

Hamilton College Library

“Home Notes”

Communal Societies Collection: New Acquisitions

Mark Tillson

Hamilton College Special Collections continue to grow, expand and change. Additions are made to the communal societies collection frequently. Spiritualism, a belief system that influenced, or was practiced by, many of these societies, has been a collecting focus of late.

A recently received batch of these fascinating and oftentimes strange books yielded a happy accident. It was discovered that three of them had originally belonged in the same library, that of Cyrus Oliver Poole. An initial Google search confirmed that Poole was no stranger to the Spiritualist world. He wrote an article entitled, *Spiritualism as Organized by the Shakers*, featured in the October 29, 1887, issue of *Banner of Light*, a Spiritualist journal. The story may have ended there had the books been merely signed or inscribed to Poole. However, the marginalia in the books, sometimes quite extensive, begged for careful analysis.

Of particular note was the fact that all three were written by Andrew Jackson Davis. Davis was a dynamic seer and clairvoyant during the nineteenth century. He praised Mother Ann Lee of the Shakers and was influenced by the eighteenth century Swedish mystic and prophet, Emanuel Swedenborg. Among many other remarkable gifts, it was said that he was able to, while in a trance, pinpoint disease in a person as if their body were transparent, along with prescribing cures for the ailment. He also heard voices, had out-of-body experiences, and dictated an entire book, also while in a trance. His followers found it quite remarkable when they learned that, by the age of sixteen, he had supposedly only read one book.

Further investigation revealed that Poole knew Davis quite well. In 1859, Davis wrote volume five of *Great Harmonia*. In the preface of the book, a letter from Poole is quoted, attesting to the talents of Davis.

“A little over two months ago, Mr. Davis took possession of his writing room in my house. No book was in, or has been used in, the room except Webster’s dictionary. He has only been engaged in writing about four hours of each twenty-four, invariably in the early or positive part of the day. And now, lying upon his table, are many hundreds of his manuscript pages, with quotations from the writings of the most ancient authors down to the present time.... During his short visit, Mr. Davis has written and prepared for publication the fifth volume of *The Great Harmonia* (entitled *The Thinker*, a work of over 400 pages).”



*Andrew Jackson Davis and his inscription to Poole in
Views of Our Heavenly Home.*

Their relationship was confirmed when I opened one of the newly acquired books to see the inscription. It reads “To Cyrus Oliver Poole— with fraternal love of the author.” The volume is entitled, *Views of our Heavenly Home. A Sequel to a Stellar Key to the Summer-Land* (1878). Among the pages, in Poole’s handwriting, are found small references to other works and authors, passages underlined, hand drawn asterisks, and in one instance, a single word, “Eloquence,” in admiration for a passage marked.

The earliest of the three books dates from 1862. Its title is *Harbinger of Health; Containing Medical Prescriptions for the Human Body and Mind*. It appears that Poole read at least the first half quite thoroughly, having underlined, drawn small hands with fingers pointing to passages he found exceptional, and adding his own narrative to some of the suggestions given in the *Diagnoses and Prescriptions* section of the book.

The third book was published in 1885 with the title *Beyond the Valley; A*

Sequel to "The Magic Staff," an Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis. Sometime between the inscription made to Mr. Poole in *Views of our Heavenly Home*, and the publication of this volume, their relationship clearly took a bad turn.

Upon opening the book, one is met immediately with a tipped in manuscript page along with half a page of writing on the inside cover. Two pictures of the "publishers and proprietors of *The Banner of Light*," Mr. Isaac B. Rich and Mr. John W. Day, are pasted under the tipped in manuscript. A news clipping entitled *Book Notices*, which is a book review of this very volume, is laid in. The margins of the pages are peppered with writing. This time, of a different tone. Poole no longer finds Davis enlightened, but rather "demented and insane," suggesting at one point, "My opinion is that you ought to have kicked the bucket."

The explanation for Poole's change of heart begins with the tipped in manuscript page, which reads:

"Fourteen years ago Mr. Davis issued the book on Mental Disorders— Dr. Ordronaux, many years in charge of the Lunatic Institutions of this State, commended this book to me as an invaluable contribution to the literature on insanity— In this book is a chapter on "Mental Storm Signals." In it, Mr. Davis shows that a Mental Storm is threatened in 44 different symptoms— It seems to me that the following can be plainly seen in the book just out by Mr. Davis—He says insanity is upon you:

"21. When you absorbingly admire and want to marry a person whom you ought not to marry, and neglect to cherish and cultivate the heart you once did marry."

"25. "When you are obstinate in trifles, and violent on small occasions, and harsh and undignified in the presence of others."

"27. When you are unaccountably suspicious of the integrity of those long your best friends"—

"31. When you disturb the whole community and overtax the patience of your relatives in rehearsing your losses, embarrassments, and bereavements"

"36. When you notice that your mind is no longer instinctively delicate concerning duty, propriety, decency,

immorality” &c. &c.

“38. When you fancy that you know more than anybody and everybody else” &c &c.

40. When you hear voices &c &c.

44. When, finally, things and persons about you seem to have been changed, and do not appear and impress you as they used to, causing you to feel and assert most positively that they, and not you, have undergone the alteration which you openly deplore and from which you privately yearn to escape”—

It is surprising that Poole’s opinion of Davis, who he had defended for so many years, had changed so severely. The marginalia throughout the book reads almost like an argument between the two men. Frequently, when Davis states something that Poole disagrees with, he angrily refutes it as if saying it directly to Davis.

The anger starts almost immediately. On page 10, an asterisk is drawn after the statement, “I would be called upon to live practically among my fellow-man.”

Poole replies on the lower half of page 11, “To live ‘practically,’ every attempt you have made has proved a failure. I cannot re-call a practical relation with earthly things that you have been loyal to, unto success— As a friend, a brother, a husband & citizen, my dear fellow you are a most contemptable crank and failure— Midnight assassins are made out of just such material as you are.”

These comments, along with information from the book review laid in, reveal the crux of the feud between these two men. The reviewer spends the majority of his time questioning Davis’s motives in seeking an annulment from his wife of thirty years, Mary. Davis claimed that his spirit guide, Galen, had instructed him to sever ties with her.

To add to the scandal, it was revealed that the divorce that Mary had acquired from her first husband, Samuel Gurley Love, obtained in Indiana in 1854, was not legally recognized in the state of New York, where she and Davis resided.

Chapter 16 of *Beyond the Valley* undoubtedly stirred strong feelings in Mr. Poole. The chapter is entitled *A Marriage of Central Temperaments* and consists almost primarily of a letter written by Davis to Mary on November 18, 1884. In it, he writes to tell her his true feelings with regard to their

marriage and that he is seeking “personal liberty.” He states that “twenty days had not passed after our legal marriage when I definitely, intuitively, realized that, although I was pleasantly associated with a gentle, loving and intelligent woman. I distinctly realized that I was *not* associated with my eternal mate in conjugal life!” To this, Mr. Poole makes the comment, “You ought to be spanked” and on the following page, “Is it a maniac— a devil—or a great booby writing this stuff?”

Mr. Poole and his wife, having opened their home to Davis on several occasions and having been avid admirers of him, were aware of his comings and goings. So then, the events that happened in the following year did not go unnoticed by them. In 1882, a student by the name of Mrs. Delphine (Della) E. Drake matriculated at the United States Medical College in New York. She went by her maiden name of Delphine Markham. Andrew Jackson Davis was also studying there, and both received their degrees in 1883. During the spring of 1884, Davis stated that he came down with pneumonia and was nursed back to health by none other than Delphine Markham.

In April of that same year, Davis had a conversation with a friend that he recorded in *Beyond the Valley* on page 206. In the conversation, a troubled Mr. Frater discloses that a person well known to Davis has visited and revealed that Davis is a fallen man and has deserted his lawful wife and become infatuated with Delphine Markham. In the margin of our newly acquired copy of *Beyond the Valley*, none other than Poole identifies himself as the man who broke this news to Frater.

In the next chapter of *Beyond the Valley*, Davis strikes back in a letter he claims to have written to a “Mr. and Mrs. Helper.” In our copy of the book Poole confirms this to be himself and his wife. In his letter, Davis thanks Mr. and Mrs. Helper for having at heart the best interests of the “Cause,” while at the same time telling them that they have meddled in something that is clearly none of their business. Following the letter, Mr. Poole has written, “I never saw such a letter as this—Who is this Mr. & Mrs. Helper? That coat don’t fit our case Jackson—Try again—.”

In February 1885 a petition was granted for the nullification of Davis’s marriage. Mary immediately penned a letter to him confirming that she had not contested this and that she would immediately take her grandmothers family name as her last name and be known as Mary Fenn from that point on.

Davis responded two days later insisting that he was happy for her and

that he had never said anything to discredit her and would remain loyal as to her life and character. Below this, in our copy of *Beyond the Valley*, Poole has written, “A faithless, heartless consummate scoundrel—I intend to banish from my memory the fact that I ever knew you—Damn a man who will wrong a woman as you have her.”

Even Davis’s jilted wife Mary, however, is not immune to Poole’s remarks. A letter she wrote to Davis in July of 1884 is quoted on page 222. In it she says that he must “do, and have done, whatsoever in your sight is right and just,” and wishes him “success in securing the personal freedom for which you strive; and may length of days, and all that makes life sweet and beautiful, be yours to enjoy.” In the margins, Poole wrote his reply to Mary on June 7, 1885 stating, “Mary you made an old goose of yourself—This letter is all gush and false pretense & you ought to be indicted & convicted under the statute in that case made and provided.”

True to what Mr. and Mrs. Poole warned the previous year, Delphine divorced her husband on July 25, 1885, and married Davis seventeen days later on August 11, 1885. On page 299 of *Beyond the Valley*, it appears that Mr. Poole has had enough. Following an account of a meeting with a gentleman in Boston, Davis writes, “We parted—the Boston gentleman and I—with mutual expressions of good will.” To this, Poole writes, “And I too will part; for the further proceeding in this book of twaddle & lies & mighty little truth interests me no more—.” This however, did not stop him from adding at least a few additional notes on the remaining pages.

Andrew and Delphine remained married until his death in 1910. Delphine went on to live another eighteen years and passed away on March 13, 1928. It is not likely that Mr. Poole ever forgave Mr. Davis for his transgression. It appears, however, that eventually Poole thought better of some of the things he wrote in the margins of this volume. On the inside cover, he wrote on June 9, 1885:

“Having intimately known Mr. Davis for over 31 years, and during the last 18 months having watched him closely & now having read this, I reluctantly have come to the conclusion that he is demented and insane in certain parts of his nature—

This, being my conviction, the pencil marginalia notes that I have made in this book of hallucinations are uncalled for and out of place—.”

This statement, almost excusing some of Davis's actions because of insanity, and evidencing a slight embarrassment for some of what he wrote, makes one wonder why Poole did not simply discard this book with all of his recorded tirades. Whatever the case may be, we are certainly glad he kept it. This small archive gives us an intimate, first-hand look at what would have been a scandal of monumental proportions in its day.

A Note on Sources

Sources consulted for this essay included:

Buckland, Raymond. *The Spirit Book: The Encyclopedia of Clairvoyance, and Spirit Communication*. Michigan: Visible Ink Press, 2005.

Buescher, John. "Andrew Jackson Davis and His Wives," International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals, www.iapsop.com/spirithistory/andrew_jackson_davis_and_his_wives.html

DeSalvo, John. *Andrew Jackson Davis: The First American Prophet and Clairvoyant*. Lulu.com: 2005

Stefanidakis, Rev. Simeon. "Forerunners to Modern Spiritualism: Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910)" First Spiritual Temple, www.fst.org/spirit3.htm

The following pages contain images of some of the most important marginal annotations in Poole's personal copy of *Beyond the Valley*.

Fourteen years ago Mr Davis issued the book on Mental Disorders - Dr. Oldenau, many years in charge of the Lunatic Institutions of this State, commended this book to me as an invaluable contribution to the literature on insanity -

In this book is a Chapter on "Mental Storm Signals". In it Mr Davis shows that a mental storm is threatened in 44 different symptoms - It seems to me that the following can be plainly seen in the book just sent by Mr Davis -

He says insanity is upon you;
"21. When you absorbingly admire and want to marry a person whom you ought not to marry, and neglect to cherish and cultivate the heart you once did marry".

"25. "When you are obstinate in trifles and violent on small occasions, and harsh and undignified in the presence of others".

"27. When you are unaccountably suspicious of the integrity of those long your best friends".

"31. When you disturb the whole community and omit the patience of your relatives in rehearsing your losses, embarrassments and betrayments".

"36. When you notice that your mind is

no longer instinctively delicate concerning
duty, propriety, decency, immorality" &c &c

"38. When you fancy that you know more
than anybody and everybody else" &c &c

40. When you hear voices &c &c

44. When, finally, things and persons
about you seem to have been changed,
and do not appear and impress you
as they used to, causing you to feel and
to assert most positively that they,
and not you, have undergone the
alteration which you openly deplore
and from which you privately
yearn to escape".

with, however chaotic we might live relatively, our associations in pronounced adherents; and, however strictly fraternal we might live as brother and sister (as we did during my early years), the fact is how remains the same, that Mary is regarded as guilty of lèse-majesté. This is my synopsis. The legal gentleman concludes his "trial" as follows: }

"It is not unlikely that you, being a resident of New York, could sensibly maintain a suit in that State, in addition to one, before Joseph Pratt, J. F., May 15, 1855.

"With all deference to other persons better acquainted with the laws of New York, I am

"Yours, in sincerity,

"ALFRED E. GRACE."

The legal reader will immediately perceive that Grace's submission, "suffice the fee," anticipates all the facts which many weeks afterwards came into my possession. Accordingly

Dec. 1, 1854, I issued a writ to be brought on the grounds above defined. Duane was retained Feb. 3, 1855, at a retainer term of the Supreme Court of the State of New York:—It is ordered and adjudged that the marriage between the plaintiff, Andrew Jackson Davis, and the defendant, Mary F. Davis, otherwise Lavey, otherwise Robinson, is wholly null and void, and of no effect from the date of this judgment, and the said parties therein be forever heretofore released from the obligation thereof."

Upon this "strange, convoluted history" the article is about as well done. A few days after a certified copy of the above decree was received by me, from my New York able and esteemed counsel, the mail brought me the following:—

"ALFRED E. DAVIS, M. D.

"My attorney, E. D. Barlow, Esq., has sent me the papers showing that the Court has granted your petition.

"I feel that it is in harmony with both good taste and fair dealing for me now by dropping the engagement 'Davis,' and I have

just done down the full

fact. I don't let the angels weep—

no doubt your view will coincide with mine in this matter. My dear parents gave me the name of my mother's loved and prized mother. My initial letter F stands for her family name, Yates. I shall make use of this for my surname. Therefore, I ask you, and shall request all, to heretofore address me, "MRS. MARY PRATT."

And the following reply was immediately mailed to her:—

"Hartford, Conn., Feb. 15, 1855.

"My DEAR MRS. MARY PRATT:

"The marriage, or adoption, of your grandfather's name, after so many years' absence from the parent stem, will, I feel very sure, bring with it good and lasting fruit,—promotive of your social and spiritual welfare, in many ways.

"Somebody has sent me a copy of the New York Graphic, containing a pleasant notice of you, and stating the high and sustaining action of Scrabble,—to all which I gladly second the motion, and heartily respond. 'Amen!'"

"And I now want you to know, even for all, that to no living man, living all things, I am so ready to do every thing in my power for the nation to such

each other with happiness, and to assert many things to each other's serious discomfiture. Therefore, I have been, in this

house, constantly and constantly loyal to your life and character; and I trust that nothing will ever cause me to disown your

personal unflinching and heroism; or to fail to do the noblest principles of love and wisdom, which we have advocated for the encouragement and guidance of others.

"In the hottest line of *Abolition*, I remain,

"Faithfully your brother,

"A. J. DAVIS."

is faithless, heartless

consignate scoundrel -
I intend to banish from

my memory that act that -
I have known you -

Wm. a man who will accept a
woman as your daughter

beauty, attracted me with a constant attraction, as the earth is attracted by the magnetic sun; yet, like the earth, I resisted the urgency of the master-force, and planted myself upon my individualized centre of life and revolution; because, again like the earth, I felt the *insane* command to perform the appropriate mission consistent with my position, powers, and tendencies.

So I continued to lean upon my Magic Staff, and commenced a journey from plateau to terrace, from majestic altitudes to sunlit cliffs and secluded retreats, from primeval solitudes to grassy gardens with their springs and fantastic waterfalls,—obeying meanwhile the sweet voices of the children of light, descending to the spirit car along the aerial lines of thought, until a place of rest was once more found in the valley between mounts Beauty and Aspiration.

* To live "practically", every attempt you have made has proved a failure.

I cannot recall a practical relation with earthly things that you have been loyal to, unto success—

As a friend, a brother, a husband & citizen, my dear fellow you are a most contemptible crank and failure—

Midnight assassins are made out of just such material as you are

table tide—is the omnipotent will of God. This deific tidal will-flow is like (or is the same as) the universal law of the attraction of gravitation. Thus, the divine tide in the 'river of life' is, in other words, the flow of the potential mind of God! All and everything obey it, either consciously and unconsciously; because, intellectually speaking, it is the almighty power of Eternal Principles. *Within* these eternal principles, by an exercise of our highest spiritual perceptions (and deepest intuitions) we behold the 'ideas' (the designs) of our infinite Father and Mother. Thus, in less happy language, the will of God is the decree of Destiny!

"Now, dear Mary, I appeal to you, and I also ask everyone who has longest known and best understood me, whether I have not, under any and every combination of circumstances, and at whatever inconvenience,—at whatever cost to my own person, position, or purse,—religiously and reverently, obeyed what I have understood to be the heavenly mandates? If I have ever *seemed* to hesitate, or to resist, or to wait idly in the valley for 'more light,' it was because I could not conscientiously move forward upon any line of action until, added to the authority of the heavenly mandates, I obtained the sanction of 'the still small voice,'—until I *felt* the subjective, positive indorsement of my own Intuition and Reason. This providential leading *I cannot resist!* When I hear its mighty tones I *must* listen,—I must bow my spirit in thankful adoration,—and I must *hasten* to 'do the will of my Father'! In the primitive history there is (see John xviii., 37) a like acknowledgment, in these words: '*To this end was I born—and for this cause came I into the world—that I should bear witness unto the truth.*'

"The true hero is born a hero. He comes with the *feeling* of courage alive in his spirit. The *Harmonia* and the *Arcubula*, if read with eyes which are not blind to the divine light, impart to the reader a self-evident feeling of the spirituality and supremacy of all Principles. To *feel* these transcendent principles, and, especially, to be governed in one's daily life by them, is to be inspired and filled with that irresistible power

* There ought to be an earthly man-date applied to you by giving you a good spanking

I must unanitized even - but -
why you are crazy as a loon -

Having intimately known me for
for over 31 years, and during the
last 18 months having watched
him closely I now having read
this, I reluctantly have come to
the conclusion that he is
demented and insane in certain
parts of his nature -

This, being my conviction, the
pencil marginal notes that I
have made in this book of
hallucinations are uncalled
for and out of place -

New York June 9-1885