In the beginning of what became the standard edition of The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, the first book that announced to a wide audience the arrival of the Age of Aquarius, the publisher spoke of the seer named “Levi” who had produced it. She revealed only the barest facts of his life. Indeed, she wrote, “Regarding the personality of Levi we are permitted to write but little.” Then, after a few more brief words about him, she abruptly drew the curtain of mystery back around him:

Further references to the personality of Levi are, seemingly, unnecessary. It matters but little who he is; his work in the transcription of the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus, the Christ, stands unimpeachable. The lessons of this book all bear the stamp of the Nazarene, for no man except the world’s greatest master could have touched the high chords of divine Love and Wisdom which characterize the pages of this marvelous book.¹

The publisher—who was in fact Levi’s wife Eva—diminished his role in the creation of the book in order to suggest that he was only the clear channel through which the full story about Jesus had been revealed to the world. On the other hand, referring to him only as “Levi” also mythologized him, elevating him above the mundane world, where people have family names and ordinary histories. I have to admit that pursuing Levi back down into that world disregards his wife’s wishes. In light of his book’s influence over the past century, however, it is surprising that no one has done this before. Is it too late to make the effort now, as the last memories of the Age of Aquarius—even as a caricatured object of nostalgia—fade away after a much shorter era than the two thousand years it was supposed to endure?² Is it too late to look at its first prophet now, before the last Aquarian UFOOnaut packs it in and heads out to the Pleiades?

Levi H. Dowling, the book’s author, was born in a log cabin in Bellville, Richland County, Ohio, on the morning of May 18, 1844, the son of William Dowling and Rachel (Biggers) Dowling.³ Levi’s family and friends often called him “Lee,” and he generally referred to himself that way.⁴

His father was an enthusiastic early minister of the Church of Christ, the movement founded by Alexander Campbell that was meant to be a restitution of the original, ancient Christian church before it was fragmented into sects. William Dowling was an eager minister of that vision. He ministered to congregations of the Church of Christ in Mansfield (a few miles north of Bellville), in Ashland, and in West Point, Ohio.⁵ From Mount Gilead, Ohio, he wrote to Alexander Campbell in 1833, saying that, “The good work of converting souls to the gospel of the Son of God is still progressing among us, and the sectarians are greatly discouraged in this place. The disciples are all alive to the great concerns of eternal life. The ancient gospel was first preached in this place by your unworthy servant, who was the first that was called in this place of the ancient
order; but thanks be to God who giveth the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our number is now very considerable."^6

During Levi’s early years, his family lived in Mt. Gilead, and then near the town of Kendallville, Indiana. The 1860 Federal Census shows young Levi, age fourteen, living on a farm with his parents and some of his sisters. Living on adjacent farms were Levi’s older brothers William Worth Dowling and John Biggers Dowling, who were already married and were raising families.\(^7\) Levi attended school in Kendallville, where his older brother William taught for two years.\(^8\)

“Levi was always a student of the deeper things of life,” says the brief and cryptic biography set at the beginning of The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ. “At the age of thirteen, in his first public debate, he took the negative side against a Presbyterian Elder on ‘The Everlasting Punishment of the Wicked.’ He began preach ing at the age of sixteen.”\(^9\)

According to one of his friends, he never did believe in “impossible hells,” and he took his point of reference from the Campbellite search for a primitive and pure religion underneath what was supposed to have been an encrustation of dogma. His father “had instilled into the young man’s life, by the Spirit of the Living God, the great need of a reformation and the emancipation of the people from the creeds and confessions of faith, into the truth as set forth by the life and testimony of Jesus.”\(^10\) How far his journey away from creeds and confessions would eventually take him, no one could have guessed at the time.

At the age of eighteen, Levi briefly became pastor of a small church.\(^11\) In a ceremony presided over by evangelist and preacher William T. Horner, Levi married a neighbor, Sylvia Ann Demmon, in the town of Allen, just south of Kendallville, on November 12, 1863. She had been born March 16, 1844, one of her parents’ nine children. Her father was Leonard Demmon; her mother was Nancy (Boughey) Demmon.\(^12\) Levi and Sylvia soon had a baby, named Frankie.

Toward the end of the Civil War, still living in Kendallville, young Levi “assisted in recruiting a company of volunteers,” and enlisted in Company S of the 152nd Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He was mustered in on March 16, 1865. His brother William wrote that, “Like the sons of most pioneer preachers of that day, he expected to devote his life to the ministry, and had ‘exercised’ his gifts’ on numerous occasions. As a consequence of his ability as a speaker soon after reaching the field, he was appointed a chaplain, and was perhaps one of the youngest men who ever held such a position.”\(^13\) His Chaplain’s commission was that of Captain.

The Regiment left Indiana for Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, where it was assigned garrison duty, and was posted in Clarksburg, West Virginia for the few months until the end of the War.\(^14\) The Regiment lost no personnel from combat, but forty-nine by
disease—a smallpox epidemic had spread through the region. A few days before Levi was mustered out, his wife Sylvia brought their young infant, Frankie, to visit him in Clarksburg. “Both took sick,” Levi later wrote. The child died on August 27th, and Sylvia died on the day he was mustered out, August 30, 1865. Levi took both bodies home with him. He buried them in Kendallville.

Later that year he went to Indianapolis and there enrolled as a student at Northwestern Christian University (now Butler University) during the academic year of 1866-67. During this time, his brother, William, also a Church of Christ preacher, was teaching at the University and was actively building up the Second Christian Church in Indianapolis, a mission of the First Church to African-Americans in the city. William was also helping preach at the Fourth Christian Church there, in its mission Sabbath School. Levi began helping him publish Sunday School literature, lesson plans and songbooks, and a children’s religious newspaper.

Levi also published The Christian Almanac for the Year of Our Lord and Saviour 1867 in Indianapolis. It was simply a listing of Church of Christ ministers and where they were serving, as well as statistics about the Church. In addition, he worked with famed hymn composers George Frederick Root and Philip Paul Bliss in editing The Crown of Sunday School Songs, which one reviewer, soon after its publication, would describe as “the new singing book that is taking our Sunday-schools by storm.” Levi and William together published a weekly newspaper, The Morning Watch, issued in Indianapolis, beginning in 1867, “for the Sunday School, Family and Church.” Levi also published a hymn collection, The Palm of Victory, especially for Sunday Schools. William would continue to publish such material for the next three decades.

In order to conduct the religious publishing business, Levi moved from Indianapolis in 1868, to Chicago, where he lived until 1871, then briefly to Bloomington, Indiana, and then on to St. Louis, where his brother headquartered their business. Also, on June 16, 1868, while living in Chicago, Levi married again, to Kate S. Mayo, in that city. William wrote of Levi that, During this time he traveled extensively organizing schools, introducing the then new International Lesson system; holding institutes and conventions; forming teacher classes and, in fact, “blazing the way” and formulating the plans which Sunday-school evangelists have been largely following ever since.

The “International Lesson system” evolved out of the National Sunday School Convention that met annually in Indianapolis, which, in 1871, adopted a uniform lesson plan.

Levi and his brother made a business of setting up Sunday Schools, by preaching at a church and encouraging the establishment there of a Sunday School for adults and for children. They then trained the teachers, demonstrated model classes for different aged pupils, and provided standardized lesson plans, hymnals, and teaching materials.
William and Levi also published a series of children’s Sunday School newspapers from Indianapolis and Chicago—William had begun the first one in January 1865 and named it The Little Sower—with the titles Little Thoughts, The Little Watchman, The Little Ones and The Little Chief. These were not small run papers—the number of copies printed of The Little Sower for its monthly issue of July 1871, for example, was 118,500. Some of the teaching books Levi published included The Sunday School Hand-Book for 1873, and a series of materials arranged for “Dowlings’ Sunday-school Banking System.” These included The Sunday School Accountant’s Record Book, The Church and Missionary Banking Systems, and Dowling’s Sunday School Reward System—all meant to organize and increase the efficiency of the management of the Sunday School.

In light of Levi’s later publications, it is interesting that he also published at this time, The Life of Jesus, which was described in a review this way: This is a series of Sunday School lessons issued in sheets—four lessons on each sheet, designed to present a harmony of the Gospels, or a connected view of the life of Jesus, accompanied with such information as will aid the student in understanding the text.... They will be found to add to the interest of Sunday School instruction, and to facilitate the preparation of the teacher.

It was one of many Gospel “harmonies” that were created especially for use in teaching children. Such works were sometimes more than a tabular comparison of Gospel passages. Their authors often created the text of the narrative themselves as a framework to support the Gospel passages.

Levi also indulged a fondness for writing poetry. An example of what he was capable of is this selection from a longer poem, entitled “Preach Christ Crucified”:

Beware of division, contention and strife,
But hold the sweet spirit of unity dear;
And sacrifice nobly each power of life,
To the cause of the Savior, with meekness and fear.

Press on to encounter the fierce “man of sin,”
Whose armies are marshalling now for the fight;
Be prayerful and vigilant, then you will win,
For Jesus your captain will guide you aright.

You will meet with discouragements here, very true,
In preaching the gospel of infinite love;
But keep the reward of the faithful in view,
And you’ll gather with joy in the kingdom above.
Levi traveled throughout the American Midwest, preaching and organizing Sunday Schools throughout the 1870s.\(^{31}\) He became the Church of Christ’s Sunday School evangelist, general agent, and superintendent for the State of Illinois.\(^{32}\) He did not shy away from applying pressure to his Sunday School missionary troops, when it came time to ask for financial support, as is evident in his first missive to his charges across the State:

> We ask every Christian Sunday School in the State to adopt the following financial plan: Lift quarterly collections that will average at least five cents from every member of the Sunday School, teacher or officer. Now, brethren, come up to this work, and let us do something worthy the name that we bear.\(^{33}\)

While resident as pastor of the Church of Christ in Waukegan, he printed and distributed cards to the residents encouraging those who had been baptized only by “sprinkling” to come to him for a real baptism, by immersion, as adults.\(^{34}\) By 1879, he was preaching to the Christian Church in Ottumwa, Iowa. All in all, he continued right up through the 1870s in every respect a committed and vigorous missionary for the Church of Christ.

Nevertheless, soon afterwards, Levi’s path of success, which he had trod alongside his brother, turned away. Most importantly, in May 1877, his wife Kate left him, “wholly disregarding her duties,” and never returned.\(^{35}\) In addition, perhaps partly as a consequence, Levi turned aside from religious publishing. We may, perhaps, also see in his search for something new, a disillusionment with the conflict within the Church of Christ, which would eventually result in 1906 in the division between the conservative Church of Christ and the progressive Disciples of Christ. The more conservative faction within the Campbellite fold distrusted attempts to establish institutional organization—such as the complex system of Sunday Schools in which the Dowlings were a moving force—as a falling back into denominationalism. They also distrusted, as a hindrance to pious simplicity, the use of complex musical and instrumental settings in church services—and the Dowlings were intensely committed to hymns and the marketing of music for use in worship.

Levi now decided to take up the study of homeopathic medicine. He first attended and graduated from Hering Medical College in Chicago and then from the Homoeopathic Medical College of Missouri, in St. Louis, where he received a Ph.D. and was briefly installed on the faculty as professor of chemistry and toxicology.\(^{36}\)

While he was living in St. Louis and practicing medicine, he formally divorced Kate, his wife of fourteen years, in October 1882.\(^{37}\) He had not bothered to do this before. The immediate occasion for Levi’s filing for divorce was clearly his intention to marry someone else.
Levi’s third wife, Eva M. Sellers, was born in Albia, Monroe County, Iowa in 1844. Her father was James Crawford Sellers; her mother was Aby Ann (Read) Sellers. 

Eva was the oldest of five children. It was her first marriage. She married Levi in Oskaloosa, in Mahaska County, Iowa, on November 9, 1882. The ceremony occurred less than a month after the St. Louis Circuit Court issued its decree divorcing him from Kate. The service was conducted by a friend of her family, the Reverend George H. Laughlin, another Church of Christ minister and Sunday School teacher, who was President of Oskaloosa College in Oshkosh, Iowa (the predecessor of Drake University in Des Moines).

Eva’s father, James, was a very successful life insurance agent, and was the secretary and a trustee of the Board of the College. He was also a deacon and elder in the Church of Christ. Levi and Eva established their residence in St. Louis, where they stayed until 1885.

For a while after the marriage, Levi continued intermittently to practice medicine and to preach. But he also “entered into the temperance field as a lecturer and publisher for the Prohibitionists.” He traveled the Midwest—including at least a short residence in Topeka, Kansas—using the same organizational skills for the Prohibitionists as he had developed for the Church of Christ. A friend described his activities at the time as combining his preaching and pastoral skills with the healing arts, a natural combination at a time in which the religious movements of New Thought and Mental Healing were being born:

He preached to the delight and edification of all the congregation, and in less than two weeks from the beginning of his preaching, we built a large tabernacle in Topeka in which we held our meetings, for more than two months, preaching every night. It proved to be the largest and most successful meeting ever held in the state of Kansas by any Christian workers. Preaching at night and visiting the sick through the day and administering to their ailments…. By his faithful and devoted work many were encouraged and lifted out of beds of sickness and placed in the pathway of health and strength.

In this work, Eva assisted her husband, as a kind of deacon and nurse. The couple moved from one place to another, mostly spending only a year or two in each, but travelling together as itinerant healers. In 1892, they were living in St. Joseph, Missouri. Eva gave birth there to their son, Leo Worth Dowling, on February 5th of that year. From there they moved back again to Kendallville, then in 1895 to Fort Wayne, Indiana.

In Fort Wayne, Dr. Dowling opened a practice specializing first in rheumatism, paralysis (strokes), nervous debility (depression), nervous dyspepsia (gastritis, ulcers), bronchitis, catarrh (inflammation of the mucus membrane, flu, allergies, hay fever, colds) and consumption (tuberculosis). His ads in the local paper assured readers that "His methods of treatment are new and his success is, usually, all that can be asked." Nevertheless, he also advertised himself at the same time as a dermatologist and a "diligent student of Bacteriology." On the basis of this self-appraisal, he opened "Dr. Dowling’s Mole Cure Parlors," where he promised to use "newly discovered oxydizing
agents” to destroy the hair bulbs at the base of moles, preventing the possibility that the moles might become cancerous. He presented his case to his readers by telling them about the observations of an expert—undoubtedly Levi Dowling:
Recently, on a day when the streets of Fort Wayne were crowded with people to see a big show parade an expert took occasion to gaze. In a short time 6,500 persons passed by, and of this number 2,740 were so notably marked with Moles that it took no opera glass to see them.46

Homeopathic medical practitioners have often described their system as the result of having turned away from the “regular” or “allopathic” medicine. They have seen themselves as deliberately rejecting unnatural treatments—such as non-vegetable medicine—and doing for medicine what the Protestant reformation did for Christianity, turning it away from false “priestcraft.” Homeopathy had the same allergy to orthodox dogma that Dowling would have grown up with as a devout Campbellite.

New Thought Visionary

The same inclination to heterodoxy was cultivated in the occultism of the time. This included spiritualism, New Thought, Christian Science, and Theosophy, which was inaugurated by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and several associates in New York in 1875.

While the Dowlings lived in Fort Wayne, the city had a thriving Spiritualist Society and professed clairvoyants who practiced astrology and held seances. It was also home to an Annie Besant Chapter of the Theosophical Society. The Fort Wayne chapter would soon change its name to the Lotus Circle of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. It sponsored well-attended public discussions, complete with visiting lecturers from the national headquarters of the Society. And in Fort Wayne, there was also an Occult Science Society, of which Dowling was a member.47 Apparently, this did not prevent him from appearing on the membership rolls (along with Eva) of the West Creighton Avenue Christian Church in Fort Wayne from the time of its founding in 1896. At least one minister in the city, however, David W. Moffat, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, had preached against the Fort Wayne Occult Science Society in particular—and the belief in spiritualism in general.48

In 1894, Levi had received a vision that demonstrated that he had delved deeply in the literature of Theosophy. His vision had come to him as he was meditating, or, as he would later put it, using a New Thought term, as he was “in the silence.” In his vision, the Theosophical sages had come to him with an initiation and a commission—“The hour is come when the good news of peace must be preached in all fullness,” they said, and “Thou art Levi, a teacher of all things.” One of his friends recounted another of his visions, in 1899, when Levi was taken into the great Councils on other planes, and there it was revealed to him how he should organize councils on this plane, Councils of Wisdom, of Execution, of Light, of Strength. Every detail of the work was shown to him,
even to the white robes that should be worn by each member of the councils when they were in session. 49

Dowling could therefore turn the organizational and marketing skills he had developed as a proselytizer for the Sunday School movement and for Prohibition to a New Dispensation, endowed with lesson plans of graded difficulty, ceremonies, branches and chapters, and so on. It also meant that he began publishing articles and poems in the journals and newspapers of New Thought, Theosophy and spiritualism. Eva was his enthusiastic supporter and a “close student,” it was said, of his new revelations. One of the tendencies of New Thought interpretations of Jesus’ redemptive activities was to focus away from his proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God and his sacrifice on the Cross, and onto his moral teachings and, especially, onto his healing of people’s bodies and minds. This corresponded well to the trajectory of Levi’s own career, from preacher to healer.

The Dowlings moved again, this time to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Levi practiced medicine. The city directory for those years lists him in 1902 as “Lehigh H. Dowling” and in 1903 as “Leigh H. Dowling.”

Levi “finally retired from the medical profession to resume literary work,” his brother wrote. This was connected with Levi’s next move. About 1903, the Dowlings moved to Los Angeles. 50 There in the City of the Angels, Levi’s “years were spent, in the practice of medicine; in philosophical and psychological research; in lecturing and in writing and publishing magazines and books along the line of the ‘New Thought.’” So wrote his brother later, and then—in a statement that came as close as one could expect, in an obituary written by a brother, to criticism—“This work rather put him out of touch with those with whom he had affiliated in earlier days.” 51 Little wonder, for Levi finally came to believe that he was a medium for an entirely new truth about Jesus Christ. William, however, wrote, “In the midst of all these, however, he never lost faith in the Bible, nor in Jesus as the Divine Teacher and Redeemer.”

That is one way to put it, but the Jesus that Levi encountered “in the silence” was radically different from the one described by scripture and tradition. “Orthodox Christian ecclesiastics tell us that Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ were one,” says the introduction to The Aquarian Gospel, “that the true name of this remarkable person was Jesus Christ. They tell us that this man of Galilee was the very eternal God clothed in flesh of man that men might see his glory. Of course this doctrine is wholly at variance with the teachings of Jesus himself and of his apostles.” 52 Believing that, Levi had made psychic contact with the spirit of “The Christ” and “transcribed” a new scripture, The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, which would set the story straight.

Not only did it tell the “whole” truth about Jesus, but it also announced the passing of the world from one grand Age into another—from the “Piscean Age” into the “Aquarian Age.” It was “the philosophic and practical basis of the religion of the Aquarian Age of
the World and of the Church Universal.” In an oracular voice, The Aquarian Gospel prophesied, “And then the man who bears the pitcher will walk forth across an arc of heaven; the sign and signet of the Son of Man will stand forth in the eastern sky…. The wise will then lift up their heads and know that the redemption of the earth is near.”

Christian millenarianism—which saw the “New Age” as a single final break in history and a culmination of time—was transmuted here into an acceptance of an eternal cycling of ages. This “New Age” is just one in a never-ending succession of ages.

The ”New Era” beloved of the Christian utopian radicals and spiritualists of the nineteenth century was often called a “New Age” once it had become transmuted by spiritualists and Freethinkers like James Martin Peebles and by Theosophy founder Helena Blavatsky. Peebles portrayed Jesus in his 1869 book, Seers of the Ages, as merely the appropriate seer for just one age out of many. The ages, then, were cycles, which Blavatsky—reflected in her associate Alfred Percy Sinnett’s fanciful 1883 work, Esoteric Buddhism—explained as the long cycles mirrored in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, which were predictable through astrological calculations. In her 1888 tome, The Secret Doctrine, and in her 1889 essay, “The New Cycle,” she prognosticated a new age—a post-Christian one—to begin around that time. Theosophist Gerald Massey had made clear that the Age just ending—the Christian one—was the Piscean one. Levi and Eva, therefore, had little left to do to conceive of the coming Age as the Age of Aquarius. In fact, it amounted to little more than taking a hint from a footnote of Helena Blavatsky’s own vamp on Massey’s description of the Piscean Age and its consequences:

There are several remarkable cycles that come to a close at the end of this century. First, the 5,000 years of the Kaliyug cycle; again the Messianic cycle of the Samaritan (also Kabalistic) Jews of the man connected with Pisces (Ichthys or “Fish-man” Dag). It is a cycle, historic and not very long, but very occult, lasting about 2,155 solar years, but having a true significance only when computed by lunar months. It occurred 2410 and 255 B.C., or when the equinox entered into the sign of the Ram, and again into that of Pisces. When it enters, in a few years, the sign of Aquarius, psychologists will have some extra work to do, and the psychic idiosyncrasies of humanity will enter on a great change.

Eva’s introduction to The Aquarian Gospel explained that Jesus was not God, as the Christian tradition maintained, but merely an enlightened human being—although he was also the ideal sage and annunciator of the Piscean Age. Jesus was the man; Christ was the God (consciousness) in him. On the other hand, we learn, Levi was the annunciator of the Aquarian Age, which the world has just entered, and which will be a joyful fulfillment of the blessed Millennium spoken of in the Book of Revelation and elsewhere. Levi’s Age, therefore, by implication, will be superior to Jesus’.

In light of Levi Dowling’s years of experience in explicating the Bible, it is difficult not to see another detail of the book as deliberately significant. Eva—undoubtedly giving voice
to Levi’s own exegesis—explained that “It is conceded by all critical students that the sun entered the zodiacal sign Taurus in the days of our historic Adam when the Taurian Age began.”56 In other words, Adam was the annunciator and representative of the Taurian Age, just as Jesus was of the Piscean Age, and Levi was of the Aquarian Age. But Levi had another astrological identity. He was, after all, born in Bellville, Ohio, on the morning of May 17, 1844, as Eva tells us in the preface to The Aquarian Gospel. That makes him a Taurus. Thus Levi was in effect a “Second Adam,” the title that the Christian Church had always reserved for Jesus. Levi would restore to humankind what Adam had lost (Jesus, if he was born on December 25th, was only a Capricorn). In other words—Jesus was down, Levi was up; Pisces was bad, Aquarius was good. All of that aside, perhaps here is the place to note that, in fact, if the Age of Aquarius begins when the vernal equinox starts to occur in the constellation Aquarius, it will not actually begin for another six hundred years. The equinox slowly shifts from one constellation to another because of the Earth’s precession. These days, the vernal equinoctial point (where the celestial equator intersects the ecliptic) is in Pisces. Hopeful apologists for the Aquarian Age character of the present day, however, have sometimes allowed for premonitory effects of the coming age beginning to appear in the present.

The publishers of The Aquarian Gospel—this was, primarily, Eva Dowling—described how Levi had come to produce the volume. “This book was transcribed,” she wrote, “between the early morning hours of two and six—the absolutely ‘quiet hours.’”57 She did not say whether she was awake during those hours to witness it. It was first copyrighted in 1908 (Can “The Book of God’s Remembrance” be copyrighted?) and first published by the “Royal Publishing Company” (probably the Dowlings themselves) in 1909 and sold by mail order, advertised in New Thought and spiritualist newspapers and journals. It was also published in London in 1909 by the literary agent and publisher C. F. Cazenove, and then by the publishing company established there years before by American phrenologist Lorenzo Niles Fowler. The first American edition was soon sold out, and a second printing was immediately issued. It has not been out of print since then.

Califorgnostification

To suggest some of the influences on Dowling’s The Aquarian Gospel is not to say that he copied it from anything he read (but leaving aside, for the moment, the question of “copying” it from some divine archive). It is simply to draw the outline of the religious context of the time. His Aquarian followers said that he had several decades of experience in meditation on “metaphysical speculative systems” or that he was a “Gnostic” from the time of his youth. Dowling, however, was probably fairly unaffected by the Occult until a few years before he and Eva and Leo moved to Los Angeles, which is to say, about four years before The Aquarian Gospel was first published in 1909. Indeed, his brother said as much, and his business activities until then suggest the same thing. So we might well look to Los Angeles itself as the cauldron in which Levi finally transformed himself into a seer. It was there that he wrote about an “Interworld
Brotherhood” that controlled human evolution and all the affairs of creation.\textsuperscript{58} “Of course all Occult students know that the physical body of man has nothing to do with the true man, the individuality,” he wrote, demonstrating his transit away from Christian orthodoxy toward Blavatsky’s notion of the “reincarnating ego.” “This is a garment of flesh which the master can put on and lay aside at will,” wrote Levi, dependent again on Blavatsky’s idea of “astral projection” and C.W. Leadbeater’s development of that idea.\textsuperscript{59}

Blavatsky had predicted that the higher “Coming Race” that was to evolve in the new cycle, would do so first on the West Coast of the United States. Her prediction would stimulate would-be leaders who reckoned that they had already evolved to move to the West. In time, this would include Theosophist Katherine Tingley—who wound up in San Diego at Point Loma—as well as renegade Theosophist and con man Edward Arthur Wilson—who, in 1927, would locate the Aquarian Foundation on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Blavatsky herself mentioned, vaguely, the period around 1900. Because Levi was preparing himself to act on his commission from the mystic sages to be a teacher, he had an ideological predisposition to move to California to prepare for a revelation of the new truth.\textsuperscript{60}

The religious ferment in Los Angeles at the turn of the century was intense. One outgrowth of it was the modern charismatic Pentecostal movement, which began with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. But the climate of Southern California also drew to the area many advocates and practitioners of fringe health treatments—including homeopathy, osteopathy, “chromotherapy,” fasting, the “raw fruit cure,” and more—and Levi Dowling was one of these advocates. A frankly entrepreneurial and speculative spirit also pervaded the region, affecting everything from real estate, mining, water rights, and agriculture to politics and religion.

Los Angeles was a refuge for those who were averse to dogmas and creeds. It was and still is a place that embraces the paradox already proclaimed by New Thought believer Frederick Pease Fairfield in 1908—“It is a truth,” he wrote, “which is coming with the New Age and which will become its chiefest pillar. That truth is Truth is Many Sided, and No Statement of Truth is Adequate, and Truth Consists in Opposites.”\textsuperscript{61} It was a dream factory suited to a spiritual salesman like Levi Dowling.

One registrant of the 1908 copyright on The Aquarian Gospel (besides Eva Dowling) was former Wyoming Congressman Henry Asa Coffeen, who also wrote the introduction to the first edition. His moves over the course of his career roughly paralleled those of Levi’s. Both of them were born in Ohio around the same time. Coffeen’s family moved to Indiana when he was young, then to Illinois. After college, he became a member of the faculty at Hiram College—the college of which George Laughlin, who married Levi Dowling to Eva Sellers, was at one time President. Coffeen then moved to Wyoming. One could guess that Coffeen and Dowling were acquainted and kept in close contact in their later years. Perhaps his copyright means that he underwrote the publication
expense of The Aquarian Gospel. In any event, Coffeen and Dowling were fellow Theosophists. Coffeen wrote that he “took up the study of the inner and psychic nature of man” in 1881.

To many people, his Aquarian Gospel has looked like fiction, but Levi gave it to the world as a true transcription from the grand Cosmic recording library—as he called it, in Theosophical terms, the “Akashic records.” “Ākāśa” is the normal Sanskrit term for “space” or “sky,” but Theosophy founder Blavatsky and her associates, long before Dowling had produced The Aquarian Gospel and had become “The Akashic Seer,” had narrowed its meaning as an English loanword. They used it to mean something like the Ether or cosmic plenum that was without form, but that served as the ocean out of and into which all things flow. In this, she was apparently influenced by translations of such ancient Indian philosophical texts as the Chāndogya Upanishad, which described it as the primordial element, the medium through which all things are propagated.

Levi was the New Messenger who, despite and also because of being a “mere” instrument, was better able than the past Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—to read the record without obscurity. His gospel was therefore presented as more faithful to the ultimate truth than the Bible accounts of Jesus’ life. From Levi’s point of view, we might think of it as a grand Gospel harmony, which “harmonized” the received Gospels, but also other scriptures and scientific and archaeological discoveries as well, all together into a single threaded narrative. Levi had received telepathically a huge and timely Lesson Book from the Great Sunday School in the Sky, in “The Book of God’s Remembrance.” By “transcribing” it, he did not tell Jesus’ story with the voice of Jesus himself, but with the viewpoint of what literary critics call an “omniscient narrator.” Nevertheless, its viewpoint does not reproduce God’s own omniscient remembrance—the master record. It would be rather surprising, for example, if a universal master record—God’s memory, as it were—was stored in English. Or that it was limited at any point in a narrative to noticing one thing happening instead of all the other infinite things that were happening too.

The text of The Aquarian Gospel is rather more like the narration of someone who is not actually omniscient, but is nevertheless able to float around events at will—like a spirit—and read people’s minds. It was as if Levi had been watching a heavenly documentary film, narrated by a Revelating Angel, and wrote down what he had heard and seen in his vision. In fact, Eva Dowling’s preface to the first edition of The Aquarian Gospel explained that Levi had simply made a copy of the collected series of the records of Jesus’ life. These had been originally made on “etheric films” in what she equated with the Book of Life that is referred to in Revelation 20:12. She also made this album synonymous with the Book of Remembrance mentioned in Malachi 3:16.

According to Eva, Jesus, like every other human born into this world, had his own “recording messenger” and “life-companion”—a kind of combination guardian angel, spiritualist amanuensis, and documentary film producer—“who is commissioned to light
up the way and record every event." These days, Los Angelenos actually pay for such services—from publicists, personal trainers, and life coaches. How appropriate that Jesus’ “recording messenger” and “life-companion” should have arranged the first full public screening, as it were, of his life, in the city of Los Angeles in 1908, the same year that the first movie was made there.

**The Lost Years of Jesus in Asia**

Much of The Aquarian Gospel describes Jesus’ adventures during the years between his early boyhood and the time when his public ministry began, years that were not described in much detail in the traditional Gospels. In Levi’s role as a Sunday School director, these years of Jesus’ youth would often have been the object of Levi’s imaginative reconstruction for Levi’s young charges, as an image of the Great Exemplar. Another reason for The Aquarian Gospel’s focus on Jesus’ youth lay in the fact that these years had become a magnet for speculative reconstruction. Also, in the decades prior to the turn of the century, Anglo-American culture had turned its attention to childhood and its innocence, and had shifted its focus away from the public, masculine sphere to the domestic sphere, under the guidance of the mother, as a place to experience the sacred.

Insofar as The Aquarian Gospel was presented as a report of Jesus’ formative years, one of its precursors in the Occult literature circulating at the time was Theosophist Franz Hartmann’s 1888 admitted allegory, *The Life of Jehoshua, The Prophet of Nazareth; an Occult Study and a Key to the Bible, Containing the History of an Initiate.* Hartmann depicted Jesus as traveling to Egypt to learn magical secrets and being initiated into a secret brotherhood there. Dowling’s book has Jesus journeying to Egypt, Greece, Persia, and to Far Asia—in particular, to India and Tibet. The Aquarian Gospel describes, in chapter 36, Jesus somehow being welcomed into a temple in Lhasa that in fact could not have been built for at least another five or six centuries (after Songtsen Gampo encouraged the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet):

6 Now, after many days, and perils great, the guide and Jesus reached the Lassa temple in Tibet.

7 And Meng-ste opened wide the temple doors, and all the priests and masters gave a welcome to the Hebrew sage.

8 And Jesus had access to all the sacred manuscripts, and, with the help of Meng-ste, read them all.

9 And Meng-ste often talked with Jesus of the coming age, and of the sacred service best adapted to the people of the age.

Dowling’s wording in a couple of places in the section on India indicates that he had at least read Russian journalist and hoaxter Nicholas Notovitch’s *The Unknown Life of Jesus*
Nevertheless, we must credit Dowling for the invention of the sage “Meng-ste,” whose name, as it stands, is neither Tibetan nor Sanskrit nor Chinese. Presumably, Dowling here simply misspelled the name of the fourth-century B.C.E. Chinese Philosopher Meng-tse, that is, Mencius (Mengxi). Notovitch’s work also described Jesus’ trips to India and Tibet, as reported in an ancient book—It was, alas, subsequently lost before anyone else but Notovitch could see it (or perhaps it had been hidden away again). Notovitch said he had discovered it at Hemis Monastery in Ladakh, and that it had been written by a Hindu merchant about the life of a contemporary of his, Jesus—or “Issa” as he was called in Notovitch’s book. Jesus had somehow gone to India and studied Pali and thoroughly read the Buddhist scriptures (which would, in fact, not be written down in Pali for another four centuries). The Russian had been “inspired” by the writing of a credulous civil servant in India, Louis Jacolliot, who, in his book, The Bible in India, had placed Jesus on the subcontinent.

At the turn of the century, Tibet often appeared in the newspapers, as the victim and object of the geopolitical Great Game being played in Asia by England, Russia, and China, culminating in the British Expedition to Lhasa led by Francis Younghusband in 1903-04. But Tibet was also much on the mind of the occultist community at the time because of the Theosophists’ insistence that “mahatmas” had found a refuge there where they were maintaining a Brotherhood that protected great cosmic secrets through the Ages.

Just a few years before, in 1901, an eccentric ex-Anglican English clergyman named Gideon Jasper Richard Ouseley had become a student of Theosophy. Ouseley claimed that a fragment of what he called “The Gospel of the Holy Twelve,” which he had “found,” was part of an independent and authentic Gospel. Actually, it was a bit of a genuine second- or third-century, harmonized compilation of two of the Synoptic Gospels, which has come to be called the “Gospel of the Ebionites.”

Nevertheless, Ouseley boldly claimed that the Gospel of which he had a fragment was the original Gospel, from which the traditionally recognized ones derived. He now presumed to have recovered the complete text through his own spirit mediumship “in dreams and visions in the night” in which he saw manuscripts on a revolving lectern, which he read and then wrote down in the morning. Ouseley believed that the spirits of Emanuel Swedenborg and of deceased occultists Anna Bonus Kingsford and Edward Maitland had “edited” the manuscripts that he had seen. The Gospel revealed Jesus to have been a proponent of Ouseley’s own favorite causes of temperance, vegetarianism, and anti-vivisectionism. Ouseley, in introducing it, wrote:

The early Christian Fathers did well their work of destroying the sources and records from which they gathered the information and data put by them in the Bible. But they failed to destroy it all. Some escaped, and as it is discovered here and there by patient research workers, it is astonishing to see how the world has been deceived by the Christian Fathers.
His German publisher—probably unwilling to disclose the book’s source in Ouseley’s imagination—said that it had been preserved—away from the clutches of early priests intent on corrupting it—by Essenes who carried it off to the mountain fastness of a Tibetan monastery, where it had been guarded. Ouseley’s text had Jesus traveling to Egypt to learn from the priests there. He then went to “Assyria and India and into Persia and into the land of the Chaldeans,” teaching people to be kind to animals, visiting temples, speaking to priests, and healing the sick, before returning to Palestine to begin his public ministry.

Jesus’ so-called “lost years” have been a matter of interest to heterodox writers, from as far back as the third-century Gnostic creators of the “infancy gospels.” And at least the Gnostic Gospel of James (otherwise known as the Protevangelium Jacobi) influenced The Aquarian Gospel in its description of the boyhood of Jesus. Heterodox authors thought that Jesus’ early life was “lost” and that it needed to be recovered again. That was, nevertheless, merely an instance of a larger “loss”—the culture’s loss of Jesus himself, due to the Higher Criticism of the Bible then in vogue, as well as the growth of materialism and atheism at large. It was because Jesus had been lost that a “quest for the historical Jesus” to find him again seemed like such an important intellectual issue. To many, the traditional Gospels no longer seemed to contain the largest truth. Perhaps that truth, they thought, was hidden in “lost” teachings of Jesus or in the “lost” portions of his life.

Something similar happened in Buddhism. The authors of the Mahayana Perfection of Wisdom Sutras lived several centuries and more after Śākyamuni Buddha. They nevertheless produced scriptures that presented themselves as having been enunciated by the Buddha at different times and in different realms and to different audiences (smarter ones, it is almost unnecessary to point out) than those described in the scriptures with which Buddhists were already familiar. But they had been hidden away until such time as people were psychically prepared to hear them. And so, the Mahayana added them to its canon of scriptures.

This Buddhist method for supplementing scriptures must have been known to anyone—like Dowling—who had delved into esotericism. A section of Levi’s “The Cusp of Ages” that Eva reproduced in her introduction to The Aquarian Gospel suggests this. In a reported dialogue between Levi and “Ramasa,” a Cherub, it offers a remarkably similar rationale for keeping secret its as-yet-unheard-of teaching about the passing of the Age of Pisces into the Age of Aquarius. “I heard the history of the Piscean Age from Piscean Cherubim and Seraphim,” Levi says. “And when I took my pen to write Ramasa said: ‘Not now, my son, not now; but you may write it down for men when men have learned the sacred laws of Brotherhood, of Peace on earth, good-will to every living thing.’” Even more explicitly, Eva’s preface to the first edition said that, “Even after more than three years of intimate companionship with the Master the disciples were not ready to receive all the truth.” But now, “The world has at last risen to the plane of spiritual consciousness where men can grasp the higher meanings of the life and lessons of
Jesus, and the Spirit of truth has torn away the veil, and a son of man”—Levi Dowling—“...has been permitted to enter the great galleries where all life histories are recorded and make a copy of these records.” She called Levi the “translator,” not the author, of the book.

Conspiracies of Biblical Proportions

Another probable influence on Dowling was the genre of “corrected” gospel stories published by American spirit mediums, beginning practically from the start of the spiritualist movement in America in the mid-nineteenth century. In all of these, Jesus or his contemporaries take the opportunity to speak again, using spirit mediums as their instruments, to tell what they say is their real story. According to them, this had been lost due to the ignorance or deliberate deceit of the later followers or priests. Most of the stories made a point of demonstrating that Jesus’ original teaching was not “superstitious” or “Papist.”

In these renditions, Jesus was either simply nonexistent—a convenient fiction—or he was a simple moral teacher. Or he was a pious scribe, or a plain good man, a sort of ultra-Liberal Protestant, actually. Or—as appropriate for the later nineteenth century—he was an anti-clerical, working-class revolutionary who had tried to usher in a socialist paradise, or he was a purveyor of pantheistic, universal, cosmic knowledge, a mystic hierophant.

All of these “Jesuses” blamed the retrograde Church for telling the wrong story about him. The spirit medium Olive G. Pettis, for example, in 1894 published the Autobiography by Jesus of Nazareth; Being His Historical Life Given by Himself through the Inspiration of the Scribe O. G. P. She wrote in the introduction that, “Catholicism is but the device of heathen appointed priests in order to hold control and nothing more.”

Jesus’ apostles, speaking through the spirit medium Alexander Smyth, reported that Jesus preached, in trance, to a crowd about progressive humanistic science, “Yes, my brethren, we have gone astray from the principles implanted in us by the God of Nature, and believed the false fabrications of a vile Priesthood.”

The Aquarian Gospel’s Jesus, too, is the image of a nineteenth-century, non-dogmatic, and somewhat eccentric Christian. Jesus’ travels to India and Tibet are like those of a Victorian tourist on the Grand Circuit, or like those of an agent of the American Foreign Mission Society. Unlike other stories of Jesus in Asia produced by Theosophists and occultists, Dowling’s does not show Jesus learning or practicing yoga or sitting at the feet of gurus waiting for instruction from them. He may have “read all their books” in Lhasa, as The Aquarian Gospel put it, but we are not told that he found much of value, if anything, in them that he did not already know. He brings light to Asia, instead. He is, in fact, when it comes right down to it, decidedly non-relativistic in his outlook—even judgmental, one might say. Release the chains of your slaves, he tells the Brahmin priests. Stop worshipping idols and offering sacrifices to your false gods.
Levi Dowling’s Church of Christ was a liberal movement, appealing across denominational lines. It wished to restore the Church to its original purity, to jettison dogma, and to rely only on Scripture. But Scripture is incomplete because it is open to a variety of interpretations. It is also dubious, if one is disposed to being suspicious, because it was so long in the hands of an already formed (and therefore suspect) Church, which had made choices about what to include in it and what to exclude from it. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discoveries of heterodox and Gnostic gospels, therefore, had the potential to undermine the Faith when that Faith relied on Scripture alone. The problem was expressed in a poem entitled “The Intelligibility of the Bible” that Dowling had years before selected to publish in The Morning Watch in 1871. The poem had dramatized a debate between two speakers representing two approaches to Scripture. The first speaker says,

How precious is the Word of God,  
Which He to man has given;  
Its teachings are so plain a child  
May learn the way to heaven.

And by the assisting grace of God,  
May safely walk therein;  
The Spirit helps those on this road  
In their warfare with sin.

To which the second speaker replies:  
So plain! I thought it was as dark  
As the ancient’s myst’ric lore;  
Its teachings so in myst’ry wrapt,  
In vain we o’er it pour,

Till light from heav’n around us shine  
That we its truths may see;  
The Spirit gives that light divine,  
Would it were shed on me.82

Dowling’s emphasis on the integrity of the individual’s unmediated relationship with God, together with his liberal desire for a universalistic salvation, combined with his sense that scriptures were the most important basis for Faith, but that those scriptures, as he had received them, were incomplete. All of this prepared him to channel a new gospel.

It would be a new gospel that would be universally inclusive in the sense of placing the previous Christian savior and teaching in a larger context of many different religions from many different ages.
It is not surprising that Levi would search for other gospels that would make sense of them all. And it is not surprising that he should search for them in the interior expanse of his own spirit. And it is not surprising that he should find one there and that he should place his confidence in it as true. What he entered inside himself was the whispering gallery of the universe, which contained not only the Bible, but also other scriptures, such as the Jewish Kabbala, which were “not in the scriptures preserved by the Christian Church,” as he put it. He may still have been relying—like Protestants before and after him—on Scripture alone, but the dimensions of that Scripture were now as vast and unconstrained as space and as intimate as his own imagination. One of his acquaintances wrote that, Dr. Dowling’s faith was not built upon a religion of spiritual exercise, creeds and dogmas. He was but little concerned with matters of doctrine, but service and kindness were to him a divine system of the humanities; likewise health, happiness and a sense of fair play were valuable attributes…. Dr. Dowling had a conscious communion with God, where it was nothing but God and the human soul on a spiritual mountain top, where the human and divine come together, an open and clear sky between the soul and God, where he had direct communion and spiritual immediacy.83

His “God consciousness,” as New Thought writers called it, was unconstrained by mere material fact.84 Henry Coffeen’s introduction to The Aquarian Gospel quoted ex-Anglican clergyman and Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater with approval on the superior access to the historical record that clairvoyants (including Leadbeater himself) possessed:

All knowledge is theirs for the searching, all that is, which does not transcend even this lofty plane; the past of the world is as open to them as the present; the Akashic records are ever at their disposal and history, whether ancient or modern, unfolds itself before their eyes at their will. No longer are they at the mercy of the historian, who may be ill-informed, and must be more or less partial; they can study for themselves any incident in which they are interested, with the absolute certainty of seeing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.85

Coffeen speculated that this facility for excavating distant times—past and future—and places—on Earth and elsewhere—operated like the then-new radio receiver. But this wireless telepathy was not the invention of Theosophists. Spiritualists had developed the technique for exploring what some of them had called “the Summerland,” where the spirits of the deceased dwelt. They had also explicitly applied the technique to exploring via clairvoyance the distant past—including the ancient civilizations they discovered, such as Lemuria and Atlantis—but also the future, which they almost always found to be a utopia. Spiritualists regarded this psychic exploration as capable of filling in gaps in historical knowledge gained through conventional means. Or as capable of overturning information gained through such mundane methods as archeological excavation, analysis of the fossil record, or other means. They called this technique “psychometry.”
Unfortunately, psychometric findings routinely contradicted one another and provided little or no evidence that ever turned out to yield true results that were not obvious from more mundane methods. On the contrary, clairvoyants’ histories of ancient cultures often contained specific errors of fact that could only have been made by having been copied from commonly available published works of comparative religion or mythology.

Coffeen, quoting Leadbeater, explained that a seer’s advancement in developing psychic vision was like progressing from turning the pages of a photo album of still pictures, to watching moving pictures, to what today we might describe as being actually teleported into another time and place. The result was the seer’s ability to correct the historical record. “Not only can he review at his leisure all history with which we are acquainted, correcting as he examines it the many errors and misconceptions which have crept into the accounts handed down to us,” wrote Leadbeater, “he can also range at will over the whole story of the world.”

Occultists of the time warred against conventional history with another argument as well. History and myth, they said, were identical products of the plastic imagination—one could be fashioned into the other, since they were both written in the “Akashic record,” as Theosophist and Anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner would explain it in 1923. He used words that would have been plain to any spiritualist in the nineteenth century or to any postmodernist in the twenty-first:
Those who have enlarged their field of knowledge are no longer dependent on external evidences where past events are concerned. They can see that which is not sensibly evident, yet which time cannot destroy. And so, from available sources of history we can pass on to those which are imperishable. Such history as this is written in very different letters from those which record the every-day events of past times, for this is Gnosis.

Those who demand empirical evidence would read this as a refusal to distinguish sharply between fact and fiction. To lead such people into the higher truth, an enlightened teacher might present fiction dressed up as if it were fact, in order to pry students from their retrograde ideas about an objective reality, external to their minds. The tool for doing this was “alternative reality literature.” In the decades before the turn of the century, the genre of ”Occult fiction“ had come into its own. Students of the Occult regarded many individual works, such as Bulwer-Lytton’s A Strange Story and The Coming Race, or Blavatsky’s Nightmare Tales as containing truth that was veiled from the unworthy by having been dressed up as fiction. We may wonder if some sympathetic readers (and, of course, the writer) of The Aquarian Gospel recognized it in some sense as a fiction—or perhaps they called it a ”myth“—but still took it to be true in some fundamental way. Would they have seen close criticism of it as a niggling, unenlightened approach that had not yet comprehended that myths were true, or that all truths were no more than myths?
This was the path that led many Christian progressives away from orthodoxy in the nineteenth century. The Higher Criticism had erased, for them, the Bible’s uniqueness and authority. Some believed that it had shown that Jesus himself was, objectively speaking, a fiction, and that Christianity was mere myth. They held on to Christianity but did not seek the truth in historical fact, but rather in timeless or subjective myth. Progressives could not accept the Gospels as historical and could not accept the literal content of the Faith. They therefore found value elsewhere, either in myth and allegory, or in the inheritance of Christianity trimmed of reference to the supernatural—in its ethics or its abstract, natural philosophy. They may have been prepared to believe in the Occult or in spirit contact, but they saw themselves as rationalists and Freethinkers.

They often accepted the Deists’ old contention that the story of Jesus was simply made up, based on the legends surrounding the Greek sage Apollonius of Tyana. This idea was first forcefully made to the English-speaking public as far back as 1680. In that year, Charles Blount published a translation of Philostratus’ Life of Apollonius, appending to it a set of notes that attacked the Gospel accounts of Jesus. Modern scholarship now understands that the influence between the Life of Apollonius and the Gospels, if any, was in the reverse direction—with Philostratus’ second-century biography being, in part, a pagan reaction to the Christian Gospels. This was not definitively clear at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, when Dowling penned The Aquarian Gospel.\(^8\) Significant to Levi’s rendition of the life of Jesus, therefore, is that Philostratus’ fabulistic biography described travels of Apollonius to India, among other places, where he studied with Brahmins.

A “Christian” who believed that the Gospels were fiction and that truth lay entirely within his or her own subjective faculties might not hesitate to “improve” the traditional Gospels or update them with more fiction. He or she would probably not conceive of this as a fraud. Nor could he or she easily distinguish between producing any particular text by “automatic writing”—in which the entranced human author might plausibly deny conscious agency—and constructing it elaborately and deliberately by careful cutting and pasting from other published sources. Or by some mix of the two, producing a text that felt inspired but had also been editorially enhanced.

Without detailed evidence of how Levi Dowling produced his text, we cannot say what, within this range, his method and motives were. Nevertheless, Levi’s and Eva’s use of the word “transcription” in describing the process encouraged the notion that it was something that Levi did automatically, without much, if any, deliberation or filtering. Whether they imposed this image of automatism on the text entirely after the fact in order to elevate its divine authority is impossible to say. The sheer length and complexity of the document, however, suggests that a significant amount of mundane editorial work went into the production of the finished work.

Disguise is in the nature of occultism—both old and new. Occultism often presents forged bona fides as part of its strategy of subversion of those in power, and to protect
itself from those who it judges should not have the truth. Dowling did this in presenting his new Gospel and his new picture of Jesus, as if this information had been hidden away by a conspiring Church and kept away from the Faithful in order to make them easier to lead.

Nevertheless, The Aquarian Gospel offers a picture of Jesus that is, in many ways, transitional. It lies between the traditional Christian view of Jesus as unique, as the sole Messiah, and as God, and some of the Theosophical versions of Jesus—Notovitch’s for example—as merely one enlightened spiritual adept among many. For that reason, we may even wonder whether Dowling actually thought of himself as an opponent of a certain sort of Theosophy, rather than its willing collaborator, or at least whether he believed that he had offered a vision that could guide it into a recognizably Christian esotericism. Dowling did something like this with Blavatsky’s prediction that human evolution would be led by a “Sixth Race,” to appear on the West Coast of America. He wrote of this evolution as if it had first manifested when the Pilgrims, separatists from the Established Church in England stepped onto Plymouth Rock, carrying their Race’s human seed with them. Further evolutionary progress had proceeded along the same dissenting religious lines away from orthodox creeds. He formulated a synthesis of Blavatsky’s occultism with Christian millennialism. It appears to have been filtered through Charles Leadbeater’s writings, which predicted that the full-blown appearance of the New Race would occur in several centuries of evolution rather than (as Blavatsky believed) in tens of thousands of years. Dowling wrote:

Races develop very slowly. Nearly 300 years have passed since the beginning of this Sixth Race, and now only a small percent of the descendents of these Pilgrims have the Telepathic sense developed in a very perceptible manner; but thousands of both Americans and Europeans are upon the cusp of the Races, and those who are willing to pay the price in consecrated effort may soon attain.89

Here he links the Christian millennial expectations to an evolutionary jump in human nature. In doing so, he adopted the occultist idea that human evolution was being directed by non-earthly intelligences who would effect humans’ salvation by liberating them from their bodies—their lower, animal natures. This was a variation on the ancient Gnostic myth that reckoned the material world as a oppressive prison built and maintained by lower demiurges. Bodies were material prisons of the eternal souls, spirits, or lights seeking freedom to travel to the stars. The idea was well known to Theosophists from Blavatsky’s explanation that beings from elsewhere than Earth had infused the human spirit in the bodies of primates (her answer to Darwinian Evolution). It was an idea, however, that already had wide currency among spiritualists, who believed that elevated spirits were about to intervene directly in human reproduction in order to make humans more spiritual. Here we may see in an early form today’s Aquarian Age advocates’ belief in extraterrestrial visitors to Earth, their stories of aliens’ experimentation with human reproduction, and their visions of an interplanetary apocalypse heralded by starships rescuing a remnant of believers from destruction.
Dowling’s Christianity was more traditionally devout than that. For him, Jesus was not an extraterrestrial. Nor was he merely a garbled myth. Dowling supported the claim that Jesus did in fact exist. This distinguished him from the radical critics of the time, like poet Gerald Massey, who argued that he was entirely made up. The so-called “historical Jesus,” to these critics, was a bricolage, a hasty assemblage of bits of mythic flotsam bobbing about in the ancient ether that had flowed in from elsewhere—particularly Egypt—from centuries before. For Massey, every item in the historical record actually existed in what seem to be a kind of timeless and unorganized attic—his version of the “akashic record” perhaps—a sort of cluttered Victorian museum of fantastic proportions. His wanderings through it resulted in his writing massive tomes on comparative religion that are nowadays forgotten by everyone but conspiracy theorists who ply their trade on the internet.

Massey was a popular speaker on the spiritualist lecture circuit, where he delivered a presentation that declared him to be a vehement opponent of the Christian “hoax.” But he was unable to navigate reliably through the cosmic ether into which he floated all historical records. For him, the authentic and the fraudulent (gospels included), the true and the false, were all the same. They were all myths floating about, waiting to be collected together and fashioned into something good or ill: The “apocryphal” Gospels are not a mere collection of “foolish traditions” or fables forged or invented to supply an account of that period in “our Lord’s” history, respecting which the accepted Gospels are almost silent. They are disjecta membra of the original matter; the mythos reduced to the state of Märchen; the story of the miraculous child told as a folk-tale which was at last repeated as a history in the Gospels with matter like the above omitted because it was too naturally incredible, and could not be utilized by the most desperate expedient of miracle.90

Here we meet again the machinations of evil priests, preying on the superstitions of the common people. Massey’s own politics—one may not be surprised to learn—were radical and socialist. He was a Chartist spokesman against the prerogatives of the nobility. But his conspiracy orientation placed him squarely among the Gnostics. They believed that (so-called) reality must be rejected, in order to pass entirely into the Light. This has continued to be a potent idea, certainly into the 1960s and 70s Aquarian Age and beyond.

Massey and his fellow Freethinkers and Jesus-debunkers were actively publishing in the 1880s and into the early years of the twentieth century. Massey was widely traveled in America, too, as a lecturer. In fact, it may well have been Massey’s works—especially his 1883 book, The Natural Genesis, that suggested to Dowling that the evolving Ages of mankind were aligned with astrological Ages (which Blavatsky had designated “Messianic Cycles”), and that the “Jesus Age” was the Piscean Age.91

We may, in fact, further speculate on the very specific Theosophical context in which Dowling produced his book. In 1906, Charles Leadbeater had withdrawn, under threat
of dismissal, from the Theosophical Society, because of a potential scandal involving his having encouraged young boys to masturbate in order to release oppressive inhibitions. The details became public in 1908 when Annie Besant had him reinstated in the Society, which created a crisis among its membership and a schism in the Theosophical Society, with the London Lodge becoming independent for a while.

One of the aspects of the brand of Theosophy that Leadbeater and Besant promulgated was that it was more positive toward the historical Jesus and Christianity than the system of Theosophy that Blavatsky and her associate Henry Steel Olcott had formulated. Blavatsky wrote of Jesus as if he had been merely a Gnostic hierophant and spiritual teacher and prophet, and that his Divine identity was a pure fiction created by his later followers. Leadbeater allowed that Jesus was a real person and a real “Divine” figure, although, one might say, not the one described by traditional Christianity, but rather a person with a highly developed “Christ consciousness.” Jesus, in his interpretation, was an avatar of the spiritual Christ, who had reincarnated throughout history in a variety of individuals, and would continue to do so. Leadbeater, in fact, would soon find the Liberal Catholic Church, an esoteric mixture of High Church Anglicanism and Theosophy.

In this respect, Levi Dowling in his Aquarian Gospel clearly revealed himself as a coadjutor of Leadbeater rather than of Blavatsky. This link with the Leadbeater faction is evident in the many references to Leadbeater’s works in Coffeen’s introduction to the first edition of The Aquarian Gospel. In addition, assuming a link to Leadbeater provides a possible explanation for the disappearance of Coffeen’s lengthy introduction in all the editions after the first, beginning with the 1912 edition. By that time, Leadbeater’s activities with boys had become a matter of public scandal. As a result, relying heavily on him as a source in the introduction to The Aquarian Gospel would have been inexpedient. Dropping the introduction would have been a way to distance The Aquarian Gospel from an association with him.

In addition, in 1909, Leadbeater had “discovered” the young Indian boy Jiddu Krishnamurti and had begun promoting him as the new reincarnation of “the Christ” and “the Messiah.” Dowling and his admirers would most probably have found this, also, to have been—as one might say—“inexpedient,” if for no other reason than that Dowling himself had some claim to be the “messenger” of the coming age, rather than a John the Baptist to the boy Christ from India. Dropping the Leadbeater-infused introduction from The Aquarian Gospel, therefore, would have been the probable result of Dowling’s reaction to the continuing scandal within Theosophy over Leadbeater, and a way to have his text stand on its own.

The Aquarian Gospel tells the life of Jesus in a third-person narrative, not as Jesus’ autobiography. A garden full of gospels recently “dictated” by “Jesus” or his associates or contemporaries were available at the time. Spiritualist clairvoyants, from nearly the very beginning of the spiritualist movement, had taken dictation, as it were, not just
from the spirits of ordinary folks, but also from those of Jesus and his immediate disciples. There were also a number of self-admitted romances or novels, the authors of which, however, claimed to have been peculiarly inspired—verging on something like spirit possession—including such works as General Lew Wallace’s 1880 effort, Ben Hur; a Story of the Christ. Wallace, we may note, like Dowling, was a Hoosier member of the Church of Christ.

In 1885, spiritualist and Theosophist Susan Elizabeth Gay anonymously published a re-rendering of the Gospels, The Spirit of the New Testament; or, The Revelation of the Mission of Christ, by “A Woman.” According to the advertisements for the book, the author possessed an exquisitely wrought feminine sensibility—her “finer feminine intuitions” and her psychic ability as a medium of “higher inspirations.” Her “acute perception of the inner meaning of the words and works of Jesus and his disciples” had allowed her to “see” things there that had been always been hidden before (from those male priests and clerical authorities). This enabled her “to throw a flood of light on much that is obscure” in the Bible. The book therefore claimed an authority superior to that of a mere interpretation or explanation of the Gospel, and hinted that, in its reliance on an enlightened vision, its authority was antecedent to that of the canonical Gospels themselves. Not surprisingly, perhaps, her feminine sensibility allowed her to detect a rather more feminine Jesus than had been revealed before, and her exegesis itself was “at once unique and significant of the intellectual progress of Woman.”

In a similar way, Levi Dowling presented his book—however others may have regarded it—as a completion and fulfillment of the story of Jesus, rather than a refutation of or a replacement for it. It reformed Christianity, he believed, rather than refuting it. It filled in the gaps of the years of Jesus’ youth. It told the full story of his public ministry in Galilee. It provided details that allowed its readers to see the story, as reported in the New Testament, in a different context. Henry Coffeen called it a “fuller gospel record” meant to “revive and rejuvenate the old church and remodel it for a new cycle of life.” As he put it, “this new work, which is but a fuller restatement of the old, recovered by psychic method from the everlasting astral records, comes forth ‘out of the heavens’ true to the ancient ideals and Essenic environments and yet again it is true to the psychological discoveries of our times.” He expected that the ignorant and benighted traditional churches of Christianity would oppose it:

The church needs the new book, and hearts that yearn for the more complete life and words of Jesus need this new book, whatever may be the dictum of hirelings who sometimes stand in official places. Such would not recognize the Christ when he was among them in Judea in the olden time, and would not today.

Most assuredly implied here, but not directly stated, was that “the Christ” was in fact making his appearance again today, in the form of The Aquarian Gospel. Coffeen makes that claim a page later:
I have no hesitancy in saying, for myself, touching the personal character and ability of
the compiler of these records, for whom I have great respect, that I believe neither he nor any other living man could have produced this book without help from the higher planes of vision.

It has qualities, tone and temper, spiritual insight, ethical teachings, conformability to the age and country, charm so divine and values so high that it stands out and takes its place among the world’s most wonderful books. Let critics sneer if they must, and science ignore, and clerics gather their official robes about them and pass by; but the life of Jesus, the Divine Master, once walking up and down the ways of Judea and Galilee, in these pages breathes again upon the world.  

Dawning of the Age of Aquarius

Spiritualist authors—Dowling’s California associate James Peebles among them—had developed a theory that reduced Jesus to a misunderstood spirit medium, and all present-day spirit mediums as somewhat equivalent to Jesus. They assumed that the Gospel writers were mere instruments of the divine, or trance mediums.

Among the various gospels channeled by spiritualists, Levi Dowling included something in his that allows us to see the salesman and evangelist in him. Not only is Levi represented as the channel for the communication, he is also represented as present in the story itself, as the prophet and messenger of the New Age. According to The Aquarian Gospel, thousands of years before, the Egyptian teacher of Jesus foretold the coming of Levi—as Eva made clear in the book’s introduction:

About two thousand years ago Elihu, who conducted a school of the prophets in Zoan, Egypt, referred to Levi thus:

“This age will comprehend but little of the works of Purity and Love; but not a word is lost, for in the Book of God’s Remembrance a registry is made of every thought and word and deed;

“And when the world is ready to receive, lo, God will send a messenger to open up the book and copy from its sacred pages all the messages of Purity and Love.

“Then every man of earth will read the words of life in the language of his native land, and men will see the light.

“And man again will be at one with God.”

Eva also provided a selection from another manuscript, also channeled by Levi, in which “Visel, the goddess of wisdom”, commissioned Levi to the task of “Akashic Seer” Visel’s name, we may note, is a scramble of “Levi” with a sign for inversion—“s”—at its axis—and so is presumably Levi himself, in the person of his divine consort in a mystical union within him. She commanded Levi, as “message bearer of the Spirit Age,” to “go
forth into these mystic [Record] Galleries” and “take up your pen and write” what he found there.

Embedding yourself in the scripture that you are “transcribing” is a useful device for adding to your authority—as being the one foretold and commissioned. It increases the chances for the scripture’s successful distribution. It is a literary device similar to that used in the Mahayana sutras, in which the Buddha predicts a future time when these very sutras themselves, invisible for a time, would be revealed. The scriptures have the Buddha promise merit to those who copy and disseminate them. If Levi had read some of the Mahayana sutras then widely circulating in translation among Theosophists, perhaps he had recognized the potential of this device.

Many of Blavatsky’s ideas and terminology, developed in The Secret Doctrine appeared in The Aquarian Gospel or in other of Dowling’s writings. These included such ideas as the “Akashic Record” itself, but also, the notion of the evolution of humans into various “root races,” and the stories of the lost continents of Lemuria and Atlantis.

More than those single ideas, however, that link The Aquarian Gospel to Theosophy was the larger idea that it was a hidden scripture that would supersede all others. Many people assessed The Aquarian Gospel as a sheer fabrication created to diminish, if not entirely replace, the Biblical Gospels. And many people assessed Blavatsky’s The Secret Doctrine in the same way. It purported to be a massive commentary on a “root text.” That inner text, Blavatsky said, was The Book of Dzyan, which she had received from one of her mysterious masters in Tibet. It had been hidden away from profane eyes, but was, in reality, she said, the true seed text from which all other scriptures around the world had been derived, and of which they were all lesser reflections. It was in a now-extinct language, “Senzar,” and its source was ultimately extra-terrestrial. Again, alas, the original that Blavatsky claimed to have translated had mysteriously disappeared again after she had finished with it. Dowling would have been influenced both by Blavatsky’s Occultic view of truth—behind the appearances of the world—as well as by her production of a new scripture, meant to outrank and therefore to supersede all others.

The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society was headquartered in San Diego, at Point Loma, but this had become independent in 1895, and was at odds with the American Branch of the Adyar Theosophical Society, which, in 1912, moved from New York to Hollywood, California. Dowling initiated his Los Angeles students into “the great White Lodge,” a term that indicates his identification with the Leadbeater group. One curious item in The Aquarian Gospel suggests a kind of contradiction from, or competition with—the group at Point Loma. Eva wrote in the introduction that, “Early in life, when [Levi] was but a mere lad, he had a vision in which he was told that he was to ‘build a white city.’ This vision was repeated three times with years intervening. The building of the ‘white city’ was ‘The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ.’” Levi’s later
follower Anna Patrick told the story with a few more details, saying that Levi first had this vision when he was twenty years old:

...the veil of the beyond was lifted by the Mystic Masters and they said to Levi: “The Masters have need of thee, put on the whole armor of God and wait. The time has come when the Empire of Peace must be established. The Capital City shall be built in security. Its foundation shall be laid in the solid rock, and shall stand forever. In the midst of this city shall arise a temple far surpassing in grandure [sic] the temple of Solomon; and this white city and this temple shall be built in the land overshadowed with wings, and where the mountains dip into the sea.”

And thus to Los Angeles did Levi go, when he came to believe that the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy was at hand. But Katherine Tingley, who, shortly after 1897, began building the Center at Point Loma, the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity, as the headquarters of a branch broken from the main trunk of the Theosophical Society, wrote that, by establishing her Center, she was fulfilling a childhood vision she had of a “White City” where students could be educated in mystic wisdom. Her vision was probably influenced by the Masonic imagery of her grandfather—building the White City in the West was equivalent to rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem in a new location, and not just in the West but in the microcosm, the interior of the soul.

Theosophy, occultism, astrology, New Thought, and spiritualism all intermingled in the cultural climate of Southern California then, as they do now. Many New Thought devotees and Theosophical students had found their way to Los Angeles at the time, such as Frank Homer Curtiss and his wife Harriette Augusta Brown Curtiss. Frank was an “alternative” physician, as we would say today, and a passionate advocate of physical exercise regimens, numerology, and the tarot. Harriette was the “instrument” of “Rahmea, Priestess of the Flame,” the head of the “Order of Christian Mystics” and the “Order of the 15.” The Priestess gave through Harriette the teachings Curtiss published as the Blavatsky-inspired 1913 work, The Voice of Isis, in which Curtiss had referred to “cycles of fulfillment.” This, she pointed to a few years later—in 1921, after The Aquarian Gospel was widely known—as a reference to the Age of Aquarius. Or, more properly, to the “Age of Aquaria,” for by that time Curtiss had become the voice of “Aquaria,” the Holy Ghost’s name in the New Age, as she explained, following Dowling’s own gospel’s declaration that the Holy Spirit was feminine.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to look farther afield for the sources of Dowling’s “Age of Aquarius.” Those sources included the writings of French occultist Eliphas Lévi (aka Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810-1875), whom Dowling quoted in lectures he gave at his Los Angeles home, demonstrating that he had absorbed from him a predilection for magic, Kabbala, and astrology, probably through Arthur E. Waite’s translations of Levi’s works.
Levi’s residences in Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles, also call to mind two New Thought advocates of the time who triangulated their careers on these three cities. The first was self-made publishing entrepreneur, Charles Francis Haanel, who pioneered self-help seminars for business executives, who learned the same mix of pantheism and personal empowerment that people today still pay to hear under a variety of names. Haanel taught his students that their own will is identical to God’s, and that they can exercise that will, through “visualization,” as he called it, to bring about their own material success and achieve whatever their goals may be.

The other New Thought leader of the time who was active in the St. Louis-Chicago-Los Angeles triangle was William Walker Atkinson, who was intent on Eastern-based methods of self-realization, including yoga. Nevertheless, he was also an enthusiastic student of the Western Occult crafts of “psycho-magic,” as he called it, including clairvoyance, psychometry, telepathy, crystal gazing, astral travel, and divination. He was a tireless writer and publisher of books on the subjects of “character power,” “creative power,” “desire power,” “faith power,” “memory power,” “personal power,” “reasoning power,” “regenerative power,” “perceptive power,” “the art of salesmanship,” “the secret of success,” and the grandly-titled “Mastery of Being.”

Atkinson’s works are typical of the New Thought movement, which denied that the material world was real. Instead, “thoughts are things” and, conversely, one might say, things are just thoughts, and so may be changed by changing one’s thoughts. This is because the world and its weal and woe is created by our minds, and “the body is only the instrument by which the mind acts.” With this conviction, one may hope for the perfection of mind over matter and for the healing of the body through right thought.

The Aquarian Commonwealth

Levi Dowling was listed in the 1911 Los Angeles City Directory, modestly, as a teacher. He had, in fact, become a New Age mystic dynamo, the center of grand expectations, based on the initial popularity of The Aquarian Gospel among spiritualists, occultists, and New Thought devotees. He called himself “Levi d’Guru,” undoubtedly thinking that nom de plume was humorous. He was a “true Illuminate,” teaching “Biopneuma,” a course of lessons in “the true science of the Great Breath,” that is, yogic mastery. It included prohibitions against tight clothing, sexual impurity, tobacco smoking, impure language, and the use of drugs and alcohol. It included admonitions to engage in deep breathing of “ozone”-filled air, “proper willing,” and “forceful thinking,” daily outdoor exercise, bathing, controlling one’s temper, masticating each bite of food twenty times, keeping regular waking and sleeping hours, and keeping regular times for eating, for defecation, and for one’s devotions—that is, meditation. This meant that one should “practice concentration of magnetic force upon yourself and others at least two hours a day.”
Levi now equated his term “Biopneuma” with the Holy Spirit, adopting an overtly Gnostic view that encouraged entering “The Great Silence” to be filled with the Biopneuma in order to become an Illuminate. To achieve this, Levi recommended the recitation of a formula that he said he had repeated to himself “for forty long years.” Then the clouds had parted and “the glory of the Lord” had shown forth and “the Mysteries of the Ages” had been revealed and had become “as an open book.” It was “Wisdom! Wisdom! It must be mine; Light! Light! I will see the true light; Illumination! Illumination! I will attain unto divine illumination, through Jesus Christ, my Lord.”

Levi had established himself as the “National Hierophant” and “National Seer” of “The Aquarian Commonwealth,” a fledgling socialistic Occult brotherhood and mutual aid society headquartered at his house on Figueroa Avenue. At its height, its members numbered perhaps a few hundred. Eva had become the organization’s “National Scribe.” Membership was open to individuals around the world—One dollar a month qualified a member to receive an insignia button and monthly mimeographed lecture notes of an ongoing series of teachings that Levi continued to record from the Akashic record. It included material on Kabbala and on other complex systems of Biblical allegory. It also contained speculations on esoteric sexual practices with a strong admixture of Indian tantra:

The Tree of Life is SEX, with its two pole connection in each human, mystically called the REINS, and in East Indian literature Ida and Pingala. The fruit of this tree is its concentrated forces, and comes into existence because in the AIR man BREATHES, there is a VITAL FORCE of life, called “Spiro” in Greek, and “Spirit” in English. It is this same force, mechanically concentrated, that gives us our electric lights, runs our street cars and elevators as well as the human and animal body.

Now, it is the concentration of this Spiro in the air we breathe that, in its union with the MAGNETIC CURRENT that FLOWS THROUGH ALL, becomes the SPIREMA in the Greek Bible. In plain English, the concentrated life force, the FIRE OF LIFE IN SEX, the FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE. And as true as its use in generation procreates and brings to earth human beings in new human bodies, just so true is it that when men and WOMEN learn to USE the SAME FIRE and fruit of life in regeneration that they now use in GENERATION and PLEASURE, they will have found the SECRET OF LIFE and WILL SURELY cease to die.

But this secret cannot and will not be given to the race as a WHOLE until selfishness leaves man in a greater state of freedom than he now lives in. MAN must find the secret of the way to live in sweetness, Peace and plenty without owning even as much as the clothes on his back. Then want, sickness and death will leave the land and all mankind shall be richer than the richest today, without a single earthly possession that he can call his own in the way that man owns things today. TODAY this secret is occasionally given to advanced natures of sweetness, learning and unselfishness. But it is always transmitted in exchange of feelings and not by words, and those who do receive it never tell of it. Nor do they ever die like common mortals. Nor do they remain
long on earth, long simply because they can, but they leave the body for a vacation when they choose, with as much ease as the ordinary man leaves the house. We state further, that regeneration as it is taught in the world today is a mistake and will NEVER do the things it is believed to do. CELIBACY has always failed and ALWAYS will. Sex was made for regeneration as well as for Generation, and, in fact, sex would NEVER have been made for the purpose of begetting species. Its value is yet unknown to modern man. In twos Gods are, in twos man came, and in twos we must return. The secret of secrets is hidden in sex, and this secret man must learn.

The mortal mind in its three parts, and the body MUST dip to the bottom of ALL there is to dip to, or in, and become WISE in ALL, and WHOLLY SATISFIED with EVERY PHASE of emotion, sensation and life, known to all the world OUTSIDE the sweet repose in the ark, or Garden of Eden, or at oneness with God in man, before we can enter the Father’s house, the citadel of Jesus, the BONY CAVERN in the forehead, above and between the eyes.

Dowling was evidently a quick study, but now he was clearly not “preaching Christ crucified,” but rather “Christ illumined.” Nevertheless, one can imagine the old Sunday School master using the same methods and accounting and lesson plan books, the same blackboard techniques, the same weekly lectures mailed to paying subscribers, but now directed not to young students of the Bible, but to adult students of sex magic.

Entrepreneur that he still was, he hopefully divided the world into councils, provinces, and chapters—the Pacific and the Atlantic, for example, and assigned these territories to individuals to cultivate. In payment for the Atlantic franchise of the Brotherhood—there were commissions for new members (perhaps in a pyramid recruitment system)—the Aquarians acquired The New Age magazine. This had been a somewhat puffy spiritualist and New Thought journal, published in Boston by Frederick Pease Fairfield. After the Aquarians took it over, they brought it to Los Angeles, changed its name to The Aquarian Age Magazine, made its graphic design more sophisticated, and used it as the official organ of the Aquarian Commonwealth. Aquarian member Frank J. French edited it. If recruitment was organized in a true pyramid form, it was in the same multi-level marketing pattern that would manifest itself in the later, very typical conjunction of New Thought (“create material success, health, and wealth through mental power”) and the New Age.

Levi’s associates in the Aquarian Commonwealth included, first and foremost, Eva, who was his amanuensis. Levi may have first produced The Aquarian Gospel by automatic writing (that is, written by his own hand while he was in trance), which Eva would have then transcribed on the typewriter. Or, he may have voiced the work in trance, with Eva taking it down in writing. Or, he may have simply written down drafts of the manuscript in his normal conscious state at night, and simply given them to Eva in the morning, explaining to her that he had been inspired. In any event, she also produced the
typewritten transcriptions of his weekly lectures, copies of which she mailed to subscribing members of the Aquarian Brotherhood.

The core members of the Aquarian Commonwealth included three spirit mediums who had already a longstanding reputation in spiritualist circles for their writings, their trance mediumship, and their abilities as spiritual healers. By this time they had all moved to Los Angeles. They were William Wilberforce Juvenal Colville, Nellie Beighle, and James Martin Peebles. All three had supplemented their spiritualism with a study of occultism, comparative religion, Theosophy, and New Thought, and had written and spoken in public about the “harmony” of all of these. Beighle, for example, had published The Book of Knowledge; Psychic Facts in 1903. Colville had a long career in trying to reconcile various forms of esotericism, most particularly spiritualism, Theosophy, and New Thought—all under the principle, he said, of “the supremacy of mind over matter.” As an example of this reconciliation, he believed that the Age’s “metaphysical movement,” was in fact “the second coming of Christ.” This, he believed, happens “in ourselves” when we are true to our inner light. And, he argued, it was something not comprehended by Christians after the first century or so, who “degenerated into extremes” and “then put the second coming of Christ far into a remote period.” Colville was also a writer of “Occult fiction.” In The Garden of Eden, “the problem of universal religion is presented for solution.” His Onesimus Templeton, “a psychical romance,” was advertised as occupying the neverland between fact and fiction—“Though this work is professedly a novel, it abounds in short essays and sparkling dialogues exploratory of the Spiritual Philosophy and all things related thereto.” Another of his books, Dashed Against the Rock, would also have to be shelved in the fiction-as-fact section. This book by Colville was “a scientific and mystical novel, dealing with spiritual laws and the latest attainments in practical science.” Actually, it was essentially a promotional piece for Colville’s friend, con man and crank inventor of perpetual motion machines, John Worrell Keely. It “contains authentic interviews with John Worrell Keely and introduces in popular form amazing information concerning Nature’s mysteries.”

Having James Peebles associate himself with the Aquarian group was particularly auspicious because of his place in the forefront of the spiritualist movement. He was also an early—although eventually disgruntled—associate of Theosophist founders Blavatsky and Olcott. Peebles was eventually installed as the “President of the Council Apostolica” of the Aquarian Commonwealth in May 1911. He also contributed a couple of articles to The Aquarian New Age Magazine, but by June, he had dissociated himself from the group, excusing himself on the grounds that his own writing and lecturing commitments left him little time to participate in their affairs.

Peebles was a friend of Edgar Lucien Larkin, an astronomer associated with the Lowe Observatory, who was also recruited into the group of budding Aquarians. One writer described Larkin this way:

...an elderly occultist who for some years before his death in 1924 ran the Mount Lowe
Observatory in California—not to be confused with the nearby Mount Wilson Observatory. Whereas the latter is a great scientific institution, the Mount Lowe Observatory was operated as a tourist attraction by the Pacific Electric Railway in connection with their Mount Lowe Inn. Larkin showed visitors the stars through a small telescope until in the 1930s the telescope mechanism broke down and the Inn burned.\(^{115}\)

Larkin was tied to some of the most exotic manifestations of occultism in Southern California. This included his involvement with Frederick Spencer Oliver, a young man who had channeled a revelation from a character named “Phyllos the Thibetan,” entitled A Dweller on Two Planets; or, The Dividing of the Way. It was first published by Oliver’s mother in Los Angeles in 1905, and so was more or less contemporaneous with The Aquarian Gospel and added to the lore passed among the members of the Aquarian Commonwealth.

This work of speculative fiction—another of the primary sources for the New Age movement, whose adherents have often tended to regard it as more than fiction—described a hidden Lemurian village still in existence down a secret tunnel in the center of Mount Shasta. Professor Larkin was supposed to have invented a “spinthariscope” which allowed him to view this hidden village.\(^{116}\) In the core of Mount Shasta, he wrote, lay a hollowed-out cavern, where a mysterious object lay, a sort of prototype of the monolith in 2001: A Space Odyssey. It was, in the words of the title of his 1916 self-published book, A Matchless Altar of the Soul, Symbolized as a Shining Cube of Diamond, One Cubit in Dimensions, and Set within the Holy of Holies in All Grand Esoteric Temples of Antiquity. It was the catalyst for a human evolutionary or millenarian jump into the New Age.

Spence’s book described a meeting of sages around that sacred object. The meeting served as an initiation and a commission ceremony.\(^{117}\) Its description is an imaginative reconstruction of a Theosophical Lodge meeting, but it is also similar to Dowling’s own rendition in The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus’ final initiation and commission at a meeting of world sages in Alexandria.

Another enthusiastic member of the Aquarian Commonwealth was Harry Gaze. He was a New Thought advocate of self-healing and the author of the ambitiously-titled How to Live Forever; The Science and Practice, first self-published in 1900, and then published in Chicago by sexologist and women’s rights activist, Alice Bunker Stockham. At the time he joined the Aquarian Brotherhood, he was writing Life, Youth and Success, Constructive Psychology from A to Z, an Alphabet of Affirmation, and teaching classes in esoterica—including one “to advanced students only” on sexual secrets (“auto-genetics”). He would later publish a few children’s books, meant to teach their young readers about the joys of creating a magical wonderland with one’s imagination, in the same way, one could say, that adults needed to learn how to benefit themselves from creating their own myths and fairy tales. Gaze’s children’s books included The Goblin’s
Glen: A Story of Childhood’s Wonderland; Coppertop: The Queer Adventures of a Quaint Child; its sequel Coppertop Cruises: The Wonderful Voyage of the Good Ship “Queercraft”; and The Merry Piper: or, the Magic Trip of the Sugar Bowl Ship.\textsuperscript{118} He also became an effective leader of the New Thought movement, both in America and abroad.\textsuperscript{119}

Other active members of the Aquarian Brotherhood who provided the bulk of its funding included Dr. William C. Watson, a physician, and James M. Wishart, who owned and operated the New Age Gold Saving Plant in Pasadena, where he reprocessed gold ore. Ex-Christian preacher Dowling was particularly effective in attracting other disaffected Christian clergymen to his organization. James Peebles had been a Universalist minister before he turned to spiritualism. Other clergymen among the Aquarian Brotherhood included ex-Catholic priest Thaddeus Vincent Jakimowicz, ex-Baptist ministers Younger Pitts Rothwell and Charles Clark Pierce, ex-Presbyterian minister Thomas Caunce, and ex-Methodist minister Lawson H. Worthington.\textsuperscript{120}

The spiritual development that The Aquarian Gospel says that Jesus underwent allowed him to become the manifestation of the “Love of God.” In other words, “after thirty years of strenuous life the man [Jesus] had made his body fit to be the temple of the holy breath and Love took full possession.”\textsuperscript{121} This suggests that Levi himself, as the new messenger, would have trained himself in order to be a fit vessel for the spirit. And indeed his devotees said that he had spent forty years in the Great Silence. Levi, in his course on Biopneuma, made clear that, on the authority of his personal experience, the power of telepathic control over another person was one of the real results that meditators practicing his techniques could expect to achieve.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine Levi Dowling as a yogic athlete. In 1907, during the time he had just finished channeling the spirit of Jesus the Christ in the wee hours of each morning, Levi gave a deposition to an examiner for the Pension Bureau in applying for a military pension (He had just turned sixty-three years old). At the time, he was not quite 5’ 11” and weighed two hundred and twenty pounds—not exactly the picture of a tantric adept.\textsuperscript{122}

He was an indefatigable spiritual salesman and organizer, however. In the summer of 1910, the Aquarian Commonwealth advertised to find members to establish a commune—in a kind of joint stock project—in the San Gabriel Valley, in parcels of the Etiwanda Vinyards. “Levi, the Transcriber of the Aquarian Gospel,” the advertisement read, “has personally inspected this property, and believes it to be an ideal homestead site, and the opportunity of securing the lands most excellent.”\textsuperscript{123} They did not succeed in attracting many, if any, settlers.

The activities of the Aquarian Commonwealth multiplied rapidly. In January 1911, the Aquarian College of Teachers and Healers opened, offering correspondence courses, as well as weekly lectures and instruction leading to two degrees—the “A. Ph. D.,” the
“Doctor of Aquarian Philosophy,” and the “A. H. M.,” the “Master of Aquarian Healing.” These degrees trained “Aquarian Ministers” and “Aquarian Healers.” Among the teachers were the Dowlings, James Peebles, Harry Gaze, and Edgar Larkin.

In May, the “First Aquarian Congress of North America” was held in Los Angeles—mostly at the Dowling’s house, with resolutions passed and officers ordained and a fundraising campaign launched. In June, the Aquarian Age Magazine noted that, through the generosity of the Dowlings’ wealthy patrons, Dr. and Mrs. Watson, “Levi has gone into semi-retirement in the mountains of the gem of the Ocean, Catalina Island, where he may more easily complete the transcriptions from the Akashic Records of the gospels of Enoch and Melchizedec and other parts of the Sacred Books of the Aquarian Age.” But before Levi took full advantage of that resort, he went to Chicago to supervise the printing of a new edition of The Aquarian Gospel. Overwork while he was in Chicago and the rigors of the return trip over the Rockies took their toll on his heart.

Levi Dowling, the “Aquarian Hierophant,” “stepped behind the thin curtain that separates the ‘here from the hereafter’” on August 13, 1911. His was a sudden death—an “acute dilation of the heart”—while riding the train in South Pasadena, accompanied by Eva and Leo en route to their “resting place in the foothills.” It must have been a shock for his followers, who, if they seriously believed his tantric teachings, would have been inclined to think that he was immortal. A memorial service was held for him on August 17th at Rosedale Cemetery in Los Angeles. His body was cremated.

In a special session of the Aquarian Congress immediately after Levi’s funeral, those present elected Eva to take his place. “Under the title Leva,” the account read, “she will, by the help of the Eternal Masters and the direction of the Holy Spirit, take up the work.”

After Levi’s death, Eva and Leo continued living in their house on Figueroa Street, together with Eva’s younger sister Adelle. Leo found a job as an actuarial clerk for a life insurance company. He and his mother published two volumes of Levi’s collected lectures, Self-Culture; a course of lessons on developing the physical, unfolding the soul, attaining unto the spiritual and Complete Course in Biopneuma: the true science of the Great Breath. Although Levi’s books—most particularly The Aquarian Gospel—continued to sell steadily, the Aquarian Commonwealth itself and all its various activities, including The Aquarian New Age Magazine, rapidly collapsed after Levi’s death. The ideas of the “New Age” and “The Age of Aquarius” and the cosmic pantheism and theosophical syncretism that were an integral part of Levi’s book, however, all gained a life of their own and spawned countless reincarnations.

Eva Dowling, after a short illness, died in Los Angeles at the house in which she lived with her son on January 9, 1923. Their Aquarian associate, the Reverend Charles
Pierce, officiated at the funeral services, which were conducted at their home. Eva, like Levi, was cremated, but at the Los Angeles Crematory. She bequeathed her son Leo her half-ownership in the house and lot at 503 South Figueroa Avenue, which she and her sister Adelle jointly owned. “She left sufficient assets to defray the expenses of her last sickness and death,” he told the Bureau of Pensions examiner.Leo also inherited from her the rights over The Aquarian Gospel and Levi’s other books. These included compilations of his Kabbala-filled lectures in which Levi had organized the events in the life of Jesus as described in The Aquarian Gospel according to a kind of Midrash around the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Leo marketed these works until he died in Los Angeles in August 1974.  

The influence of The Aquarian Gospel on the New Age movement has been extensive. It began almost immediately after the first publication of Dowling’s book. Joseph Harris’ The Triune Mind and the New Aquarian Age (the Age of Woman) 1914 to 4414 A.D; the Conscious and the Subconscious Mind and the Soul Mind Explained is just as one example of direct influence. It was written by a Utah phrenologist in 1924 and published in Los Angeles. It reproduced great gobs of The Aquarian Gospel in its text. So did The Mystical Life of Jesus, written in 1929 by Spencer Lewis, the founder of AMORC (Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis), which became the largest Rosicrucian group in the world.  But these books were not unique. Dowling’s text was cut and pasted, in part or in full, into a plethora of New Age books, from the time of its publication to the present. Numerous translations of the book have been published over the years.  

Beyond the actual text, however, the ideas in it—the Age of Aquarius, the Akashic Record, the Cosmic Christ, Jesus in Asia, and on and on—became an indelible part of the New Age movement itself. They surfaced in the 1930s through the 1950s in psychic literature by such channelers as Edgar Cayce and Elizabeth Clare Prophet and in the travel writings of eccentric explorer and Theosophist Nicholas Roerich. Theosophists almost immediately took the explicit title of the Aquarian Age and applied it seamlessly to the “New Cycle” they were expecting. Theosophist Alice Bailey and her “Tibetan sage Djwhal Khul,” for example, used the language of the “New Age” interchangeably with the “Aquarian Age” in her 1948 essay, The Reappearance of the Christ. Proponents of New Thought did the same to Levi’s “Age of Aquarius,” applying it to the “New Age.” Even as early as 1918, a group in Manchester, New Hampshire, calling itself the National Astrological Society, reformed itself into the “Universal Church of Aquarius” and offered its acolytes instruction on becoming “magi.”  

Nevertheless these were fringe movements. Their terminology and ideas did not begin to pervade the larger culture until the counterculture eruption in the late 1960s. The entry point of “The Age of Aquarius” into the larger culture was the series of astrology columns that Gavin Arthur wrote for the San Francisco Oracle during its heyday in 1966-68. Public discussions that Arthur conducted with astrologer, Theosophist, and avant-garde musician Dane Rudhyar during this time, on the subject of when the
Aquarian Age would begin, also contributed to the spread of the idea.\textsuperscript{138} It became more generally known in the wider culture through the song, “The Age of Aquarius,” in the off-Broadway 1968 musical Hair, and the song’s 1969 hit version by The Fifth Dimension in their medley “Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In” on their album “The Age of Aquarius.” In the years since then, the “Aquarian Age” has replicated itself into the farthest trivial recesses of world culture. It has appeared on everything from massage-parlor matchbook covers to Japanese Anime characters. It further expanded into the wider culture with the publication of Marilyn Ferguson’s 1980 pop sociology book, The Aquarian Conspiracy, which drew together, as part of the Aquarian Age, various sociological, spiritual, and political phenomena, and solidified the image of the New Age as a cultural movement.\textsuperscript{139}

Dowling’s gospel itself, over the past hundred years, has also had a potent effect on the formation of other new religions. The Aquarian Gospel has stimulated wave after wave of what might be called the “Further Adventures of Jesus,” as avatar of the Cosmic Christ principle and the modern-day dawning of the Aquarian Age. This was taught by Guy Ballard, founder of the “I Am” Movement in California in 1932, and is still taught in the Aquarian Academy of Robert E. Birdsong in Eureka, California.

The Aquarian Gospel has spread, in a particular way, to Korea as well, connected to the syncretistic Unification Church headed by the Reverend Sun Myung-Moon. One of the first proselytizers for the Church in America, a Korean missionary named Young Oon Kim, used The Aquarian Gospel and other New Age material as part of her presentations on the new church founded by the Reverend Moon.\textsuperscript{140}

The Aquarian Gospel continues to claim a place at the center of the New Age movement, with some of its devotees regarding it as “the most important book ever written.”\textsuperscript{141} Some of the organized Aquarian groups have incorporated into their beliefs the millenarianism of the New Age, with an apocalyptic tenor, together with the notion that hidden or extraterrestrial intelligences are guiding the evolutionary development of the human race. Jesus’ home was “off planet,” so to speak, and he and other “Christs” have manifested here to act as catalysts for human evolution. Jesus, according to one baroque variation on this theme, was an n-dimensional being projected into simpler four-dimensional space-time. He was a quantum fluctuation, yielding zero-point energy.\textsuperscript{142} The Christ, coming in a divine invasion of saucers or comets, would be beaming up those who had plugged into this energy and had “dropped the body,” and had thereby become “transhuman,” a thoroughly Gnostic goal.

**The Aryan Race and The “New Cycle”**

The growth from the germ of the notion of a millenarian “New Cycle,” after it was grafted onto notions of race and human evolution, occult histories and priestly conspiracies, has produced some strange fruit over the past hundred years. In Germany, Nazi theory and practice looked for the evolution, through controlled
breeding, of the Aryan race and the elimination of “lesser” races in a thousand-year
Age. In Southern California, the Heaven’s Gate cult, convinced that the Aquarian Age
would begin with their ascension to a higher level, committed suicide en masse in 1997,
expecting to be teleported a la Star Trek onto starships that they imagined were trailing
the Hale-Bopp comet.

Among the hundreds of groups that have taken up the name “Aquarian” are the
Aquarian Age Teaching and the Aquarian Age Educational Group in Sedona, Arizona,
and the Aquarian Church of Universal Service in Portland, Oregon. Most uninhibitedly
fun, perhaps, is the Aquarian Perspectives Inter Planetary Mission, a UFO group whose
leaders receive messages from “Futron” and the “Rainbow Star Legionnaires.” The
leaders are a couple, “Dr. RA-Ja ‘Merk’ Dove” (aka Stephen Stass) and “Prof. Moi-RA
‘Lady of the Sun’/ ‘Quan Yin’ Dove” (aka Rosalia Borja). They are “Intergalactic
Ambassadors from Venus and the Pleiades, Global Star Shepherds, and Anchors for the
Taos Ashram of Ascended Masters.”

More significantly, The Aquarian Gospel was also present at the founding of the Nation
of Islam. Timothy “Noble” Drew “Ali,” a railway worker from North Carolina living in
New Jersey, incorporated much of Dowling’s Gospel into the first nineteen chapters of
his scripture, The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America (sometimes
called the “Circle Seven Koran”). He established his church in 1913, very shortly after
Dowling’s death. The Aquarian Gospel continued to live on, synthesized with plenty of
other sources, in Elijah Muhammad’s writings. And it has continued to make itself felt
in the literature of the Five Percent Nation, called the Nation of Gods and Earth,
-founded in 1964 by Clarence Smith (Clarence 13X). The Five Percent Nation points out
that Dowling’s Jesus went to study and was initiated in Egypt, which is in Africa, and
that (White) Romans killed him, and that the coming Age will include some Black on
White payback. In this way, The Aquarian Gospel has conveyed to later generations a
message of racist evolution as part of its subtext.

Levi Dowling, who thought, perhaps, that his Aquarian Gospel would provide a basis for
a unifying, inclusive form of Christianity, beyond dogmas and creeds, would
undoubtedly have been surprised at the uses to which his scripture has been put. But
the unity that he envisioned required the acceptance of a conspiracy theory in which all
orthodox forms of Christianity had to be subverted in favor of an esoteric form. And
conspiracy theorists are hardly known for their ecumenism or tolerance, even when the
conspiracy is merely an Aquarian one.

They should not have been surprised. To achieve a unity of culture and religion, the
New Age downplays or denies the distinctive truth claims of each culture and religion it
uses. Each is welcomed into a multicultural universal brotherhood as long as it appears
dressed as a simplified, disembodied, and spiritualized version of itself—that is, as long
as it accepts being made merely relative. Impervious particularity of form is a scandal
and an affront. The various races of peoples and their religions are melted down and refashioned into a super-race and a super-religion.

All must yield to the New Order of the Ages, which dissolves distinctions in its universal solvent, its Philosopher’s Stone, its elixir of youth, its permanent revolution. All contrary evidence, all protest, must disappear behind a willing suspension of disbelief, into a vision of a new utopia cleansed of dissonant elements through an alchemy applied by the play of the dialectical imagination. Woe to those, Black or White, Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist, whose distinctive claims or discrete identities resist this transmutation. But the “Coming Race” and its über-religion, whenever it is conjured, always betrays marks of what the conjurer has pretended to make disappear. It never really escapes its origins. Its imagined future is always a parody of the present. Its materialized spirit—when examined closely—always resembles the conjurer who has called it forth.

Frederick Fairfield, the editor of The New Age Magazine, subscribed to the mailed typewritten manuscript teachings that Dowling offered for sale to the Aquarian Brotherhood. He glowingly reviewed a collection of them, entitled Truisms of the Great Masters, in his magazine. Included in his comments was this:
It is full of “meat,” but all of Levi’s writings are, for that matter. Where does he “get the goods”? I don’t care, do you? I believe he has access to the sources he claims. But what matters it? Is truth something that somebody says? No, truth is something which I discover. And your truth is something which you discover. If some man says something which appeals to you and calls forth a truth which was sleeping within, then be thankful, and offer praise to the Giver of All Truth. Truth is always Internal. Truth is always Recognition. Truth is always Self-Evidence.

This is the message of the New Age. It deliberately brackets objective truth. It makes truth entirely subjective. It recommends the willing suspension of disbelief as the highest form of knowledge. It dotes on the play of youth rather than yielding to the authority of elders. Readers of Munchausenesque stories of Western seekers traveling to Tibet can say that these are revelations of veritable events, but when faced with massive evidence to the contrary, can also say that they do not care whether any of it actually happened.

The protagonists—and the authors—of occult fiction present themselves as moving through a world of discoverable evidence, common sense, and testable structures of objective truth. But that is as much a sham as the robes covered with luminous paint that spirit mediums don in materialization séances in the dark. When the lights are turned on—when contradictory evidence is presented—the mediums turn against those who have exposed them, saying that what they were presenting was simply an entertainment. Those who have exposed it, they say, have not comprehended the spirit in which it was offered. They have not understood that truth resides in the imagined world created in the performance, not in the stage machinery that produced it.
The view that the real truth lies in what appears, not in what occluded little minds offer as objectively real—provides both method and content to occult fiction, in which the villains (internal and external) are those who do not understand this view. By the time Theosophy appeared in the 1870s, self-described advanced thinkers regarded Christianity itself—insofar as it had not progressed to the self-destruction of its own authority—as having betrayed the revolution (or even the Protestant Reformation). That revolution aimed at making immanent the highest spiritual truth, which is that truth is a hall of mirrors, all of which reflect back onto the inner ineffable self. The universe is a whispering gallery of sounds singing our own name.

By 1910 Dowling was envisioning The Aquarian Gospel as the first volume of a trilogy that would be called "The New Age Sacred Scripture.” The second volume would be entitled “The Philosophy of the Aquarian Age.” It would “comprise the postulates upon which all religions and true philosophies are founded, together with a full report of the great work of the Seven Sages of the Aquarian Age.” It would be a collection that included the canonical gospels but also a great mass of heterodox and apocryphal writings. The third volume, “The Aquarian Key,” would be “a book of ethics giving in detail the duties of every man to himself, to every other man, to inferior life, to angel, to cherubim and to God.”

The trilogy would present Christianity as only one limited manifestation of a higher truth. Jesus is only the “Christ” of the Piscean Age. There are many other “Christs.” They are all fragmentary reflections of a higher truth that resides in the self.

Dowling transcribed the first portion of “The Indian Gospel of Jesus the Christ of the Piscean Age” by “Lamaas” from the “Book of God’s Remembrance” and published it in The New Age Magazine in 1910. Its narrative has Jesus spending his youth in India. The sage Lamaas reveals that Jesus “read the Sacred Books [of the East] with interest” and that “The Gospel of the Buddha of enlightenment was his delight.” One day, a Brahmin asks him if there is “yet a power in Brahmic faith or Buddhic faith to save the world?” which is to say, is there a universal truth here in the religions of India? Jesus replies:

7 All truth is one. Through his appointed messengers God gave this truth to man, and out of it man formulates his doctrines, creeds, and ethic laws.

8 In ages long ago men thought that they had every useful phase of truth condensed to meet the needs of every man. They formed some postulates, drew up a form of doctrine, made a creed and then declared, “What we have written is the secret Doctrine of the gods.

9 And men who found it tiresome to think, accepted without question what these good men wrote; and it was well, for what they wrote served well the purpose of the age in which they lived.
10 But time passed on and men required added light, and other good men seized the truth of God from which they formulated other postulates, made other creeds...

All of these teachings (and one can assume that, for Dowling, Jesus’s public teachings would be subject to the same fate) “do not light up the mountain top. Their lights are darkness for the people of this age. The world needs higher lights; and they will shine.” Dowling has Jesus say:

23 An old religion cannot be reformed; when one disturbs its postulates, its doctrines and its laws, it goes to pieces, like an ancient fabric in a gust of wind.

24 Go to, and from the one great truth of God, form postulates, and state in language clear and most concise, the doctrines of the Deity that people of the coming age require and can comprehend.

25 The people of the coming age will walk in higher planes of life than did the people of the ages gone.

But is this really Jesus speaking? It certainly is Gnostic hierophant Levi Dowling, trying to break free of the chains of historical contingency. And it is the spirit of the Age of Aquarius, articulating its progressive religion. Truth is subjective and relative. It is an industrial light and magic show: Journey to the stars, but always follow your own feelings, and may the Force be with you.

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2. Let us acknowledge, however, that keepers of the millennial Aquarian Age flame, have found various systems of exegesis in order to explain the dawn of the Age of Aquarius as occurring anywhere from two hundred years ago, to six hundred years in the future. But, according to some, it has already died, killed either by Hell’s Angels at Altamont or by Charles Manson or by Marshall Applewhite, or at the moment that a child of hippie parents registered as a Young Republican.

3. William Dowling, of Scots-Irish descent, was born August 28, 1800, in Pennsylvania; he died December 12, 1873, in Kendallville, Indiana. Rachel Biggers was born on March 7, 1803 in Washington County, Pennsylvania; she died June 18, 1882, in Kendallville and was buried there at Lake View Cemetery; see Frances Dingman Chapter, DAR, Noble County Indiana Tombstone Inscriptions (Kendallville, 1935), 275.
4. Affidavit of Mahala L. Weaver, December 4, 1911; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File (Application 973.948; Certificate 734.797); Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; National Archives Building (NAB), Washington, D.C.


6. Millenial Harbinger (Bethany, Va.), vol. 4, no. 7 (July 1833): 326; see also Alexander Hall, comp., The Christian Register; containing a statistical report of the Christian Churches in Europe and America (Loydsville, Ohio, 1848), 6. And, for William Dowling's ministry at Mount Gilead, see History of Morrow County and Ohio (Chicago: O. L. Basin, 1880), 302, 308, 311.

7. Lisbon post office, Allen township: "The Disciple Church was first started at Lisbon; but before it was completed it was taken down, and the material was conveyed to Kendallville, where it was used in building the present church”—Weston A. Goodspeed and Charles Blanchard, eds., Counties of Whitley and Noble, Indiana; Historical and Biographical (Chicago: F. A. Battey, 1882), part 2, 133. William Worth Dowling (1834-1920, b. Ohio) (m. Julia, b. 1839, Ind.) and John Biggers Dowling (b. 1832, Ohio) (m. Rebecca, b. 1830, Ohio; Grace Eggleston). His other siblings included Josephine E. (m. William W. Glosser) (1847-1933), Miranda (m. David Lash), Melinda (m. Horace Taber) (1827-1894), Matilda C. (m. John W. Berry), and Mahala L. (m. Samuel Weaver). See [William Worth Dowling,] "Emigratus," Front Rank (St. Louis), October 7, 1911. (The article is unsigned, but on a copy that Eva Dowling submitted to the Bureau of Pensions and is now in her pension casefile, she has written that it was authored by William Worth Dowling. Its final sentiment, too, makes it clear that he wrote it.) Information on Levi's sisters and their marriages also comes from Noble County marriage records, obituaries, and cemetery records, transcribed at http://www.rootsweb.com/~innoble/index.htm and from "Early Marriage Records, 1844,” The Ohio Liberal (Mansfield), vol. 11, no. 49, March 19, 1884.


12. Frances Dingman Chapter, DAR, Marriage Records of Noble County, Indiana, 1859-1875 (Kendallville, Ind., 1942). Sylvia’s parents: Leonard Demmon was born June 14, 1814, in Chesterfield, Massachusetts; he died on February 9, 1899, in Kendallville, Indiana; Nancy Boughey was born July 19, 1820; she died on February 15, 1908, in Kendallville. See the transcription of the obituary of Leonard and Nancy Demmon at http://www.rootsweb.com/~innoble/Obituaries/De.htm. Among Sylvia’s brothers and sisters were Isaac, Olivia, Roselda, Josephine, Gertrude, Lenna, and Elwood. Professor Isaac Newton Demmon (1842-1920) (m. 1871 to Emma Regal, settled in Ann Arbor, Mich.), Olivia (1846-1912) (m. George P. Alexander), Roselda A. (1849-1947) (m. William T. Holsinger and Linus Pike), Josephine (1847-1933) (m. William W. Glosser and William Palmer), Gertrude J. (1854-) (m. Milton L. Blaney), Lenna (1858-1879), and Elwood F. Demmon (ca. 1862-). Among Sylvia’s brothers and sisters were Isaac, Olivia, Roselda, Josephine, Gertrude, Lenna, and Elwood. Professor Isaac Newton Demmon (1842-1920) (m. 1871 to Emma Regal, settled in Ann Arbor, Mich.), Olivia (1846-1912) (m. George P. Alexander), Roselda A. (1849-1947) (m. William T. Holsinger and Linus Pike), Josephine (1847-1933) (m. William W. Glosser and William Palmer), Gertrude J. (1854-) (m. Milton L. Blaney), Lenna (1858-1879), and Elwood F. Demmon (ca. 1862-). Sylvia’s parents: Leonard Demmon was born June 14, 1814, in Chesterfield, Massachusetts; he died on February 9, 1899, in Kendallville, Indiana; Nancy Boughey was born July 19, 1820; she died on February 15, 1908, in Kendallville. See the transcription of the obituary of Leonard and Nancy Demmon at http://www.rootsweb.com/~innoble/Obituaries/De.htm. Among Sylvia’s brothers and sisters were Isaac, Olivia, Roselda, Josephine, Gertrude, Lenna, and Elwood. Professor Isaac Newton Demmon (1842-1920) (m. 1871 to Emma Regal, settled in Ann Arbor, Mich.), Olivia (1846-1912) (m. George P. Alexander), Roselda A. (1849-1947) (m. William T. Holsinger and Linus Pike), Josephine (1847-1933) (m. William W. Glosser and William Palmer), Gertrude J. (1854-) (m. Milton L. Blaney), Lenna (1858-1879), and Elwood F. Demmon (ca. 1862-) (settled in Grand Rapids, Mich.). Isaac N. Demmon taught school, 1860-63, then attended Northwestern Christian University, 1863-66, was Sergeant in 132nd Indiana Infantry during Civil War; entered the University of Michigan and graduated in 1868; was Professor of Greek at Mount Union College, Alliance, Ohio, 1868-70; Professor of ancient languages, Hiram College, 1870; Principal of Ann Arbor High School, 1873-76; Assistant Professor of English at the University of Michigan, 1876-79, and of English, 1879-1881, when he was elected to the full chair of English and Rhetoric. He published on library matters and bibliography. Harvey Clelland De Motte, The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans, vol. 3 (Boston: The Biographical Society, 1904), 209-210.


16. Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File (Application 1364.603; Certificate 1144.608); Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; National Archives Building (NAB), Washington, D.C.

17. Affidavit of Mahala L. Weaver, December 4, 1911; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File (Application 973.948; Certificate 734.797); Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.

18. W. W. Dowling, “Emigratus,” says this study was “supplemented by further studies at a college farther East.”

19. William Robeson Holloway, Indianapolis: A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City, a Chronicle of Its Social, Municipal, Commercial, and Manufacturing Progress, with Full Statistical Tables


21. Published Cincinnati: J. Church, 1871. For the comments of the reviewer—who does not seem to be Levi himself—see "Indiana Sunday-School Convention," The Morning Watch (Indianapolis) (September 1871): 130.


31. See Frederick Snyder, "The Missouri State Meeting," The Christian Record (Bloomington, Ind.) (November 1873): 499.


33. The Gospel Echo (McComb, Ill.) (September 1871): 440.

34. A copy of the card, "Have I Been Baptized?" is in the archives of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

35. Levi Dowling, Affidavit, May 1, 1882; Levi Dowling, Plaintiff vs. Kate S. Dowling, Defendant, Circuit Court of the City of St. Louis, June Term 1882.


37. Divorce Decree, Circuit Court, City of St. Louis, October Term 1882, Wednesday, October 11, 1882, Levi Dowling vs (58853) Kate S. Dowling; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. See also, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June-July 1882, for publication of the notice of court action filed against Kate. The granting of the divorce was reported in the St. Louis Republican, October 12, 1882. On Levi’s places of residence, see Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.

38. James Crawford Sellers was born January 14, 1828 in Garrard County, Kentucky. He died in 1874 in Kendallville. Aby Ann Read was born in Putnam County, Indiana. She died in 1876, also in Kendallville.

39. Eva, Alice (m. Dr. Smith Augustus Spillman), Adelle ("Dell," "Della") (m. Edward A. Brown), Caroline ("Carrie") (m. Henry Willey Comstock), and James C. (Jr.).

40. Affidavit of Josephine E. Glosser and Olivia Alexander, December 4, 1911; Affidavit of E[izabeth] M. Hammond, November 28, 1911; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. On Laughlin, see History of Portage County, Ohio (Chicago: Warner, Beers, & Company, 1885), 747 (Hiram Township). Laughlin filled the chair of Ancient Languages in Oskaloosa College, before becoming President of the College. Afterwards, became President of Hiram College in Ohio. “He has given many lectures on educational and religious themes. He is of a metaphysical turn of mind. As a minister he is decidedly non-sectarian, and as a public speaker he has been regarded as very successful.”


44. Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. Also, St. Joseph, Missouri, City Directory 1892, listing for “Lee H. Dowling.”


47. For the Theosophical Society chapter, see The Fort Wayne Daily Gazette (June 1, 1895): 8 and the Fort Wayne City Directory for 1893-94; for the Spiritualist Society (May 25, 1895): 8 and the Fort Wayne City Directory for 1896, where we learn that Dowling’s colleague in the Occult Science Society was also the Secretary of the First Spiritual Society of Fort Wayne; for the Occult Science Society, see The Fort Wayne News (March 28, 1896): 4. Other members of the Occult Science Society included Dowling’s fellow homeopathic physician, Hiram Van Sweringen.

48. Spiritualism; as Viewed by Rev. Dr. D. W. Moffat, H. V. Sweringen, and L. O. Hull (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Fort Wayne Occult Science Society, 1894), copy in the archives of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.


50. In Los Angeles, the Dowlings lived at 1344 Kellam Avenue, then at 1040 South Olive Street, then at 503 South Figueroa Street.


54. Gerald Massey, The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ (London: The Pioneer Press, 1921), 30 [This is one of Massey’s lectures that were circulated privately, but not published until 1921]. Massey had already explored these themes in A Book of the Beginnings, Containing an Attempt to Recover and Reconstitute the Lost Origins of the Myths and Mysteries, Types and Symbols, Religion and Language, with Egypt for the Mouthpiece and Africa as the Birthplace (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881). Aleister Crowley, supposedly in 1904, had channeled The Book of the Law, a verse of which (verse 34,
chapter 3), had indicated that a new eon had just begun. I have no idea whether Dowling would have had any access to Crowley’s “news.”


58. Reflecting here the Annie Besant-Charles Webster Leadbeater Theosophical doctrine of the “Inner Government of the World.”


61. The New Age (Boston) (November 1908): 352. This magazine is to be distinguished from the one of the same name that was the official magazine of Scottish Rite Freemasonry.

62. Coffeen was born in 1841 and died in Wyoming on December 9, 1912. For more on him, see Leonard Schlup, “I’m Not a Cuckoo Democrat,” Wyoming Annals 66.3 (Fall 1994): 30-47. In his introduction to The Aquarian Gospel, 14, Coffeen wrote that he intended soon to publish his own ideas on the science of clairvoyance under the title Basis of Higher Consciousness, but I have found no record of him having done so.


64. Edgar Cayce would also subsequently claim to have become a reader of the “Akashic Records.”

65. Chandogya Upanisad, 5.1.1.


67. Published in Boston by the spiritualist newspaper, The Banner of Light.


70. For some more of Dowling’s anachronisms, see Goodspeed and Beskow.

71. The Bible in India; Hindoo Origin of Hebrew and Christian Revelation (London: J. C. Hotten, 1870), a translation of the original La Bible dans l’Inde; Vie de Iezus Christna (Paris: Lacrois 1869). The influence of Jacolliot—as well as other attempts at world syncretism such as that of Godfrey Higgins in his Anacalypsis—was profoundly felt among spiritualists, who produced narratives of the Jesus-Buddha-Krishna figure they supposed to have been the original source of these and other stories—see, for example, the story written by trance medium Fanny Green M'Dougall, “Christna. The First Avatar,” Brittan’s Journal (New York) (January 1874): 60-74.

72. Ouseley lived in Brighton with his cats, “his only followers” (as his neighbors said). He later found a few people to join what he called “The Order of At-One-Ment and United Templars Society.”

73. Ouseley, The Gospel of the Holy Twelve, introduction. For more information on Ouseley and his relationship to Theosophy, Hermeticism, and to the ideas of Kingsford and Maitland, see the article by James Patrick Holding at <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/ouseley01.html>.

74. Ouseley published it as, The Gospel of the Holy Twelve, Known Also as the Gospel of the Perfect Life; translated from the original Aramaic and edited by a Disciple of the Master, reprint (London: John M. Watkins, 1956). It was first serialized in newspapers in 1900, and was collected together and published in 1901, with enlarged editions published in 1903 and 1904. The German edition was published in Berlin in 1902 by Samuel Krauss, under the title Das Evangelium des vollkommenen Lebens.

75. This allowance for what might be called “continuing revelation” still occurs in modern times in Tibet, with “treasure text” (terma) scriptures, being “found”—materialized—by people who claim for them an early, authoritative provenance. For an introduction to this subject, see Tulku Thondrup Rinpoche, Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

76. Dowling, The Aquarian Gospel (1964), 7. “The Cusp of the Ages” was never published separately or in its entirety. It may have been one of the weekly teachings that Levi had typed and sent out to the Aquarian Brotherhood.


78. Olive G. Pettis, Autobiography by Jesus of Nazareth (Boston: J. P. Cooke, 1894), 8. Modern Mary Magdalen devotees will be disappointed to learn that Mary affirmed, through Olive, that she had, indeed, been a prostitute (though naturally pure, and only driven into a brothel by the bestial lust of deceitful priests), and had no revelations to make through Olive about being either an apostle or the sexual consort of Jesus.

79. Alexander Smyth, Jesus of Nazareth; or, a True History of the Man Called Jesus Christ, embracing his parentage, his youth, his original doctrines and works, his career as a public teacher and physician of the people, also, the nature of the great conspiracy against him; with all the incidents of his tragical death, given on spiritual authority, from spirits who were contemporary mortals with Jesus while on the earth (Philadelphia: The Author, 1864).
80. An example of Jesus-as-yoga-student is in Nicolas Notovitch's The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1894).


82. The Morning Watch (Indianapolis) (September 1871): 133-134. The poem is by Sallie W. Smith.


88. See, for example, “Great Theosophists: Apollonius of Tyana,” Theosophy (July 1936): 385-395, which does not recognize Jesus as an historical character; and “Apollonius of Tyana,” Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 611.

89. “Universal Communication,” The New Age Magazine (Boston) (August 1909): 642. This system—like virtually every other occult system of the time (until Noble Drew Ali)—assessed the northern European races as the human avant-garde, on the cusp of making an evolutionary leap.


91. Gerald Massey, The Natural Genesis; or, Second Part of A Book of the Beginnings, Containing an Attempt to Recover and Reconstitute the Lost Origins of the Myths and Mysteries, Types and Symbols, Religion and Language, with Egypt from the Mouthpiece and Africa as the Birthplace (London: Williams and Norgate, 1883); also, particularly on the Christian Age as the Piscian Age, see, for example, the appendix in his Ancient Egypt. Massey’s deeply anti-Christian, pro-spiritualist sentiments are on display in his lecture, “The Coming Religion,” first published privately in 1900, and since republished.

93. These included, among them, medium Levi McKeen Arnold’s The Life of Jesus of Nazareth, Spiritually Given by His Spirit (Poughkeepsie, N. Y.: 1853); Vermont physician George C. Briggs, A True History of Jesus the Christ: Being a Detailed Account of the Manner of His Birth, and of All That He Did and Suffered up to the Time of His Crucifixion, Dictated by Himself (Boston: W. F. Brown & Company, 1874); Glasgow spirit medium and painter David Duguid, Hermes, a Disciple of Jesus: His Life and Mission Work, also the Evangelistic Travels of Anah and Zitha, Two Persian Evangelists Sent Out by Hafed, together with Incidents in the Life of Jesus Given by a Disciple through Hafed (Glasgow: H. Nisbet, 1888); M. Faraday [pseudonym], Jesus Christ, a Fiction: Founded upon the Life of Apolonius of Tyana; the Pagan Priests of Rome Originated Christianity; New and Startling Disclosures by Its Founders, and Full Explanations by Ancient Spirits (Springfield, Mass.: Star Publishing company, 1883); Jonathan M. Roberts, Antiquity Unveiled: Ancient Voices from the Spirit Realms Disclose the Most Startling Revelations, Proving Christianity to Be of Heathen Origin (Philadelphia: Oriental Publishing Company, 1892); the anonymously authored The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as Revised and Corrected by the Spirits (New York: The Proprietors, 1861); Charles Linton’s The Healing of the Nations (Philadelphia: The Author, 1864); John Ballou Newbrough’s Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible in the Words of Jehovah and His Angel Ambassadors (New York: Oahspe Publishing Association, 1882); and, of course, the American prototypes of this genre, Joseph Smith, The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus the Christ, and the “gift” texts of the Shakers, such as Alonzo Giles Hollister, ed., The Life and Sufferings of Jesus Anointed, Our Holy Savior and of Our Blessed Mother Ann: in Two Parts, Written by Inspiration, Enveloped thru the Inner Consciousness of William Leonard, in the Church at Harvard, Mass., October 1841 (Mount Lebanon, N.Y., 1904).

94. The “Auburn Circle,” for example, produced new revelations on the Gospels from the spirits of Peter and Paul, which they published as Spiritual Exposition of the Prophetic Scriptures of the New Testament, Received by J. M. Brown, E. H. Baxter, E. A. Benedict (Auburn, N.Y.: E. H. Baxter and E. A. Benedict, 1850). This circle was taken over by Thomas Lake Harris and moved to New York City. See also The Spirit of Jesus Communicating through the Rappings! (Rochester: The Tribune, 1851), a reprint of early spiritualistic material from The Rochester Tribune. A new wave of Jesus-as-psychic explanations were published in the period between the World Wars. Examples are Richard Arthur Bush, Jesus at Work; a Selection from a Series of Communications upon Many Subjects from the Spirit-Side of Life, Given through Richard Arthur Bush (Manchester: Two Worlds Publishing Company, 1929); Frederick B. Bond, The Gospel of Philip the Deacon; Claiming to be a Reconstruction of the Original Document Burned in Athens about the Time of Philip’s Mission (say AD 36-40), through the Recall of the Spiritual Memories of the Past Which Ever Persist, and Are Available to Mental Sympathy; Received by Frederick Bligh Bond through the Hand of Hester Dowden ... Embodying the Narrative of the Holy Nativity, and the Messianic Constellation, the Passion, and the Resurrection of Christ, the Pentecostal Gifts and the Story of the Sangreal, the Sole Personal Relic of the Master Remaining on Earth (New York: Macoy, 1932); Hereward Carrington, Loaves and Fishes; a Study of the Miracles, of the Resurrection, and of the Future Life, in the Light of Modern Psychic Knowledge (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1935); John Sebastian Marlow Ward, The Psychic Powers of Christ (London: Williams & Norgate, 1936); Daniel Boone Herring, The Thirteenth Man; a Revelation of the Actual Spiritual Work of Jesus (Holyoke, Mass.: The Elizabeth Towne Company, 1936); and James Arthur Findlay, The Psychic Stream; or, The Source and Growth of the Christian Faith (London: Psychic Press, 1939). Channeling Jesus has continued down to the present; see, for example, George King, The Twelve Blessings: The Cosmic Concept for the New Aquarian Age as given by the Master Jesus in His Overshadowing of George King, revised edition (of 1958) (Hollywood, Calif.: Aetherius Society, 1974); James Morgan, Jesus and Mastership: The Gospel According to Jesus of Nazareth as Dictated through James Coyle Morgan (Tacoma, Wash.: Oakbridge University Press, 1990); and The Wholly Bible, What I Intended; by Jesus, the Christed (North Bend, Wash.: HeartHouse Publishers, 1995).


100. She is quoting The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ (1964), chapter 7, verses 25-28.

101. See the remarks of his associate L. H. Worthington in The Aquarian New Age Magazine (September 1911): 313.


107. So he signs himself, as the author of the poem “Illumination,” at the beginning of Dowling, Complete Course in Biopneuma.

108. Dowling, Complete Course in Biopneuma, 56.


110. Pages 7-8 and 10 of manuscript in possession of the author, an old carbon copy of 18 pages, single-spaced, undated, but by ”Dr. Levi Dowling” and mentioning events in California.
111. In the January 1909 issue of The New Age, Fairfield reviewed The Aquarian Gospel. In The New Age (June 1909): 606, he reports himself as an “agent for the Gospel” of the Aquarian Brotherhood and in May as in charge of a “Center for the North Atlantic Council,” 576. By the June 1910 issue, The New Age was entirely filled with Levi’s unsigned musings. Immediately afterwards, the journal relocated to Los Angeles and its name was changed to The Aquarian New Age Magazine. It continued through the September 1911 issue.

112 Fairfield would turn his own hand to “speculative fiction” with a utopian and spiritualist premise (and resembling Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward); see his Story of the City of Works; a Community of Peace and Plenty, Where Every Man is His Own Policeman, a New Order of Government, Anti-Socialistic, Free Street Cars and Telephones, No Middlemen, No Capitalist Class, All Profit Accrues to Labor, Farm and City Life Conjoined (Boston, 1919).


114. See, for example, Peebles’ consultations with Larkin, as reported in Peebles’ Spirit Mates—Their Origin and Destiny, Sex-Life, Marriage, Divorce … also, a Symposium by Forty Noted Writers, Spirit Mates—Their Pre-Existence, Earth Pilgrimages, Reunions in Spirit-life (Battle Creek, Mich.: Peebles’ Publishing Company, 1909).


116. Frederick Spencer Oliver, A Dweller on Two Planets; or, the Dividing of the Way, by Phyllos the Thibetan (Los Angeles: Mary Elizabeth Manly-Oliver, 1905). Professor Larkin’s perhaps apocryphal expedition to Mount Shasta with his exotic spyglass was detailed in an article by Edward Lanser, “A People of Mystery: Are They Remnants of a Lost Race? Do They Possess a Fabulous Gold Treasure?” in the Sunday magazine of the Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1932, reprinted in Lewis Spence, The Problem of Lemuria: The Sunken Continent of the Pacific (London: Mayflower Press, 1933); see bibliographic studies on material at the College of the Siskiyous Library at <http://www.siskiyous.edu/shasta/bib/B16.htm>

117. For a similar mythical ceremony of occult initiation, see Emma Hardinge Britten, ed. Ghost Land; or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occult Spiritism; Being a Series of Autobiographical Papers, with Extracts from the Records of Magical Séances, Etc. Etc. Translated and Edited by Emma Hardinge Britten (Boston: William Britten, 1876), 345-366, hearkening back as far back as the 1617, Fama Fraternitatis; or, a Discovery of the Fraternity of the Most Laudable Order of the Holy Cross, yet another hoaxed, but highly influential and often believed, text, which instigated the legend of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood.

118. Propaganda for the children in the spiritualist cause, one might say, and for a belief in fairies and the occult. Gaze’s Coppertop (New York: Harper & Brothers) and Goblin’s Glen (Boston: Little, Brown & Company) were published in 1924; The Merry Piper (Boston: Little, Brown & Company) was published in 1925.


120. Charles Clark Pierce was the author of the self-published 1909 collection, Songs of Heaven from Many Hearts, comp. by Rev. Charles Clark Pierce, D.D., which, from its appearance, was a memorial souvenir volume of poems of consolation by such authors as Whittier, Robert Browning, Ella Wheeler
Wilcox, Bulwer Lytton, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, compiled for the purpose of the clients of the Pierce Brothers’ mortuary.


122. Levi H. Dowling, personal deposition, August 31, 1907; Levi H. Dowling, Invalid Pension Application, Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. The Seer seems to have been inexplicably uncertain about his personal characteristics—his eyes, he wrote, were “hazel, I guess,” and his hair color was “brown” and then, on second thought, “nearly black.” He married Kate Mayo, he wrote, “in 1868 I think.”


126. Levi H. Dowling, Death Certificate (South Pasadena, County of Los Angeles); Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C.


128. The Aquarian New Age (September 1911): 315.

129. 1920 Federal Census for Los Angeles, California. Adelle S. Brown (b. November 22, 1864, Iowa; d. March 2, 1941, Los Angeles) was the widow of Edward A. Brown, who had been the editor of the Daily Press and the Daily Stockman of Nebraska City, Otoe County, Nebraska; see the biographical essay on James C. Sellers in Hedge, Past and Present of Mahaska County, Iowa.


131. Declaration of Leo W. Dowling, January 26, 1923; Levi H. Dowling, Widow Pension Application (Eva S. Dowling), Case File 1364.603; Records relating to Pensions; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48; NAB, Washington, D.C. They were living at 126 North Vendome Street. For Eva’s obituary, see “Religious Authority Is Called; Mrs. Eva S. Dowling Dies after Brief Illness; Was Close Student,” The Los Angeles Daily Times, January 10, 1923. After his mother passed away, Leo quit his job as an actuarial clerk and, by the time of the 1926 Los Angeles City Directory, was in business as the publisher and distributor of The Aquarian Gospel and “other books of Levi.”

132. Social Security Death Index. Leo’s last residence was 91108 San Marino, Los Angeles.

133. Harve Spencer Lewis, The Mystical Life of Jesus (San Jose, Cal.: Rosicrucian Press, 1929).

134. These have included L’Evangile de Jésus le Christ selon le Verseau (French), Ewangelia Jezusa Chrystusa Ery Wodnika (Polish), Il Vangelo Acquariano di Gesù Cristo (Italian), Jeesuksen Kristuksen Henkinen Evankeliumi (Indonesian), Das Wassermann Evangelium von Jesus dem Christus (German), El Evangelio de Acuario de Jesús el Cristo (Spanish), O Evangelho Aquariano de Jesus Cristo (Portuguese), Vodnárské evangelium o ježiši chrestu (Czech), and Songyak Songso: pobyonggung sidae ui kidokkyo pisa (Korean).


