognition by their friends. This is the account invariably given of them by communications obtained in various ways; so that the objection once thought to be so crushing—that there can be no "ghosts" of clothes, armour, or walking-sticks—ceases to have any weight.

6. *Spiritual Photographs*.—These, as just detailed, demonstrate by a purely physical experiment the trustworthiness of the preceding class of

observations.

We now come to the mental phenomena, of which the following are the chief.

1. *Automatic Writing*.—The medium writes involuntarily; often matter which he is not thinking about, does not expect, and does not like. Occasionally definite and correct information is given of facts of which the medium has not, nor ever had, any knowledge. Sometimes future events are accurately predicted. The writing takes place either by the hand or through a planchette. Often the hand-writing changes. Sometimes it is written backwards; sometimes in languages the medium does not understand.

2. *Seeing, or Clairvoyance and Clairaudience*.—This is of various kinds. Some mediums see the forms of deceased persons unknown to them, and describe their peculiarities so minutely that their friends at once recognise them. They often hear voices, through which they obtain names, date, place, connected with the individuals so described. Others read sealed letters in any language, and write appropriate answers.

3. *Trance Speaking*.—The medium goes into a more or less unconscious state, and then speaks, often on matters and in a style far beyond his own capacities. Thus, Serjeant Cox—no mean judge on a matter of literary style—says, "I have heard an uneducated barman, when in a state of trance, maintain a dialogue with a party of philosophers on 'Reason, and Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,' and hold his own against them. I have put to him the most difficult questions in psychology, and received answers, always

thoughtful, often full of wisdom, and invariably conveyed in choice and elegant language. Nevertheless a quarter of an hour afterwards, when released from the trance, he was unable to answer the simplest query on a philosophical subject, and was even at a loss for sufficient language to express a commonplace idea." ("What am I?" vol. ii., p. 242). That this is not overstated I can myself testify, from repeated observations of the same medium. And from other trance-speakers—such as Mrs. Hardinge, Mrs. Tappan, and Mr. Peebles—I have heard discourses which, for high and sustained eloquence, noble thoughts, and high moral purpose, surpassed the best efforts of any preacher or lecturer within my experience.

4. *Impersonation*.—This occurs during trance. The Medium seems taken possession of by another being; speaks, looks, and acts the character in a most marvellous manner; in some cases speaks foreign languages never even heard in the normal state; as in the case of Miss Edmonds, already given. When the influence is violent or painful, the effects are such as have been in all ages imputed to possession by evil spirits.

5. *Healing*.—There are various forms of this. Sometimes by mere laying on of hands, an exalted form of simple mesmeric healing. Sometimes, in the trance state, the medium at once discovers the hidden malady, and prescribes for it, often describing very exactly the morbid appearance of internal organs.

Table i
CENSUS NUMBERS OF SPIRITUALISTS IN NEW ZEALAND, 1871-1901

province	1871		1874		1878		1881		1886		1891		1896		1901	
	no's	%	no's	%	no's	%	no's	%	no's	%	no's	%	no's	%	no's	%
Auckland	-	-	21* ^o	.03*	11*	.01*	31*	.03*	38	.03	27	.02	65	.04	116	.07
Taranaki	-	-	0	0	1*	.00*	0	0	9	.05	35	.16	24	.08	16	.04
Wellington	-	-	6* ^o	.02*	5*	.01*	15*	.02*	94	.12	84	.09	57	.05	160	.11
H. Bay	-	-	0	0	1*	.00*	1*	.00*	13	.05	24	.08	10	.03	21	.06
Nelson	-	-	1*	.00*	4*	.01*	15*	.06*	15	.05	37	.1	27	.08	18	.05
Marlb.	-	-	0*	0*	1*	.00*	1*	.00*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canterbury	-	-	11* ^o	.02	7*	.01*	17*	.01*	23	.02	9	.01	18	.01	55	.04
Westland	-	-	2*	.01*	1*	.00*	0	0	1	.00	1	.00	11	.08	1	.00
Otago	33**	.05	43* ^o	.05*	24*	.02*	67*	.05*	59	.04	122	.08	164	.1	112	.06
Total NZ	47	.01	84	.03	52	.01	146	.03	252	.04	339	.05	375	.05	499	.07

* These figures are estimates. See footnote 87, chapter one.

^o The 1874 census gave numbers for all towns over 500 people. In the Auckland province, spiritualists were almost exclusively situated in Thames. In the Wellington province, what few lived there were scattered. In Canterbury, spiritualists lived almost exclusively in Christchurch, while in Otago they were overwhelmingly situated in Dunedin, although several appear to have lived in Riverton (Census, 1874, pt.3, table viii).

** Source: J.T. Thomson, *Social Problems: An Enquiry Into the Law of Influences*, London 1878, p.202.

Table ii BOROUGHS IN NEW ZEALAND CONTAINING SPIRITUALISTS IN 1891 CENSUS

BOROUGH	no. of spir's	male	female	% of borough
Devonport	1		1	0.04
Auckland	9	4	5	0.03
Thames	5	4	1	0.11
Hamilton	2	2		0.17
New Plymouth	1	1		0.03
Fielding	15	8	7	0.95
Palmerston North	6	3	3	0.14
Napier	16	6	10	0.19
Masterton	1	1		0.03
Carterton	2	1	1	0.18
Wellington	37	21	16	0.12
Nelson	2	1	1	0.03
Westport	1	1		0.04
Hokitika	1	1		0.05
North-east Valley (Dunedin)	5	2	3	0.15
West Harbour (Dunedin)	10	7	3	0.77
Dunedin	33	15	18	0.15
Roslyn (Dunedin)	4	3	1	0.1
Caversham (Dunedin)	32	15	17	0.68
Mornington (Dunedin)	9	4	5	0.26
St Kilda (Dunedin)	6	5	1	0.52
South Dunedin	6	2	4	0.14
Invercargill South	12	6	6	0.77

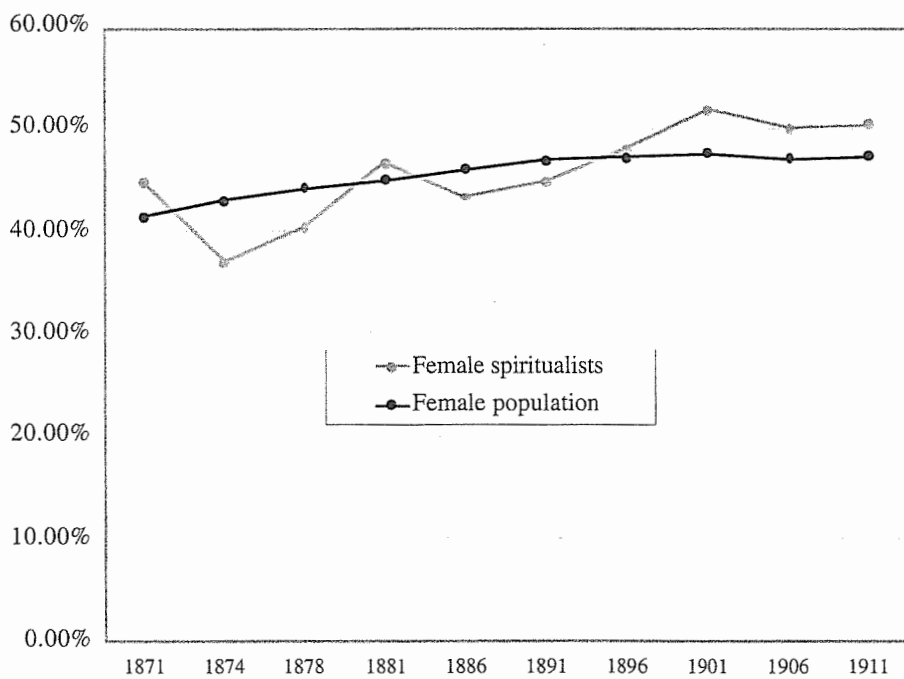
Table iii COUNTIES IN NEW ZEALAND CONTAINING SPIRITUALISTS IN 1891 CENSUS

COUNTY	no. of spir's	male	female	% of county
Bay of Islands	1		1	0.04
Eden	1	1		>0.01
Cook	8	5	3	0.2
Taranaki	21	13	8	0.27
Hawera	13	6	7	0.3
Wanganui	8	6	2	0.35
Oroua	10	7	3	0.13
Hawkes Bay	6		6	0.1
Waipawa	1	1		0.01
Patangata	1	1		0.05
Pahiatua	1	1		0.04
Hutt	3	2	1	0.05
Buller	19	10	9	0.41
Inangahua	14	7	7	0.3
Amuri	1	1		0.1
Geraldine	9	9		0.06
Waihemo	1	1		0.05
Bruce	1	1		0.02
Southland	3	1	2	0.02

Table iv GENDER OF SPIRITUALISTS, 1871-1911

	1871	1874	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896	1901	1906	1911
Male	26	53	31	78	143	187	196	240	526	593
Female	21	31	21	68	109	152	180	259	528	604
Total	47	84	52	146	252	339	376	499	1054	1197

Graph i PROPORTION OF FEMALE SPIRITUALISTS AND PROPORTION OF FEMALES IN THE NON-MAORI POPULATION



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