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**THE MILLENNIAL PRESS—SHAKERS AND THE PROGRESSIVE PERIODICAL
(1871–1899)¹**

“A Shaker ought to use good paper, good ink, a good pen, and have good thoughts, well digested.”

—*The Shaker Manifesto* (May, 1882 12.5, p. 110)

“A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself.”

—Arthur Miller, 1961

On a crisp October morning in 1878, the editor of the monthly periodical *The Shaker Manifesto*, Elder George A. Lomas, brooded over the sharp declines in membership and sudden financial pitfalls that now beleaguered the United Society. That year alone membership at the Pleasant Hill community had plummeted from 385 to 234 members, and, just weeks before, the Tyringham, Massachusetts, settlement closed after reporting only seventeen members.² Lomas had just finalized the proofs of the Shaker monthly featuring his column entitled “Just For a Change,” in which he put forth a highly peculiar request to the editors of major “worldly” newspapers. Lomas writes:

“In view of the slanderous persecutions some of our contemporaneous communists are receiving; and of the grand, good openings these are making both for religious inquires and financial markets, will not the *N.Y. Times* or some paper of equally large circulation abuse the Shakers a little or a great deal? We believe it would be good for a change; as nearly all men are “speaking too well of us,” and we are feeling the “woe” of stagnation. Please, knights of the press, be more impartial, and let us have share of *the apparently* bitter dose.³

Lomas’ petition to the “knights of the press” is rather amusing, especially in light of the striking connection he draws between the “woe of stagnation” and the absence of anti-Shaker religious persecution in American journalism. Just several decades before, there was no dearth of the abuse Lomas now sought; for over a century, believers endured the incessant invective of journalists, public ridicule,

¹ My heartfelt thanks to Chief Librarian, Mr. Chuck Rand, of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Library, Maine, for patiently retrieving all requested materials of the Shaker periodical for study. I am most grateful to Dr. Randall Balmer, Mandel Family Professor in the Arts and Sciences at Dartmouth College, for his invaluable insight and encouragement.

² Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers*, (Yale UP, 1992), p. 234.

³ *The Shaker Manifesto*, 10.8, October 1878, p. 247.

violence, and vandalism incited by the popular press. But as America plunged into postbellum industrialization and urbanization, society began romanticizing the Shakers as a superannuated people; their communities—impeccably tidy, picturesque, solitary—were regarded as crumbling monuments of a bucolic utopian experiment on the brink of inevitable decline. Lomas, an adroit wordsmith, knew the printed word's power in whipping up public outrage and storms of speculation but, most importantly, its remarkable ability to pique public curiosity through controversy. It is his droll plea for negative publicity that suggests the quondam vitality of the United Society was, in part, indebted to years of standing in the blinding glare of the censorious, anti-Shaker press. Indeed, throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Shakers had learned to turn the attention of negative media to their advantage by attracting inquiries and curious visitors to their communities, and Lomas' desperate request to the *Times* editors to administer a "bitter dose" of much-needed obloquy expresses a similar effort to excite public curiosity in Shakerism.

Audacious Rhetoric: The Rise of the American Religious Newspaper (1800–1840)

The decades before the 1871 inauguration of the United Society's periodical marked a momentous era in American publishing history which print culture historians have aptly termed "radical religious journalism."⁴ Firebrands of Jeffersonian individualism, these freethinking journalists employed the press to emphasize the importance of independence in matters of religion and politics: obedience to erudite authorities, they insisted, crippled individual volition in religious and political matters. Fiercely opposed to social hierarchy, radical journalists favored the brassy and bold rhetoric of public opinion to stimulate a liberal, pluralistic religious democracy grounded in principles of political and religious self-determination.

⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, "Elias Smith and the Rise of Religious Journalism in the Early Republic," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, eds. W.L. Joyce, et al. (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 250-277.

“To the puffers, the bawlers, the babblers and the slang-whangers,” bellowed Washington Irving in 1807, “I have seen...that awful despot the people, in the moment of unlimited power, wielding newspapers in one hand, and with the other scattering mud and filth about...”⁵ Irving could hardly believe the radical changes occurring within American journalism. To be sure, journalism of the early Republic was undergoing extraordinary, unprecedented changes, namely due to the rise of a particularly intriguing text: the religious newspaper. Religious periodicals were “virtually nonexistent in 1800,” says historian Nathan O. Hatch, but had proliferated at such a remarkable rate that, by 1830, torrents of Methodist, Adventist, Anti-Mason, and Universalist newspapers had flooded the stalls of street vendors. For instance, William Miller and his congregation of Adventists circulated over four million articles of religious print over a period of only four years.⁶ The American public was bombarded with a welter of periodicals, tracts, pamphlets, bulletins, broadsides, handbills, proclamations, and flyers, supplying the ammunition for what Mormon leader Joseph Smith risibly dubbed “this war of words.”⁷

As the number of periodicals climbed steadily from ninety in 1790 to 370 in 1810, more and more newspapers could not slake the thirst of America’s expanding reading public.⁸ Hatch frames this critical juncture in American publishing history as a sharp transition from the outmoded conventions of pre-18th century publications—“learned, circumspect, oriented to authority figures”—to a period marked by the din of competing voices, ideas, and sects, “each campaigning for public support with the printed word.”⁹ The energy galvanizing the religious press, says Hatch, “sprang from an explicit faith in reason and popular opinion”—that is, “...Americans could easily declare that common folk could challenge their

⁵ Howard B. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, Library of Congress Symposia on the American Revolution, (Washington D.C., 1974), pp. 63-89; quoted in Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 260.

⁶ Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 251.

⁷ Joseph Smith, *The Pearl of Great Price* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851), pp. 56-70; quoted in Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 270.

⁸ Statistics retrieved from Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 260.

⁹ Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 252.

betters without violation of conscience, that the working out of democracy was a sacred cause.”¹⁰ In the context of these early 19th century radical religious texts Shaker periodicals, too, would compete for reader attention within the cacophonous, ever-expanding marketplace of American publishing.

Illustrating how the public’s increased control of print technology drastically altered the landscape of American religion, Hatch references the impressive career of a largely unknown American journalist, Elias Smith. Entitled *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Smith published America’s first religious newspaper in September 1808 exhorting “ordinary” citizens to think for themselves by breaking free from religious elites, institutionalized education, and tradition—all of which, he insisted, sustained historic patterns of class disparity and immured the American people in “mental bondage.”¹¹ This biweekly periodical served as the soundboard for Smith’s campaign, tuned harmoniously to the chords of dissent, popular opinion, and the far-flung voices of common folk. “It may be that some may wish to know why this paper should be named, *Herald of Gospel Liberty*,” declares Smith in the debut issue, “[but] this kind of liberty is the only one which can make us happy, being the glorious liberty of the sons of God which Christ proclaimed...”¹² Smith drew his inspiration from the work of Bostonian radical Benjamin Austin Jr., who, in 1803, raised a warning voice against citizen gullibility endemic to frontier America: “Its [sic] degrading to an American to take every thing on trust, and even the young farmer and tradesman should scorn to surrender their right of judging either to *lawyers* or *priests*.”¹³ Fortifying the belief that the public did not need patronizing religious and political authorities to guide them to “truth,” Smith’s periodical reminded its common readers that they possessed a God-given, intrinsic intelligence to discern their own claims of religious truth.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹² *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, 1.1, (September 1, 1808), p.1.

¹³ Benjamin Austin Jr., *Constitutional Republicanism in Oppositions to Fallacious Federalism* (Boston, 1803), p. 173; quoted in Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 261.

Animating Smith's radical press was a simple philosophy contending that a publicly governed publishing establishment was essential to stimulating popular enlightenment. Tinged with acerbic wit, Smith's columns delivered lyrics extolling religious blasphemy and incendiary editorials holding members of the privileged class—especially doctors, lawyers, and the clergy—the butt of their aspersions. One sneering ditty entitled “Priest-Craft Float Away” chants: “Why are we in such slavery, to men of that degree; / Bound to support their knavery when we might all be free; / They'r [sic] nothing but a canker, we can with boldness say; / So let us hoist the anchor, let the Priest-craft float away.”¹⁴ Unmooring the vessel of privileged clergy to the riptides of public scrutiny was the message of artful parodist and Rogerene Quaker Timothy Waterous, a frequent contributor of the *Herald* whose columns contrast hardscrabble, transient life on the frontier from the opulent lifestyle of ecclesiastics. Waterous' brazen rhetoric shares Smith's enthusiasm for dissenting public opinion: “As truth is no *private man's property*, and all Christians have the right to propagate it, I do also declare, that every *Christian*, has a right to publish and vindicate what he believes.”¹⁵ Of “unmistakable Enlightenment vintage,” the *Herald* was a stentorian voice among early American religious periodicals as its powerful messages of self-determination, peppered with defiant humor, empowered readers to carefully scrutinize religious conventions in a way that valorized individualism and rational thought.¹⁶

With Smith's editorial gumption, *The Herald* wielded considerable political and social clout; for several years after its debut circulation, irritated readers who skimmed its impious columns, including Congregationalist minister and Yale president Timothy Dwight, arrogantly dismissed newspaper reading as lowbrow recreation.¹⁷ Yet the vituperations of privileged clergy and academic elites did little

¹⁴ Timothy Waterous, *The Battle-Axe and Weapons of War: Discovered by the Morning Light, Aimed for the Final Destruction of Priestcraft* (Groton: Conn., 1811); quoted in Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 268.

¹⁵ Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1816); quoted in Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 264.

¹⁶ Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 257.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 260.

to squash public interest in these stirring texts; in fact, by 1816, the *Herald* had secured 1,500 subscribers—a considerable number for the time—and continued garnering the contributions of an aroused citizenry. Given its fierce subversion of convention, this so-called religious press did not appear to be remotely theological; indeed, at times it reads as a vulgar, anarchic pamphlet conjuring images of an obstreperous crowd of dissenters demanding power. But the driving ambition of Smith’s editorial campaign was to establish a “democratic religious culture in print” that upheld a discourse of self-determination that would equip readers to confront authority and determine their own religious and political destinies.¹⁸ Perhaps the most forceful impact radical religious journalism would have on the evolution of Shaker newspapers was its fearless call for social progress and nationwide introspection. The ideological climate of America at the 1871 inauguration of the Shaker periodical was one of simmering optimism for a modernized, industrial future; “Progress” writes Stein, “was the watchword of the day,” and this national ferment for secular progress was markedly evinced in religion, in which, Stein continues, “efforts to push beyond traditional creeds and practices toward universal truths and values created controversy...[and] attracted many who had rejected the established orthodoxies.”¹⁹ Given the far-reaching influence of religious periodicals and a public readership distrustful of religious authority, how believers employed print technology would be of crucial importance for ensuring Shakerism’s survival as the nation moved swiftly into the 20th century.

By forging robust connections between razor-sharp rhetorics of dissent and bold expressions of public opinion, the rich contributions of radical religious journalism provide a dynamic historical context for charting the rise of the Shaker periodical. During the decades in which Americans witnessed the turbulent growth of the religious newspaper, the Shakers had established nineteen prosperous, economically self-sufficient communities throughout the United States. Despite this hard-earned

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁹ Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 240.

success, believers and their way of life had been mercilessly lampooned in the popular press. In 1862, for instance, there appeared in *Vanity Fair* perhaps one the most scurrilous and popular anti-Shaker pasquinades. Composed by the Maine-born humorist, Charles Farrar Browne, but narrated by his pseudonym-persona Artemus Ward, the poor itinerant entertainer ventriloquizes Brown's coarse humor through a prose typified by crude solecisms and grammatical gaffes. In his story, *The Shakers*, Ward's peregrinations lead him to overnight in a Shaker community. Lost in the storm, Ward "observed the gleams of a taller candle" and is taken in by a Shaker eldress "upards of 40 and homely as a stump fence."²⁰ Finishing his meal, he ogles two Shaker women: "Direckly thar cum in two young Shakeresses, as putty and slick lookin gals as I ever met...they was charmin enuff to make a man throw stuns at his granmother if they axed him to." Ward asks the women " 'my pretty dears, ear I go you hav no objections, hav you, to a innersent kiss at partin?' " To which the women respond: "'Yay,' they said, and I YAY'D...[and] esoomed my jerney."²¹ Depicted as promiscuous and wavering in their religious vows, Browne's disparaging portrayal of Shaker women reinforced public opinions traducing the sect's purported claims to celibacy. Accompanying Browne's squib was a cartoon illustrating the farceur seated smugly between two young Shaker women, kissing one while the other coyly turns her face away from the momentary, proscribed embrace. Imaginative expressions of anti-Shaker ridicule, such as Browne's, were animated by certain rhetorical features of early 19th century religious journalism, particularly a prose exposing instances of religious hypocrisy and transgression. Browne's mordant caricatures, and others of its ilk, were reprinted in widely circulated magazines across the nation, garnering admiration from his readers for their unsparing humor.

That the combative ethos of American journalism had any bearing on the United Society to establish its own religious periodical is certain, but as the nation's interests remained fixed on

²⁰ Charles Farrar Browne, *The Complete Works of Artemus Ward*, The Project Gutenberg, November 2004. Accessed 16 October 2013 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6946>>.

²¹ Browne, *Complete Works*.

recuperating from the Civil War, stimulating industry, and westward expansion, the growing need for a print campaign that would excite public curiosity and celebrate Shaker identity was felt most acutely in these years of community decline. In 1871, Elder George A. Lomas founded *The Shaker*, which, Stein documents, served as “the most significant missionary initiative undertaken by the society....”²² Its missionary scope aimed to educate potential converts through discussion of “Shaker life, habits, economy, success, theology, prophecy, inspirations, revelations and expectations.”²³ “Our object,” Lomas plainly states, “is to disseminate truth *far* and *near*. Think it will be what we most desire it *should* be—a home educator.”²⁴ Taking his cue from lingering traces of religious journalism, Lomas promoted *The Shaker* as “most radically religious monthly in the world.”²⁵ Interspersed throughout the eight-page quarto were poems, Shaker recipes, hymns, and humorous op-ed pieces, but the centerpieces were lengthy theological expositions. Articles entitled “WHO ARE THE SHAKERS?” and “WHAT ARE THE SHAKERS?” served as straightforward question and answer columns that aimed to dispel prevailing canards and misconceptions of Shakerism, especially those bruited about in Browne and other detractors’ articles. “Not shrill or ill-tempered in their statements,” observes Stein, *The Shaker* delivered its messages with equanimity, serving to foster a lively discussion between Shaker intellectuals and critics of the society’s theological and political ideology.²⁶ Lomas and his contributors were highly attentive and knew that if the periodical were to attract converts, it would not be through editorial retaliation, dramatic sermonizing, or the dissemination of abstruse theology. Essentially, Shaker writers shifted from the stylistic hallmark of Elias Smith’s religious journalism of the first half of the century, which relied on

²² Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 225.

²³ *The Shaker*, 2.9, (September 1872), p. 71.

²⁴ *The Shaker*, 1.3, (March 1871), p. 24.

²⁵ *The Shaker*, 1.1, (January 1871), p. 1.

²⁶ Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 226.

the cannonry of invective and satire to stimulate public opinion, and found a fresh rhetorical vitality in homespun humor and mellow discussion.

Just how successful were the newspaper's missionary efforts in drawing converts and establishing a readership outside the narrow ambits of Shaker communities? 7,000 issues of the January edition were circulated, boasted Lomas in March 1871, and "subscriptions come in rapidly."²⁷ A useful index for measuring the periodical's popularity is the voluminous epistolary correspondence reprinted in the editorial columns. Supposedly *The Shaker* enjoyed immediate popularity. One anonymous subscriber writes, "The greatest thing the Shakers have ever done for the world is the publication of *The Shaker*."²⁸ Another admires the periodical as a panacea for the sins of a spiritually ailing nation: "We do not believe there is a more radically religious monthly in the world—radical, so far as going down to the foundation of human woes and loss, illustrating their cause, effect, and remedy, and aiming at the elevation of the whole human race."²⁹ The United Society's official publication even inspired the editors of the *New York Herald* and *New York Sun* to print in January 1874: "WANTED. Men, women and children can find a comfortable home for life, where want never comes, with the *Shakers*, by embracing the true faith, and living pure lives. Particulars can be learned by writing to the *Shakers*, Mt. Lebanon, N.Y."³⁰ Remarkably, within five days of the national posting, the Mt. Lebanon editors received 135 letters expressing interest in the Shaker life.³¹

Not all readers, however, found the "sweet manna" of *The Shaker* palatable. The Mt. Lebanon editors reprinted the amusing letters of indignant readers in an EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS column, all of which were received from subscribers outside the Shaker community. One concerned parent's

²⁷ *The Shaker*, 1.3, (March 1871), p. 24.

²⁸ *The Shaker*, 2.7, (July 1872), p. 56.

²⁹ *The Shaker*, 2.12, (December 1872), p. 96.

³⁰ Quoted in Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 227.

³¹ Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 227.

subscription inquiry reads: “My son is greatly interested in the Shakers. As I cannot let him go to them, it will be a pacification for him to have *The Shaker*.”³² A woman, determined to peruse its pages surreptitiously, wished the monthly be delivered to a private address: “Please change my P.O. address from — to —; my husband don’t like *The Shaker*, while I do, and will have it.”³³ Such messages not only suggest that *The Shaker* hosted a devoted readership outside the community, but that its worldly readers provoked friction among those who regarded Shaker doctrines with suspicion and even outright disdain. Crucially, the establishment of *The Shaker* fit the temper of the times: as membership and public curiosity in the United Society flagged, industrial breakthroughs in paper-making allowed the United Society to acquire print technology that promoted its participation in religious journalism. Simultaneously regarded as a source of preternatural nutrition for the soul and a print menace that brought discomfiture to the secular order, the diverse reception of *The Shaker* suggests that its missionary reach extended beyond that of a contained, minor publication, and one that would strive tirelessly to leave its imprint on the American religious landscape.

“Shake all that you can”: Shaker Politics and Editorial Strife³⁴

Not all believers, however, promoted the principles underpinning Lomas’ editorial program. While they lauded his successful establishment of a national Shaker publication, the progressive camp, led by Shaker intellectual Frederick W. Evans, viewed the newspaper’s stringent missionary objectives and disproportionate emphasis on Shaker-centered issues as a discursive tool maintaining the society’s tradition of fierce isolationism. Sharply contrasting from conservative attitudes, progressive Shakerism, writes Stein, shifted from “...simply condemning the world and trying to flee from it, [to] many Shakers now wish[ing] to change things for the better. They came to see themselves as agents for the

³² *The Shaker*, 2.7 (July 1872), p. 56.

³³ *The Shaker*, p. 56.

³⁴ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.12, (December 1875), p. 89.

transformation of American society.”³⁵ While Evans’ coterie of freethinking Shakers supported the view that the newspaper ought to be employed as a vehicle for initiating national social transformations—such as women’s rights, race issues, and land reform—which promoted the collaboration of believers and outside Americans, conservatives like Lomas recoiled from these changes, remaining stubbornly intransigent in their support of community seclusion they understood to preserve Shaker customs. Progressives argued that these conventions were positively inimical to realizing the millennial kingdom in America and would ultimately drive the sect to extinction. Such discord positioned the society’s newspaper at the center of an ideological tug-of-war in which progressive and conservative Shakers heaved vehemently to and fro according to their views concerning community decline and the inauguration of the millennial age.

In early November 1872, just as Lomas was preparing to commemorate *The Shaker’s* third anniversary, fires razed the wagon houses, three barns, and sheds of the South Family buildings of the Watervliet community. Lomas likely lamented his new circumstances. The Mt. Lebanon Trustees asked him to resign his position as chief editor to supervise the cleanup and reconstruction of the scorched village; further, he feared possible editorial revisions that would compromise the periodical’s conservative underpinnings. The December 1872 issue of *The Shaker* announced: “SPECIAL NOTICE. The present editor retires to the position of Publisher; and the present, able head of the Novitiate of Orders—Elder F. W. Evans—becomes its Editor, AND TO WHOM ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED.”³⁶ As a frequent contributor and board member of *The Shaker*, Evans was familiar with Lomas’ conservative editorial perspective, and it is no surprise that his initial days as chief editor occasioned a succession of bold revisions espousing the views of progressive Shakerism. First, he renamed the periodical *Shaker and Shakeress* and divided the first half of the paper for male Shaker

³⁵ Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 304.

³⁶ *The Shaker*, p. 96.

writings and the latter four pages reserved exclusively for female contributions. He also appointed Antoinette Doolittle, eldress of the North Family at Mt. Lebanon, as “Editress,” a neologism coined to underscore “our fundamental idea of *duality* in the Divine government of the universe, and also in our Society organizations.”³⁷ In his first issue as editor, Evans articulated a rousing message: “We invite all progressive minds and classes, and all truth-loving, religious persons, from the most scientific rationalist to the revivalist, to take the *Shaker and Shakeress*, and help us to inaugurate the blessed era of universal virtue...the construction of a true Christian order...a new millennial earth.”³⁸ Triggering these gender-related emendations was the “intelligent discussion” taking place in the “outer world” concerning “women’s rights, duties, privileges,” notes Evans, therefore synching the society’s publication with those vigorously debated political issues headlining worldly American newspapers.³⁹

This is not to say Lomas rejected the contributions of women writers; in fact, he and other male editors published the writings and epistolary correspondences of Shaker women with alacrity. Evans’ publishing record, however, reveals a certain affinity for the literary imagination of Shaker women, especially poetry conflating progressive gender reform and grand visions of the millennial kingdom. For example, Cecelia Devyr’s poem, “Motherland,” rallies Shaker and worldly women to condemn in unison America’s political and religious hypocrisy: “Daughters of the nation listen!...They [the Founding Fathers] said, ‘All men are equal, / with inalienable rights;’ little dreaming of the sequel, / That has filled the land with blights.”⁴⁰ Devyr bemoans “the demon, *slavery*” and “the hells that *priests* created,” beseeching womankind to work towards “a declaration, / That will make all *women* free!” With undertones of imminent rapture, the Shaker choir crescendos in the forceful toppling of the American flag: “Droop’d the flag, the stars were broken...Is there yet no hope for nations? / Must all constitutions

³⁷ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 1.

³⁸ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 3.1, (January 1873), p. 82.

³⁹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.2, (February 1875), p. 15.

fail?” Devyr hopes for a humane government that “Soon will bring true *order* forth.../ [and] Build ‘new heaven and new earth.’⁴¹ The poem is strikingly redolent of Waterous’ hard-hitting verses featured in “Priest-craft Float Away” as Devyr employs an equally trenchant rhetoric when promoting controversial views of human equality. Splitting *Shaker and Shakeress* into equal sections grounded the United Society’s progressive gender ideals in a concrete visual reality, serving to both heighten the visibility of gender equality in America and provide a larger platform for the voices of Shaker women.

Before joining the United Society in 1830 and crystallizing his reputation as the vociferous gadfly of Shaker progressivism, Evans distinguished himself as a fierce political agitator and publisher of radical religious texts. With his older brother, George Evans, he successfully launched the labor-reform and abolitionist journals *Workingman’s Advocate* (1829) and *Young America!* (1844). Born in Leominster, Worcestershire, England, in 1808 as the son of a working-class father and an aristocratic mother, Evans emigrated to New York City in 1820. Inspired by Emersonian rhetorics of nationalism, equality, and romantic visions of Western expansionism, he wrote incisively in support of worker’s rights and poverty reduction. Among his secular publications of this period was a remarkable volume expressing Elias Smith’s spirited message of self-guided reason. Like the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Evans’ *The Bible of Reason* (1828) branded ecclesiastics and institutionalized education as the adversaries of religious autonomy, making a vehement “appeal to the public opinion on the urgency for reclaiming their rights.”⁴² This gritty book censured the “artifices of the clergy to uphold its influence,” to the promoting “Freedom of the press; the clergy its opposers—Infringement of rights by religious tests and Sunday ordinances.” His conservative counterpart’s publishing record, however, was less than scintillating. Spending the first ten years of his life in New York City, Lomas joined the Shaker Village at Watervliet, New York, in

⁴¹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 15.

⁴² Benjamin F. Powell, *The Bible of Reason, or, Scriptures of Modern Authors*, (New York: George H. Evans, 1828), pp. 3-4. Evans published the book with the aid of his older brother.

1850. Before founding *The Shaker*, Lomas taught school, instructed choir, composed church hymns, and meted out several minor pamphlets defending Shaker doctrine. Though fellow Shakers and editors, the men's simmering ideological differences would eventually bubble over in controversy.

French sociologist Henri Desroche's astute assessment of Evans' life as a Shaker accents how his varied engagement with radical political journalism shaped his editorial vision for *Shaker and Shakeress*: "Unlike so many of the society's uncultured or narrow-minded members, Evans had read, traveled, and absorbed vast blocks of modern culture from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," therefore, Desroche elaborates, by "realizing the element of myth and nonsense in the notion of a sudden worldwide conversion to Shakerism, he [Evans] tried to resolve their problem by a reflective conversion of Shakerism of the world."⁴³ Seen from this perspective, Evans' approach to initiating "reflective conversion" ushered in a period of journalistic inquiry prompting believers and worldly readers alike to mobilize national social reform. Close readings of Evans' periodical reveal that its discourses grafted American public health concerns, particularly hygiene, diet, and self-care, into the larger narrative of Shaker eschatology. Articles published under Evans' administration promulgated that Americans (i.e. non-Shakers) ought to fear for the wellbeing of their bodies since they cared little for the health of their souls, which, in turn, evoked a powerful eschatological principle conflating not only physical wellbeing and the spiritual-moral health of the nation, but American nation-building and the realization of the millennial era.

As Americans scurried to lay the bricks of expanding cities under the miasma of factory pollution, Evans was convinced that the nation had morphed into a well-oiled machine of rapacious consumption, exploitation, and waste. The bodies and souls of Americans, he feared, had come to resemble the blackened, smog-choked metropolis of industrial America. Framing national public health issues within the contexts of Shaker eschatology was an audacious editorial move on Evans' part because it equated

⁴³ Desroche. *The American Shakers*, p. 221.

physical health concerns with the nation's wavering degrees of moral fitness. Deeply troubled by these developments, he mounted a critique of American trends of consumption and materialism, declaring that the *Shaker and Shakeress* would agitate reforms concerning "peace, temperance, hygiene, and physiology, and woman's suffragists and land reformers."⁴⁴ Beginning with dietary health and American food culture, Evans expresses: "I quite agree with the God of Israel, that the first step in the work of human redemption is to make and eat good bread" and doubted "whether really good men and women—Christians—can be raised upon poor bread, made of adulterated materials and chemically corrupted by leaven."⁴⁵ His article, "BREAD," polemicized popular bread-making techniques that corrode the body: "The Americans have been termed a toothless, dyspeptic nation. They might be termed a physic-taking nation, as, instead of 'throwing that article to the dogs,' it is adopted as food, by the nation at large, and taken daily. This is no more wonderful than it is horrible."⁴⁶ "Superfine bolted flour," he continues, incorporates "wheat [that] is ground to death" which, after long-term use, "decomposes animal tissue and disintegrate bones and teeth."⁴⁷ By identifying the corrosive ingredients lurking in certain foods, Evans and Doolittle sought to address an unenlightened public in how to care for the physical and spiritual state of the body.

Essential to advancing social progress in America, remarks Evans, was the elimination of these "unphysiological foods and drinks" and the sedulous cultivation of organic food sources that would nourish a healthy, superior human population.⁴⁸ Listed among these "extravagant, health-destroying" foodstuffs were "brain-maddening *Spiritous Liquors*," "nerve-destroying *Narcotics*" (tobacco, opium), "*Condiments, Tea and Coffee*," and "*Foul Air*" (a growing problem for urban dwellers).⁴⁹ Evans justified his

⁴⁴ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 81.

⁴⁵ *The Shaker Manifesto*, 12.10, (October 1882), p. 235.

⁴⁶ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 3.11, (November 1873), p. 81.

⁴⁷ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 82.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 81.

⁴⁹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.12, (December 1875), pp. 89-90.

claims with a simple, oft-repeated axiom: “The bread of a people determines largely the character of that people.”⁵⁰ Significantly, Shaker theology had focused on the mysterious workings of the human soul and regarded the body as the reservoir of dark impulses and desires that needed to be controlled by the soul; although soul and celibacy remained the bedrock of Shaker doctrine, discussions focusing on the earthly perfection of the body dominated Evans and Doolittle’s newspaper. This decisive shift in theological emphasis raised awareness of the self-destructive habits of consumption. For example, Evans’ article “THE TEETH” discusses the “evils” of “artificial substitutes for the extracted natural teeth,” proposing that “slow eating would be a most excellent thing for Americans, who are in the habit of bolting their food in five or ten minutes, and then run to the doctor to complain of indigestion.”⁵¹ Another column, “SANITARY INFLUENCE OF SUNLIGHT,” reports the then-recent findings of Russian medical experts on “the effect of light as a curative agent,” which calls for “sunny homes, where sunlight and fresh air play through the spacious halls” and “where the windows are thrown open to all healthful influence.” Shakers and non-Shakers alike, he insisted, must “obtain the quota of pure oxygen necessary for keeping lungs in the most healthful condition, [for] the people of God should be as clean as the air they breathe, as in the food they eat...”⁵² Informed readers, Evans noted, would recognize that this urgent call for pure air was adumbrated in Mosaic law, a warning that toxic vapors would fill the lungs of those “disobedient to his laws and statutes.”⁵³

Healthy teeth, fresh air, and salubrious doses of sunlight aside, Evans’ vigorous health campaign also made a persuasive case for what many Shaker and outside readers considered his most radical reform: vegetarianism. In his amusing and wildly controversial article “Stomach and Conscience,” Evans

⁵⁰ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 4.1, (January 1874), p. 81.

⁵¹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 82.

⁵² *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.12, (December 1875), p. 89.

⁵³ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 84.

outlines his understanding of “millennial health” by making several shocking claims connecting appetite-hunger with national moral corruption:

The good of the present generation and the welfare of the future, are subordinated to appetite...the existence of chattel slavery, in America, gave rise to, terminating in a destructive, *uncivil* war, come into operation in all contentions and struggles between stomach and conscience, than have occurred, and will hereafter occur, in any new degree of progress, in Nations, in Societies, or even individuals.⁵⁴

At the core of all human tribulation—calamities of war, political corruption, slavery—is an overpowering “appetite-created mentality,” argues Evans, in which people are hopelessly “enslaved by their stomachs.”⁵⁵ In this way, he continues, *flesh-eaters* are not to be distinguished from the senseless military commanders and political functionaries who sent thousands of men to perish on the battlefields of the Civil War. To prevent future human catastrophe, he sketches a simple vegetarian ethic he hopes American Christianity will, in time, embrace—one asserting that if Americans, especially powerful political figures, “would change their diet, discontinue the use of domestic animal foods” and adopt “Horticulture, like the people of Vineland,” then they would “approximate the diet of the Israelites in the wilderness” and vanquish, once and for all, its “innumerable social ills.”⁵⁶ This equation of sorts pronounces that if Americans close their abattoirs and quell the carnivorous rumblings of their stomachs, their appetites would gradually come to resemble the Nazarenes, “who ate no flesh [and] drank no wine,” and advance the establishment of the millennial kingdom.⁵⁷ “Flesh meat,” Evans continues, “is almost exclusively, the food of the wild Indian, in his primitive state.”⁵⁸ Turning to Old Testament scripture to substantiate his views, his article “DIALOGUE” transcribes a conversation between two characters, one cast as an unenlightened *Flesh-eater* and the other as the sagacious Shaker *Vegetarian*.

⁵⁴ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 4.9, (September 1874), p. 65.

⁵⁵ *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 65.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 65.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 65.

“What reason do you have for rejecting (as food) flesh, fish, eggs, butter cheese, and grease?” inquires the *Flesh-eater*. The *Vegetarian* responds: “See Genesis 1:29; and Numbers 11:13 and 33. The Prophet Isaiah (66:3) said: “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man.”⁵⁹ Even if scripture did not address it as directly, the grave ethical conundrum anchoring Evans’ vegetarianism was abhorrence of the “killing of dumb animals, who cannot plead their own rights.”⁶⁰ That a daily massacre of this voiceless and vulnerable population has gone overlooked, he says, confirms that Americans were being carried along the currents of senseless consumption, and emphatically maintained that “the *food* question is the *soul* question. A change of dietetics, is a change of the social system, for better, or for worse.”⁶¹

Evans’ remarks were, in a word, startling. This line of thinking was too radical for some of his followers in the progressive wing, but behind this reform linking stomach and soul was not the blatherskite of an eccentric vegetarian; in fact, it was a larger perceptive insight into the inner workings of the national psyche and the perils of over-indulgence, grasping how people not only become enslaved to patterns of mass-market consumption, but come to embody the insidious cultural values, appetites, and desires that impede true physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Evans and Doolittle’s you are what you eat theology received both applause and acrimony from readers. One fervent supporter of Evans’ food program, Oliver Prentiss, states in an editorial: “We are on the ascending grade, with ETERNAL PROGRESS inscribed on our banner...The change [vegetarianism] has been gradual—not by compulsion—in accord with the increased resurrection from the earthly to the heavenly.”⁶² Another enthused correspondent from the New Enfield, New Hampshire, community writes “DEAR ELDER FREDERICK:—...I have born my cross, against flesh meats...and

⁵⁹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 3.10, (October 1873), p. 76.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 76.

⁶¹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 4.9, (September 1874), p. 65.

⁶² *The Shaker Manifesto*, 11.8, (August 1881), p. 181.

am enjoying comfortable health.”⁶³ Later in 1890, Ernest Pick’s article “VEGETARIANISM and the MILLENNIUM” articulated that “only fruits, grains, and vegetables” can end civilization’s perpetuation of “the horrible cruelty and suffering inflicted in slaughterhouses and stock-pens...All is ready for this new form of truth!...for as goes the West, so goes America; and as America goes, so goes the future world.”⁶⁴ Despite scriptural underpinnings, many believers dismissed Evans’ health reforms for two major reasons: first, they quarreled that his millennial views were steeped in a grueling, unattainable quest for perfectionism—so unattainable that spartan diets and constant surveillance of consumption wearied his adherents; second, breakthroughs in 19th century medicine and science reminded people that, regardless of one’s diet and physical condition, disease and age were inescapable.

Shaker conservatives snorted disdainfully at Evans and Doolittle’s dedication to national social progress, firmly maintaining that seclusion and tradition trumped worldly interaction. A spate of angry letters from Groveland and South Union believers addressed to the Central Ministry, Mt. Lebanon, objected to these radical views.⁶⁵ The most vocal gainsayer of Shaker progressivism and longtime contributor to *Shaker and Shakeress*, Elder Harvey Eads of South Union, Kentucky, published a collection of essays in *Shaker Sermons: Scripto-Rational*, in an effort to clarify essential Shaker teachings he argued Evans and progressives had obscured. Hardly surprising, Lomas enthusiastically championed the volume, stating in the proem that “This BOOK OF SERMONS scarcely needs a preface...the reader will feel the hallowed influences of one who has been with the Christ.”⁶⁶ Both celebrating Shaker traditions and extolling isolationism, Eads recapitulates the doctrines of “*Virgin Purity, Non-resistance, Equality of*

⁶³ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.10, (October 1875), p. 75.

⁶⁴ *The Shaker Manifesto*, 20.8, (August 1890), pp. 175-176.

⁶⁵ Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, p. 491.

⁶⁶ Eads, *Shaker Sermons*, p. III.

inheritance and Unspottedness from the word,” pointing out where Evans and his followers “drifted out to sea without chart or compass.”⁶⁷

As opposition to the *Shaker and Shakeress* mounted and Eads’ sermons rallied conservatives to throttle progressivism, the Central Ministry, in late 1875, ordered Editor Evans and Editress Doolittle to vacate their chairs. Evans’ closing remarks in the last issue were decidedly terse, leaving readers with a simple injunction: “Cease to do evil.”⁶⁸ To do so, the editors itemized, for the last time, the “Seven Individual and Society Evils” of the “anti-Christian Babylon” known as America: under “SOCIETY EVILS” they listed, “ *Holding land, as private property, forever, War, Slavery, Male Domination, Usury, Spiritualism*”; listed under “INDIVIDUAL EVILS” was the list of dietary perils that destroy the body.⁶⁹ Lomas was promptly restored to his former position as editor. The editorial discord that splintered Believers into progressive and conservative camps, and the struggle to gain control of the influential newspaper, revealed the zealous question of concern: what were believers to do in the shadow of modernization and membership decline? Should they, as Evans so fervidly promoted in *Shaker and Shakeress*, compromise tradition by becoming vocal agents of social transformation in America? Conservatives had responded with an emphatic no, dislodging Evans and Doolittle from Lomas’ old office, but their answer did little to ensure that Shakerism would survive beyond the waning decades of the 19th century.

Over the previous three decades, the voice of the United Society had grown hoarse against the competing claims of religious intolerance, industrialization, and encroaching secularism. Evans and Doolittle had shifted from Lomas’ myopic missionary goals in hopes of heightening the sect’s presence as a force of national social reform, but, ultimately, were marginalized by the conservative majority.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 248.

⁶⁸ *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.12, (December 1875), pp. 89-90.

⁶⁹ *Shaker and Shakeress*, pp. 89-90.

Conflicts of ideology represented in *The Shaker* and *Shaker and Shakeress* were fundamentally the results of differing eschatological viewpoints: while the eschatology of Shaker reformers viewed the discourses of Charles Finneys' Social Gospel critical to stimulating millennial progress, conservatives blamed membership decline and the unraveling of tradition on worldly interaction. Though editorial head-butting between the camps never completely subsided following the dissolution of the *Shaker and Shakeress*, an active journalism under Lomas' direction would play a role in the intellectual life of late 19th century Shakers.

As a publication maintained by a religious minority, Evans and Doolittle's editorial campaign stamps a truly significant era in the larger trajectory of American religious print culture as the imaginative adaptation with which they re-conceptualized the publication fearlessly stirred readers to think critically about their moral responsibilities in the larger American nation-building narrative. As to efface any foul trace of progressivism, Lomas promptly reverted the newspaper back to its original single-section format and title, *The Shaker*. He explains that his revisions should "amplify rather than detract dual principles, in all things which the name *Shaker and Shakeress* could imply...THE SHAKER will illustrate the fruits of such a belief by the presentation to the world of a brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ."⁷⁰ Although the periodical would remain in print, Lomas' successor, Elder Henry C. Blinn, was forced to terminate the publication in December 1899, lamenting that "Times have changed. Money is scarce and the several Societies have suffered with the laboring classes in the common distress."⁷¹ That conservative readers and editors silenced the voice of progressives regrettably betrayed the principles of the radical religious print tradition from which the Society's publication sprang, withdrawing from a practice of democratic journalism that vowed to represent the heteroglossia of the community and plurality of opinion. In their obstinacy to embrace social change, hardbound Believers stunted the

⁷⁰ *The Shaker*, 6.1, (January 1876), p. 4.

⁷¹ *The Manifesto*, 29.11 (November 1899), p. 172.

intellectual growth of the periodical and prevented it from flourishing into a national democratic platform that could have possibly secured Shakerism's position at the forefront of American social conscience, furnishing instead a monolithic text that served little more than the manifesto of a shrinking, disillusioned religious sect resigned to vanish in self-isolation. To be sure, such deformities in Shaker print culture suggest that the religious periodical was more similar to secular political publications than religious journalists of the 19th century would have liked to admit—with its feuding readers and heavy-handed editors having stumbled into the pitfalls of censorship and infighting, it was an equally unstable text that had locked the free dissemination of public opinion in an editorial stranglehold. Though financial restraints and dwindling membership were evident factors, the periodical's failing vision of Elias Smith's democratic religious journalism contributed forcefully to its demise—principles apparently too progressive, too brazen even for *The Shaker*, “the most radically religious monthly in the world.”⁷²

⁷² *The Shaker*, 1.1, (January 1871), p. 1.

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